

## **LIFESTART MACEDONIA -- EVALUATION (2000 - 2003)**

UNICEF approached the Lifestart Council in 1995. At that time UNICEF were researching suitable Early Years Programmes for use within Macedonia.

In 1996 UNICEF decided that the Lifestart Programme was the programme best suited to their requirements. Lifestart personnel visited Macedonia and accompanied UNICEF during negotiations with various Government Departments in order to gain support for Lifestart in Macedonia so as to make it available to the various ethnic groups within the country.

The issue of transferability was addressed.

After deliberations a Formal Contract was signed between UNICEF and Lifestart.

UNICEF Staff visited Lifestart Projects in Ireland and saw how the Programme is delivered in the home for the benefit of parents and children from birth to five years of age.

They formally received a copy of the Growing Child materials which they adapted for delivery to Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish and Roma families.

During one of their visits, staff of the Lifestart Foundation delivered a Training programme to Management, Co-ordinators and Family Visitors and provided them with Training Manuals and Materials for adaptation and use throughout Macedonia.

The Lifestart Programme has been established and delivered throughout Macedonia for the past six years.

We are happy to present this Summary Report of an evaluation carried out by UNICEF, which reflects the development and success of Lifestart Macedonia to date.

We acknowledge the amount of valuable work done by all those concerned in developing and nurturing Lifestart Macedonia. We trust that this important work will be sustained into the future.

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## Evaluation of the "Lifestart in Emergencies" ECCD Project

### Executive Summary

#### **Background**

The project provides training and materials to parents and communities, as well as basic learning materials for children, all with the objective of improving parenting skills. The programme is facilitated by Family Visitors who, on a monthly basis, bring age-appropriate learning materials to the participating family and spend time discussing the material and the child's development with the parents, and facilitate community deliberation in weekly group meetings according to the age of the child. It covered 5000 mothers, all Albanian, and over 9165 children of project age located in 7 municipalities: Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Kichevo, Struga, Kumanovo and Lipkovo.

The project contributed to establishing some kind of normal life for the children aged birth to five, both Macedonian Albanian and Kosovo refugee children. It also provides a focus for the parents, predominantly mothers, to devote a significant proportion of their time to the development of their children, in addition to improving the learning and development potentials of the children. On the other hand, it establishes a process of community development and increased cohesion, through expanding and improving community networks and strengthening both the role and the position of the women in the Albanian community.

#### **Purpose/Objective**

For the family visitors and coordinators who worked with the mothers, this evaluation sought to assess:

- the value and the importance of the materials these subjects have used in their work
- the quality of the training they have had
- the life attitudes towards the programme's acceptance by the mothers-users and their families
- the priority functions and roles of the female non-governmental organisations in the programme realisation
- changes the programme made on personal grounds

For the mothers participating in the programme, this evaluation looked at the:

- degree (intensity) of the development
- change of the mother's relationship with the child and application of the knowledge and the skills acquired in the programme
- parameters for personal development/changes
- changes in the relationships among the family members
- changes of the mother in her relations with the local community (elements of cooperation, adequate and personal responsibility, mobility)

## **Methodology**

Two questionnaires were conducted: one for 146 of the family visitors and coordinators, the other for 1400 of the mothers involved in the programme. There was also a written assessment from the expert team who designed the programme, reflecting on the results of the questionnaires.

## **Key Findings**

### **Family Visitors and Coordinators of the Programme:**

A majority - 71.23% - of the family visitors and co-ordinators found the training well conceived and sufficient. Although there were certain problems at the beginning, they were overcome together. The female non-governmental organisations were viewed by most - 75.34% - as a good link among themselves, the team of professors-experts and UNICEF.

Family visitors and coordinators believe that they themselves had changed with greater self confidence 51.37%, greater knowledge in how to raise children 42.46%, and knowledge in how to change their local community for the better 42.43%.

Overall, the family visitors and coordinators felt their information was well received and appreciated by the mothers. Only a very small percentage - 3.42% - of the family visitors and coordinators felt that the families viewed the programme with some restraint and mistrust.

### **Mothers in the Programme:**

More than half 52.14% of the mothers believed that the programme contributed 'very much' to the progress of their child's development, while 43.00% believed it contributed 'more,' 4.64% 'little' and 0.22% 'not at all.' When asked what they had learned from the programme, the top answers were: to care about the child's hygiene, show the child that I love them as they are, have a conversation with the child, try to find out the cause of the child's nervousness, and to encourage the child to learn.

The programme contributed to changes in the family 'very much' in that family members were satisfied with the mothers' participation in the programme 65.14%, the mother is the one to decide what is best for the child 60.28%, and that all family members feel more pleasant at home 52.57%.

One of the starting points of the expert team was that the project was supposed to initiate and develop in the mother and the other family members the culture of communication that would be supported with love, respect and tolerance. This was the objective and the spirit of the training sessions whose basic idea was to develop the individual personality of the mother that would understand responsible parenthood.

Mothers were asked how the programme contributed to their personal change. A majority of mothers ranked the following as 'very much': the belief that parents are responsible for providing the conditions for proper development for their children, parents are the most responsible for the development of our children, it is parents who should plan and provide the conditions for their development, and that she acquired the knowledge and skills for the proper development of the child. A slight majority 50.64% rated that they achieved self-confidence as 'very much.'

Developing awareness about the personal responsibility for the development of one's own child is an important objective of the "School for Parenthood" project. A majority felt the programme contributed 'very much' to changes in the mothers' relationship with their local residence in that 'we realised that us parents are responsible to plan and provide conditions for development of children from our place of residence' and that interest in the environment in the Project is increasing.

The mothers ranked the most important change as occurring in the children at 43%, and then within themselves 35.28%, within the family 20% and in the community 4.14%.

### **Lessons Learned**

The commitment of beneficiaries is great when small children and parent development are concerned, even in an emergency setting. Refugees need to be given assignments and tasks. That will help restore the normalcy of the day. Child-oriented activities will take the minds of the parents off the current situation and help women restore a sense of duty and also pride and dignity.

### **Recommendations**

"School for Parenthood" project confirms the fact that each child has a right to development and is a condition for a happy family, pleased parents and prosperous community. Although the programme was introduced by an Irish NGO, we were able to develop sufficient local capacity and will continue with local expertise.