Caring for children and families in indigenous communities
Preserving traditions and protecting rights
Taller de Vida, Colombia

MODEL

Taller de Vida (TdV) (Centre for Development and Psychosocial Consulting/Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial) works with three indigenous communities in different areas of Colombia: the Emberá Katio and Emberá Chami in the regions of Risaralda and Chocó; and the Wayuu in the far north of the country in La Guajira. It supports all of the groups to preserve their unique culture and traditions while also protecting the rights of women and children within their communities.

One of the main areas of support Taller de Vida provides is helping communities to prepare a Plan de Vida. This is an official document that they must submit to the government, detailing how they will address five key areas of community life in order to access funds. The five areas are: access to health care; respect for women; education; organisation of territories and governance (particularly ensuring the participation of women and children); and families.

Taller de Vida works to prevent child marriages and suicides in indigenous communities by helping parents to understand the importance of children’s education. It also provides training on psychosocial approaches to teachers in indigenous schools to help them improve how they support children’s wellbeing. Boys and girls learn about their rights and learn Spanish to enable them to continue their education at a higher level.

In some communities, practices that are considered violent towards women and girls still exist. TdV developed the Luciérnagas or Fireflies project, which uses creative art therapy to support the empowerment of indigenous girls to prevent abuse and violence against their bodies.

“Recognising that it takes time for cultures and traditions to change, Taller de Vida takes a long-term approach to its work with indigenous communities.”

IMPLEMENTATION

To develop the Plan de Vida TdV works collectively with the whole community. It organises large community meetings as well as individual groups with women, young people and community leaders to ensure that everyone can express their views freely and all voices are part of the Plan. Once ideas are collected TdV staff draft a plan, record a video and create a community map; providing a variety of support materials to accompany the implementation of the Plan de Vida.

The Luciérnagas project uses the metaphor of the firefly’s light to encourage girls to speak and act. TdV staff teach girls about their bodies, how they change and how to respect and protect them. These themes are developed through creative arts, using drawing, photography and creative writing. Girls keep a diary to record their day-to-day lives in their own words and drawings. Taller de Vida organises photography exhibitions to share the girls’ work with their families and communities. Male indigenous leaders can often be very resistant to change so they are usually surprised to see girls speaking up, using a camera and showcasing their lived experiences.

IMPACT

1. Children and young people who were previously very reserved become empowered to speak up and express themselves.
2. Taller de Vida sees a marked improvement in teachers showing care and understanding towards children following their psychosocial training.
3. Indigenous community members now know how to navigate the bureaucratic political system and address the authorities.
4. TdV’s parent education programmes have stopped many forced marriages in indigenous communities.

CHALLENGES FACED

1. Corruption; funds given to communities by the government are often lost in bribery or commissions.
2. Behaviour change; changing mindsets of some indigenous leaders is not easy, particularly those who exploit and abuse their own communities.
3. Sustainability; it can be difficult to access funds to work in a consistent way with communities and over extended periods of time, which is necessary to ensure continuity and long-term change.

ABOUT TALLER DE VIDA

Established in 1994, Taller de Vida (TdV) works with children and families 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

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

There are over 100 diverse indigenous communities and cultures in Colombia. Around 2 million people are of indigenous descent, which is roughly 5% of the population. During the country’s armed conflict, which lasted for more than 60 years, many indigenous groups lost their land and their leaders were assassinated.

The rights of indigenous communities are now protected in Colombian law and specially designated reserves or resguardos have been created to preserve indigenous territories. However, despite this progress, indigenous communities continue to face many challenges in protecting their lands and while living on reserves helps to preserve cultural traditions, it also means that communities are isolated from the advances of the rest of the country.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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

How We Care is an initiative 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.

www.howwecare.community