

Surveys to assess the impact of COVID-19 on children and families

Children in Distress Network (CINDI), South Africa

Introduction

CINDI - Children in Distress Network - is a multi-sectoral network of over 250 South African civil society organisations (non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and faith-based organisations). CINDI champions the rights of vulnerable children and their families by bringing together this strong, diverse network of local organisations to implement a wide range of effective and sustainable programmes for vulnerable children in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. CINDI creates opportunities for networking, collaboration, research and advocacy by mobilising resources, providing access to information, and by building the capacity of its members to advance the rights of vulnerable children and their families.

In March 2020 South Africa entered into a period of lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the government provided economic support for businesses affected by the lockdown restrictions, people in the informal employment and domestic work sectors found themselves without jobs and a way to earn a living. As a result of this there was a huge need for food support across the country, compounded by the fact that between 50 and 55 per cent of South Africa's population was already living on the poverty line before the pandemic. This increased need resulted in many of CINDI's members re-prioritising activities to focus on food support for vulnerable adults and children in their communities.

The tool

As a network organisation, CINDI does not deliver services itself, but supports its members to do so through training and knowledge exchange. In order to assess the impact of COVID-19 on children and families in KwaZulu-Natal, CINDI leveraged its role as a network, by compiling the information gathered by its members on the ground within communities, to inform regional- and national-level understanding and advocacy. It played to its strengths by drawing on its broad membership within KwaZulu-Natal as well as its participation in national networks and fora, in order to raise awareness of the issues faced by children and families. As a network, CINDI did not face the same service delivery pressures

of other organisations and so was able to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. This allowed it to play a key role in consolidating information and connecting people.

Implementation

At the beginning of the lockdown period, CINDI checked in with its members to find out how the communities they worked with were being impacted. Through these email and telephone conversations, it started to establish a picture of how organisations were using their resources, where food parcels were needed, and what the main worries and child protection concerns were. With this information it began to provide support through referrals and connections, including sometimes with new organisations outside of the CINDI network.

Some CINDI members sent out surveys to their clients to find out which issues needed an immediate response and to establish longer-term needs. One organisation, Thandanani Children's Foundation, produced an [infographic report](#)¹ from the information they obtained. Other members consulted their clients via telephone calls or during socially-distanced face-to-face contact while delivering food parcels.

As a member of the National Child Care and Protection Forum, CINDI was asked to input into a national survey on the impact of COVID-19 on children and families with specific sub-sections including foster care, alternative care, child protection and violence against children. Thanks to the information provided by its members, CINDI was able to coordinate a response from over 20 organisations on the impacts of COVID-19 on foster care, sharing an overview of the situation across the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

It also contributed to the sub-section on child protection by collating inputs from members of a national WhatsApp group on child protection. This national group consists of a wide variety of organisations and experts from across the children's sector in South Africa. CINDI took on the role of compiling a coordinated response to the aforementioned forum's survey, which included some policy recommendations for the government Department of



Family
for every child

**How
we
care**

By practitioners,
for practitioners.

Social Development on how responses could be improved in the future, and identified needs relating to the prioritisation of children's care going forward.

Outcomes

- As a result of CINDI's increased networking at a national level, it has developed a booklet on providing psychosocial support during COVID-19 with the collaboration of four other organisations, called [We Play, We Connect, We are Brave²](#). A second booklet on psychological first aid is in development.
- CINDI's network model was put to strategic use.
- CINDI's profile on the national stage was raised.

Next steps

As humanitarian needs have escalated and are likely to remain high for the next 1-2 years, CINDI's members are discussing how social services practitioners can better coordinate their roles to ensure a more cohesive continuum of care through better referrals and linkages between the different practitioners and service providers.

Read CINDI's completed rapid assessment questionnaire on child protection services during COVID-19 [here³](#).

¹ Thandanani Children's Foundation COVID-19 Rapid Needs Assessment: https://a5e55440-d050-42e1-9eed-6b7742b-d53b7.usrfiles.com/ugd/a5e554_c9acb3e5020b460d92cbc-59261592b0f.pdf

² 'We Play, We Connect, We are Brave' psychosocial support during COVID-19 booklet: https://a7a4295c-3398-440f-8c6a-992effcdbfd4.filesusr.com/ugd/969956_630dcd0a516c4d-6b8513471395f90799.pdf

³ Rapid Assessment Regarding Provision of Child Protection Services During COVID-19: https://a5e55440-d050-42e1-9eed-6b7742bd53b7.usrfiles.com/ugd/a5e554_8101fe29b-014451990d12b3c116f0cb6.pdf

Challenges faced

- Navigating relationships within the child protection sector in South Africa in order to respond quickly.
- Low staff capacity in CINDI to gather this kind of information and undertake this networking.
- The ever-changing situation of COVID-19: food parcel provision is not a long-term solution, but if needs remain high, will we still be able to respond?

Top tips

- 1 Building and maintaining relationships with key people is really important: the personal connection in networking cannot be underestimated.
- 2 Be responsive to even the smallest opportunities.
- 3 Be prepared to take on support activities that may not have a direct impact for you, but that will impact the greater good.
- 4 Most organisations CINDI works with really value working collaboratively, but often do not have the capacity to focus on this. CINDI really benefitted from having a staff member dedicated to building these collaborations.

CONTACT DETAILS

Find out more about CINDI at www.familyforeverychild.org/children-in-distress-network or contact Suzanne Clulow, Research and Advocacy Lead family@cindi.org.za



Family
for every child

