

## **MERCY CORPS' COMFORT FOR KIDS AND MOVING FORWARD: HELPING CHILDREN RECOVER AFTER DISASTERS**

When disaster strikes – whether earthquake, hurricane or human conflict – young survivors are especially vulnerable to intellectual, physical, emotional and social problems.

In recent years, Mercy Corps has teamed up with partners Bright Horizons and Nike to develop two post-crisis interventions especially designed for children and youth. The programs we created, called Comfort for Kids and Moving Forward, have been used to help children recover after the traumatic events of September 11 (2001), Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005) and the conflict in Gaza (2009), as well as earthquakes in Peru (2007), China (2008) and Haiti and Chile (2010).

Mercy Corps, working with local partners, has trained thousands of adults to help children and youth recover after disasters, so they can look toward a healthy future.

### **Comfort for Kids: Building Adult Capacity**

Comfort for Kids educates adults about normal and abnormal responses to crisis. The program provides a recovery model and tools tailored to the emergency and culture, which Mercy Corps shares through participatory group workshops for professionals and parents. By providing psychosocial support to traumatized children following a disaster, we can help kids avoid post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Mercy Corps works with doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, parents and child care workers so they're equipped to help children understand and communicate what they have been through. As part of our program, we have published 1 million copies of more than 20 educational resources for post-disaster settings, including culturally adapted workbooks that help children tell their personal stories of the disaster in a safe environment. Both our training and these resources set the stage for children's emotional healing.

**Moving Forward: Sports and Games Help Heal**  
Moving Forward uses sports and games to

promote resilience, teamwork, self-esteem and constructive communication to crisis-affected kids. Our goal is to restore a sense of normalcy to their daily lives, decrease the psychosocial distress children suffer after disasters and support the creation of critically important social support networks. We train teachers, coaches and others who care for children how to use play time for healing. Included in the program is an intervention toolkit and starter set of sports gear, such as balls, Frisbees, jump ropes, gym bags and first aid kits.



*Mercy Corps uses songs and games to help Haitian orphans recover from the effects of the quake. Photo: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps*

### **Haiti Earthquake: 2010**

Haitian children who survived the January 2010 earthquake experienced a shock that could negatively affect them for life. Through Comfort for Kids, within 12 weeks Mercy Corps helped 750 pediatricians, physiotherapists, nurses, teachers, psychologists, social workers and parents, as well as staff from other NGOs, meet the needs of distressed children. We also laid the foundation for long-term youth programming. Ultimately, we will train 5,000 adults, benefiting 150,000 children.

To help Haiti's kids, we are publishing:

- 5,000 Creole-language copies of the 60-page booklet *What Happened to Our World*, adapted from our responses to other disasters to help adults meet the needs of crisis-affected children. This booklet is being distributed to Haitian mental health providers, senior professionals and others who work with affected children.
- 10,000 Creole-language copies of the children's workbook *My Earthquake Story*, to help kids

*Last year, Mercy Corps helped 19 million people turn crisis into opportunity.*

express their experiences and recover from them.

We also are distributing 4,000 child-friendly kits – containing age-appropriate toys, hygiene supplies, blankets and art materials – to Haitian orphans.

### **Chile Earthquake: 2010**

In response to the 8.8 magnitude earthquake on February 27, Mercy Corps is partnering with local health organization Educación Popular en Salud (EPES) to help children and youth through Comfort for Kids and Moving Forward. In April we launched our program to train 60 facilitators, who will reach 1,200 children and youth through our workbook and sports program. EPES will also train 400 parents with basic information about their children's reactions to the crisis, and their own.

### **Gaza Conflict: 2009**

In the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas fighting in early 2009, Mercy Corps adapted two publications to guide parents and professionals in how to support children who have fear and anxiety about ongoing violence. These publications were distributed to 10,000 adults. We also worked with the US-based Children's Psychological Health Center to publish a new workbook that was distributed to 3,250 child survivors of the violence. All three are available in both Arabic and English.

### **China Earthquake: 2008**

After the May, 2008 earthquake centered in Sichuan Province, Mercy Corps teamed with local partners China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, Sichuan Youth Federation and the Dujiangyan Women's Federation to train 1,800 adults to help 30,000 children through Comfort for Kids and Moving Forward. All 30,000 participants received the My Earthquake Story workbook and other materials, designed to lessen post-traumatic stress and strengthen coping skills, and adapted by Mercy Corps and our partners to be culturally sensitive and relevant. Through local partners, we distributed 25,000 additional workbooks to help other children and youth. And, we distributed 80,000 pamphlets about children's mental health to local communities and schools.

### **Peru Earthquake: 2007**

After the 7.9 magnitude earthquake in 2007, Mercy

Corps partnered with Soluciones Practicas, as well as Nike and Care, to provide Moving Forward to Peruvian child survivors in four affected communities. We trained 22 adults to help 425 children. We also implemented Comfort for Kids, adapting materials developed for Hurricane Katrina. Working with local mental health partner CEDAPP, we trained 59 teachers to use children's workbooks with their 1,300 students.

### **Katrina and Rita Hurricanes: 2005**

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Mercy Corps provided support to 75,000 child survivors in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas through Comfort for Kids. Working with regional YWCAs and others, Mercy Corps provided training to professionals, child care workers and parents, and distributed 75,000 children's workbooks, as well as 55,000 comfort and school kits containing toys, stuffed animals and school supplies, and portable, safe play areas for use in shelters.

### **New York Attacks: 2001**

After the attacks of September 11, Mercy Corps launched a first-of-its-kind effort to provide social and psychological support to kids affected by the event. We trained 8,000 professionals, child care workers and parents to help provide children with better, more informed support through the years. We distributed 265,000 copies of our publications, as well as 12,500 comfort kits with stuffed animals and age-appropriate materials to help the most highly affected children heal.

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**You must be the change  
you wish to see in the world.**

~ Gandhi



Be the change