

Care and Courage: Using Isibindi to Strengthen Child Protection in Zambia

The UNHCR entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Association of Child Care Workers in South Africa (NACCW) to replicate the Isibindi model in a custom designed model to service refugee children in Zambia at the Meheba Refugee camp. The model project ‘*Care and Courage: Using Isibindi to Strengthen Child Protection in Zambia*,’ was designed to develop refugees in the Meheba camp into entry level Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs) to provide basic care and protection to refugee children in the camps.

The partners in this ambitious project include the Zambian Association of Child Care Workers (ZACCW); the Zambian line Ministry — the Ministry of Community Development (MCD); UNHCR Headquarters; UNHCR ROSA; the UNHCR Country Office in Zambia and the NACCW.

Many of the guiding principles in the “Para Professionals in the Social Service Workforce: Guiding Principles, Functions and Competencies” document have been embedded in the design of this Program. The Program in Zambia is committed to training a cadre of CYCWs with clear entry level competencies that are linked to this profession. These CYCWs will receive certificates recognizing them as a specific para-professional with a unique identity. The training embeds the CYCW practice in the strengths perspective; acknowledging that the wisdom, assets and knowledge of both the learners and the community are seen as potential resources. In respect of diverse cultures, integration of indigenous knowledge and building cultural competency are the overarching principles integrated into the training and the program. The training adopts an adult learning approach, which is both participatory and oriented to problem-solving, acknowledging the unique and difficult circumstances of the refugee worker. The UNHCR has committed itself to providing an incentive to all the trained CYCWs to serve as a stepping stone in supporting the recognition of their professional journey. The innovative commitment to mentorship and supervision is described in this document. This is a clear guiding principle related to supporting the workforce. The framework for the strengthening of the Social Service Workforce, the planning of the workforce, development of the workforce in both a program specific and country specific support of the workforce in a country specific context towards the protection of children is well articulated in this program.

“ This training gave us the opportunity as NACCW to spread the spirit of Ubuntu and rescognise our joint humanity. The profession of child and youth care needs to reach every corner of the globe as there are millions of children who still need a child and youth care worker in their lives. ”

– Sabitha Samjee, NACCW



The NACCW reviewed its training course called the Basic Qualification in Child Care (BQCC) to ensure that it was aligned to the Global Alliance Child and Youth Care Competencies. The BQCC is based on the Circle of Courage and includes 5 training modules which are Attachment and Relationships, Mastery and Competence, Independence and Empowerment, Generosity and the Spirit of Ubuntu and Safe Park Training. The additional module of the Safe Park Training was added after the review of the material against the competencies. This review showed that developmental play and appropriate activity programming linked to the implementation of Safe Parks did not feature adequately in the training. This new module focusses on the practical application of knowledge of the four previous modules in this module on activity programming in the Safe Parks.



The risks faced by children of concern in Meheba Refugee Settlement include violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The intention was to develop a systematic and comprehensive identification mechanism for such children to strengthen the referral system for at risk children, and to identify children at heightened risk or victims of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation – in order to assist them with targeted support. The support will be provided by the recruited and trained CYCWs from the Meheba Refugee Camp.

Training



The Isibindi pilot Project in the Meheba Refugee Settlement aimed to develop the capacity of recruited refugee Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs), who receive customized training covering core competencies for working in the livespace of children and youth as well as on Safe Parks by NACCW. 32 CYCWs successfully completed the training and obtained certification and comprise an Isibindi team — thereby establishing a functioning community-based child protection mechanism. CYCWs regularly visit children at heightened risk, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), in their homes and provide comprehensive support, including practical and therapeutic assistance to children and youth in their 'life-space', based on the specific needs of the child in his/her family context. The Project provides community-based services to at-risk children and youth, responding holistically to their needs, whilst creating — and strengthening — a sustainable social service team of refugees, recruited from within the refugee community.



Quotations from Zambian CYC learners:

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- *I have been living in darkness since I left my country, family and friends. This training has brought light into my life (he switched the lights off and switched it on again to demonstrate his darkness). Now I am starting to see myself as a human being. Yes I am a “human being”.*
 - *Human Rights were words only. When you live in an abnormal situation for too long, it becomes normal. You do not notice how human beings hurt another. I had become blind to the children’s pain. After two weeks of training I can see the violation of Children’s Rights.*
 - *NACCW must take the training beyond the borders of Africa. Save the children of the world. This training is about saving human beings.*
 - *You made history in Africa. Please take this to the children of the world. Please take Isibindi and this training and comfort the children of the world.*
 - *The Circle of Courage has helped me understand myself. The stories made me see that we are human. Your words and knowledge is a seed that will become a tree. The message shall remain.*
- ”

Safe Park



The training on Safe Park activities was provided at an informal Safe Park established while the Meheba management team planned the building of the formal Safe Park in Meheba.

The establishment of Safe Parks which are supervised and safe places for children to play and receive educational assistance from the CYCWs as well as specialized programmes to provide targeted support for at-risk children and youth, such as UASC, children with disabilities, children survivors of violence and/or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Safe Parks are safe and supervised child-friendly places where children can play and receive educational assistance under auspices of child and youth care workers, as well as specialized programs targeting children at heightened risk and children with specific needs. The Safe Parks will establish a mechanism for identification of at-risk children and youth.

Hundreds children are attending the Safe Park on a daily/weekly basis, engaging in activities such as soccer, board games (monopoly), cultural songs and dance, indigenous swings and free play with toys.

Mentorship



South African Child and Youth Care Workers also visited the camp to provide mentorship to the new recruits, helping the CYCWs to translate theory into practice. This required the mentors to walk to far-flung family homes and demonstrate how to work with children in the context of their families. Ongoing regular mentorship has since been provided through structured teleconferences between South Africa and Zambia where the Zambian child care workers raise queries and questions on child care practice and receive guidance and feedback from the South African mentors. Complex issues have been raised linked to matters such as, access to education for children, how to network effectively, securing documentation, responding to Child Protection cases, responding to issues like witchcraft and child brides, understanding ways to break the poverty cycle and there was an expressed need for ongoing supervision and debriefing.

A WhatsApp group was initiated for the purpose of ongoing, in-the-moment guidance and is continuing to work successfully. Some of the queries in the WhatsApp group linked to the following:

- The availability of the Isibindi formats as they were unable to report properly without the reporting tools
- Guidance and support on how to deal with Child Protection cases, such as child brides
- Concern about how and when they will get the bicycles as promised (CYCWs travelled more than 15km to get to the families)
- Requests for the NACCW mentors to visit the Meheba refugee camp again

Ongoing activities

An activity yet to be undertaken includes the much anticipated graduation ceremony for the Zambian child and youth care workers. There will be ongoing mentorship provided by the NACCW and ZACCW, and the finalisation of the infrastructure for the formal Safe Park. There will also be a consultative process to refine the Isibindi procedure manuals to suit the context of the program, and finalise the Monitoring and Evaluations (M&E) system. The draft of the Best Interest tool is being finalised through a consultative process to ensure that the child care training is integrated into the UNHCR Best Interest Assessment tool. Exchange visits between the two countries will take place.

“ We are thrilled. Isibindi seems to be such an effective and creative way for refugee children to get the care and protection they so badly need. You can imagine the needs of unaccompanied children without adult guidance and supervision, the child survivors of abuse and neglect and the children with disabilities growing up in refugee camps with uncertain futures. They live among other uprooted people from a mixture of nationalities marked by dependency, lack of livelihoods and education opportunities, meaningful activities and lasting solutions. This is a high risk environment for children who are already hurt by flight. In this context, where resources are very few and social protection skills are lacking, Isibindi

has given us a tested model for how to build a skilled community-based child protection workforce to reach children at risk, which simultaneously engages refugee talents and builds their capacity for the future. Seeing the passion and enthusiasm in the eyes of the refugee child and youth care workers after the training and during mentoring says a lot about the spirited force of Isibindi. It has given the refugee child care workers concrete concepts to understand and tools to act and change the lives of children for the better... We believe Isibindi can make a real difference to children in Meheba refugee camp. ”

– Anna Leer, UNHCR

