



Multi-sectoral services for street and working children in Lebanon

Photo: IRC/Jacob Russel

This case study describes (i) a comprehensive approach to service provision for children living and working on the streets in Lebanon and (ii) the main lessons learned and effective approaches of the programme.

Background

In response to increasing numbers of street-connected children in Lebanon since the onset of the crisis in Syria, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) initiated a programme to provide case management and comprehensive child protection services through IRC's safe space model: Safe and Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS). In 2016, recognising that significant numbers of children working in different types of child labour were not being reached, the programme was adapted and extended to children working on the streets, often in the worst forms of child labour.

Comprehensive services for children living and working on the streets

The programme for street-connected children in Lebanon included the following components and lessons learned:

1. Start-up of the programme

- **Conduct a scoping exercise** in each new area including observation, questionnaires with children and caregivers, and coordination with other services providers.
- **Work hard to develop trust with children and their families** in the initial stages of programmes by providing basic psychosocial support (PSS) and information on the street.
- **Locate the safe space close to where children work** so staff can maintain a presence, observe their working environment, and provide services as close as possible to where children are exposed to risks.

2. Centre-based and mobile service delivery modalities

- **Conduct street-based outreach and provide the services in centres or other closed spaces**, for example a community centre, child-friendly space or SHLS, to improve efficiency and confidentiality and to reduce interruptions when working with children.
- **Have a regular opening period** of four hours a day, but also open flexibly and at night depending on when children work and are available.
- **Provide mobile services** attached to the fixed site of the SHLS, as street-connected children move to different areas of the city to work depending on the time of year, celebrations or events.

3. Comprehensive, multi-sectoral services

- **Provide a range of community-based protection and psychosocial services** through SLHS including social and emotional learning; basic literacy and learning; positive parenting for caregivers; awareness sessions; a case management team; a help desk and hub for information on all agency services; and outreach to notify children about activities.
- **Provide focused psychosocial support** through a social and emotional learning package developed specifically for street and working children. Experiential learning indicated that non-focused PSS was not very effective for street and working children: they got bored easily, have developed survival skills, and behave and think in ways that are older than their age. They needed unique ways of being engaged with tailored interventions and curricula for different age groups. Activities now consider the individual circumstances of every child, taking account of their development and experiences. Sessions include mindfulness, coping with difficult emotions, developing positive relationships, how to keep safe and prevent bullying on the street, and life skills.
- **Train and empower all child protection, case management and PSS staff to identify children with additional risks who require extra support from case management.** Training develops skills that enable staff to make informed judgements, handle disclosures and refer children appropriately. It covers core child protection concepts, each type of job and its related Lebanese and international legislation, the risks and the conditions which are most harmful to children, and early intervention. It is important to develop critical thinking and analytical skills so content and delivery can be tailored. Street and working children cannot be given the same sessions that would be given to other children.
- **Conduct individual safety mapping as a PSS activity for each child**, regardless of whether a child needs case management, as it helps to support each child to mitigate the risks they face. If there are any disclosures during risk mapping, a child gets referred to case managers. Safety mapping is conducted by a case manager when a child is considered high risk.
- **Provide case management for children considered high risk.** Limited resources and capacity for case management mean additional factors (in addition to being in a WFCL) are used to determine whether a child is considered high risk. Those factors include: age, type of work, types of tools, exposure to chemicals or fuels, being separated or unaccompanied, working at night, working unattended, attending school or not, and other additional protection issues the children might be exposed to, such as physical or sexual abuse.

Safety Mapping

A case worker sits with each child or sometimes in a group. They draw a map of their home and work, the routes from home to work, and around work etc., adding in who is on the route, where they feel safe/unsafe and who the people are that make them feel safe/unsafe. An additional plan is put in place to mitigate the risks they have identified and provide alternatives such as different routes, safe people and places.

- **Focus on solution-based decision-making** which mitigates risks and strengthens the environment for street-connected and working children. In the context it is difficult to expect all children not to work, especially older children who are main breadwinners. Staff need flexibility to get the best possible outcome as soon as possible for each child. The sooner the intervention, the quicker and greater the impact – for instance, this could be by decreasing working hours, empowering them to make safe choices and so on. Street and working children need a lot of follow-up and support with life skills such as hygiene.
- **Work with caregivers.** Caregivers can attend a specifically designed programme for the caregivers of street and working children. It covers the causes and consequences of child labour, risks to children in the workplace, health and developmental impacts of work, the differences between adults and children, and legal obligations in very simple way – for example, hours and time children can work and so on.
- **Strongly advocate for caregivers’ access to available entitlements, services and extra support.** For instance, health, registration, emergency cash, protection cash or multi-purpose cash, WFP card. Caregivers need support as they often have many vulnerabilities.
- **Develop learning and awareness materials to support case management and PSS,** which are suitable for street and working children through the **Street Heroes and Field Heroes** packages.

Street Heroes & Field Heroes

These were developed as decision-based comic books to support activities to improve the safety and welfare of working and street-connected children. The materials were developed through focus group discussions with children and observation on the street and of working children in fields to identify the type of dangers the children were exposed to, and suitable mitigation measures. Each scenario is based on real life and the decisions which children make every day. For instance, if a stranger comes and offers you \$100, what would the child do? The reader answers a series of questions and progresses through the comic based on their answers. At the end of the decisions they make, key messages are given such as “call the hotline”, “speak to someone trusted” etc.

A facilitators’ guide has also been developed to focus on delivery of the sessions. Delivery must consider any potential risks during planning including location, safety concerns, possible bullying within a group, and disclosures, possibly numerous disclosures in a group. Facilitators need to avoid blame and stereotypes and focus on empowering children to make better choices and seek help.

- **Consider during case management** that while many parents are open to discussing their children’s work and putting in place a plan to reduce harm, some are exploitative and harmful for their children. There must be a position, determined individually, which supports parents as much as possible but accepts that formal reporting and the judiciary may be necessary in some cases, where every effort has been made but where parents remain harmful to a child. This is only done under strict conditions and after every possible action to get change has been unsuccessful, as it can end in the removal of the child from a family.
- **Support siblings at the same time.** Experiential learning indicated that following an intervention to help a working child, their siblings would often be seen working in the following months. To reduce risks of younger siblings being pulled into work, they are targeted with additional educational support in partnership with the education team, including early childhood development sessions for children, and positive parenting sessions for children from birth to five years.

- Support child/caregiver economic strengthening. Experiential learning showed that despite case management and PSS activities, the root causes of child labour within a household were not sustainably addressed. The child protection and economic recovery and development (ERD) team worked closely together on both apprenticeships and livelihoods for adolescents aged 15 to 18 years and caregivers. Reflections and lessons learned include:
 - ◀ Apprenticeships follow individual interests and talents, last four months and provide a stipend. Employers are vetted by child protection and ERD teams, and the programme follows ILO guidelines on vocational training. A detailed training plan is drawn up with the employer about the type of skills and experience that participants will gain. All adolescents attend life skills sessions in advance. There are conditions attached to the apprenticeships – such as they must not return to street work or other WFCL, they must also agree that their younger siblings do not work. Within a household, generally only an adolescent or caregiver benefits from livelihoods support.
 - ◀ Street and working children need a lot of follow-up during and after ERD activities. This is done through field presence, home visits, follow-up visits and close cooperation with the ERD team and community to verify attendance, quality and safety of apprenticeships and to make sure the children or their siblings are not in harmful work during or following apprenticeships.
 - ◀ A lot of additional tools are needed to support extremely economically vulnerable households. Winterisation kits, summer kits, Ramadan kits, medical emergency case assistance to cover medical needs may be needed.
 - ◀ Child protection teams should work with the ERD team at the start of the year to plan for the required number of spaces for families identified and referred by caseworkers. Adolescents and caregivers of street and working children are integrated into wider targeting of ERD programmes.

4. Working with employers

- **Work cautiously and sensitively with employers.** A lot can be achieved through advocating with employers about issues such as decreasing children's working hours, encouraging children to use safety kits and appropriate tools, taking healthy breaks, attending SHLS activities or school. Experiential learning has shown that approaching employers and working with them needs to be done carefully and gradually, looking at the whole context to identify where the most harms exist that need to be mitigated. Situations are not always clear, and efforts need to be flexible in order to protect the best interest of a child at all times.
- **Provide a tailored workplace toolkit (NFI safe work toolkit) for children in hazardous work,** depending on the type of work they are doing, and the risks involved in the tasks they conduct at work. There are different toolkits for mechanics, working in a stone quarry, working collecting garbage and so on. Kits contain a mix of gloves, face masks, anti-bacterial wipes, respirators, bandages etc. Teams monitor children to make sure they are using the items.

5. Focus on supporting working children to access learning

- **Integrating working children into formal schools should be the priority for all child protection and education practitioners.** In the event that working children face barriers which prevent access to school then child protection and education practitioners should prioritise integrating the child into informal education with an aim of eventually identifying a pathway to formal school.
- **Access to education is critical and a high priority for working children.** Child protection practitioners working with this cohort of children need to attend coordination meetings, support and target representatives of the Ministry of Education to systematically advocate for a reduction in barriers and restrictions that prevent this cohort from accessing school – this includes addressing barriers such as lack of certification of formal learning, lack of formal identification, as well as discrimination and violence.

6. Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

- **Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework** including through a checklist which looks at the impact of what we are doing – for instance, what risks have been reduced, whether working hours have decreased, whether there is physical protection to do the job, or a protection environment.
- **Establish a feedback and response mechanism** for children and parents to provide their feedback, for example through focus group discussions and regular (individual/group) check-ins. This would include an anonymous and confidential set of questions on a checklist which ask about the welfare of the child, how they are, what they are experiencing etc. It highlights issues faced by children and adds to the overall picture of the welfare of street and working children and the problems they face.

Limitations

- A smaller number of children were targeted with this intensive programme approach, which is often not appealing for donors. Over a five-year period around 2,000 children were reached. Being a small programme, the services cannot help everyone.
- The programme doesn't work with employers holistically; while some employers were cooperative, others were not. It has been difficult to determine which approaches are particularly successful.

Resources

- ◇ IRC (2014). **Fact Sheet: Street and Working Children's Program.**
- ◇ IRC. **Child labour resource page with the Street Heroes and Field Heroes awareness-raising materials and comics, including the Parenting Modules.**
- ◇ IRC. **Safe Healing and Learning Spaces resource page.**

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>