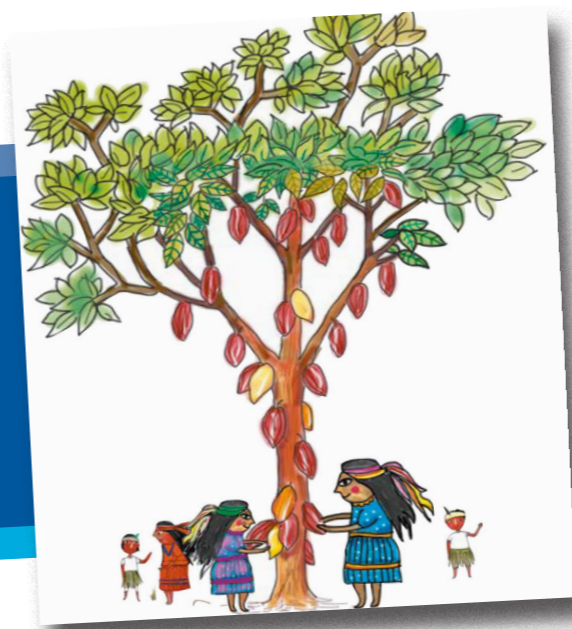


Art Therapy and the Reintegration of Children in Armed Conflict

Taller de Vida, Colombia



THE MODEL

In the midst of decades-long war between government forces, paramilitary and guerrilla groups, which has devastated the lives of thousands of children and families in Colombia, Taller de Vida (TdV) (Center for Development and Psychosocial Consulting) is working to nurture life. An estimated 18,000 boys and girls have been forced to fight on different sides of the conflict, separated from their families, putting them at great risk and resulting in lasting physical and psychological damage. These children are abused, witness murders and sexual violence and are forced to commit acts of violence themselves. Many of them come from physically and emotionally violent homes, which has made them especially vulnerable to recruitment; thus, reintegration into the family system can face particular challenges.

Arts and music-based therapies play a central role in TdV's work to reintegrate children affected by armed conflict. TdV believes that through expressive arts children can make their voices heard, they can build new ways of communicating and relating to others and can recreate their personal and collective stories. The children learn to recognise their emotions, beliefs and prejudices, thus developing life skills as they reintegrate into their families and civil society. Involvement in the arts groups helps children to rebuild these essential ties. Building resilience of individuals and communities is a core component of this work and the healing process.

'Art collectives' sit at the heart of TdV's innovative psychosocial intervention methodology for the reintegration of children. (This methodology has been adopted by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF)). Working primarily with children between the ages of 4 to 18, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, TdV runs multiple arts therapy projects (psychosocial workshops) for large groups of children, which incorporate stories, dance, poetry, song and more.

IMPLEMENTATION

Below are examples of TdV's arts therapy projects:

- i) Corazón de cebolla (onion heart): involving 2-3000 children, through collaboration with educational institutions, this project helps children to avoid participating in armed conflict.
- ii) Artemisa (art memory): this project focuses upon the social inclusion and strengthening of girls, who in many circumstances are most heavily affected by the conflict.
- iii) Bambú (Bamboo): this project works with 50 to 60 boys and girls who have come out of armed conflict. It also provides psychological support through art therapy for girls who have been affected by sexual violence.
- iv) Aracuiduma: this project has focused on families' experiences during COVID-19, with particular emphasis upon people with disabilities, who often suffer the highest levels of exclusion.
- v) Cuarenticuentos: during the period of COVID-19 quarantine, TdV worked with 20 organisations across Colombia to collect stories of quarantine from young people between the ages of 16-26 years.
- vi) Enraizarte: supporting displaced indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities through the creation of 'stories to root'.



IMPACT

- 1 92% of the children involved in the Bambú project do not return to armed conflict; they take back their lives and participate in society.
- 2 82% of the children TdV works with return to education.
- 3 The voices of traditionally under-represented groups are now being heard through the Truth Commission's work. TdV has played a significant role in this shift through their engagement with children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

CHALLENGES FACED

- Many of the children working with TdV, and their relatives, require protection.
- TdV's staff are exposed to the harrowing experiences suffered by children and families, and in turn require their own therapeutic support.
- Financial resources required to implement the work are significant.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic the armed conflict has worsened.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

2020 has seen an increase in violence across Colombia, with a corresponding increase in the recruitment of boys and girls by armed groups (five times the recruitment levels of the previous year). This is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as schools and various health services have closed, leaving boys and girls an easy target for armed groups.

The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in Colombia in early March 2020. As of early October 2020 there have been 829,679 cases and 25,998 deaths.

ABOUT TALLER DE VIDA

Established in 1994, Taller de Vida (TdV) works with children affected by the armed conflict in Colombia, striving to keep them safe and protect their rights. Through their programmes they work to prevent the recruitment of children and young people into the armed conflict.

TdV provides safe spaces for former child soldiers and for young people at risk of being recruited. Lives are transformed for children who have been demobilised by Colombia's civil conflict; they are rehabilitated and reintegrated back into society and with their families.

Find out more about Taller de Vida www.tallerdevida.org or contact Stella Duque, Executive Director: tallerdevida@gmail.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

Family for Every Child is a diverse membership network of civil society organisations based around the world.

How We Care is an innovative platform for those working with children and families, across the globe, to share their practice. Our vision is that through the exchange and learning facilitated by How We Care, organisations' family care practice and programming will be strengthened, with improved outcomes for the children they support.

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“Will the storms stop? No... but the rainbow will always come out again...”