CCF is an international child development organization that works in more than 30 countries, assisting 10.5 million children and family members without regard to race, religion, gender or national origin.
This volunteer (left) is one of many who helped establish Child Centered Spaces in the Philippines after a devastating mudslide in 2006.

A CCF Child Centered Space in Aceh, Indonesia. One activity included monitoring children’s growth and development after the tsunami.

Cover Photo: Two little girls dance on the beach where the tsunami once crashed in. Dancing on the beach is just one way CCF’s Child Centered Space activities are designed to help children recover.
community activities such as clean-up campaigns, and mentoring younger children. Children’s care-takers also receive psychosocial help through participation in support groups, children’s development and health education, and workshops on parenting skills that enable them to attend to children’s physical, emotional and social needs. Trained staff refer severely affected children to mental-health specialists, other professionals or traditional healers.

In the small fishing village of Vallandamomu in Tamil Nadu, the whole community participated in the opening ceremony of their child-centred space: parents cradling babies, children linked arm in arm, youths in small groups, and elders watching and nodding. A community committee had earlier cleared the open space of debris, and the young people wove decorative strings of birds out of palm leaves and carefully placed them throughout the centre. Throughout the afternoon the children sang traditional songs, played group games, and lined up for a turn on the newly installed slide. They performed local dances and elders passed out sweets. An elder declared: “The children are happy again. Now we can be hopeful for all our futures.”

These centres are not a stand-alone intervention but are supplemented by wider child-protection efforts. Community members participate in child well-being committees that stimulate community action to reduce risks and improve children’s psychosocial well-being. Made up of children and adults, the committees work to identify, monitor and reduce physical, social and emotional risks to children. They also educate parents and communities about children’s rights and psychosocial needs. By intermixing urgent assistance with prevention, this holistic approach aims to create hope for the child survivors of the tsunami and their caregivers.

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In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, a conflict or a post-conflict situation, Christian Children’s Fund steps in rapidly with programs to support children. The creation of Child Centered Spaces is a key expression of the organization’s commitment to child protection at times when children are especially vulnerable.

CCF has established hundreds of Child Centered Spaces in countries affected by armed conflict, such as Afghanistan, Angola, Chad, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Timor-Leste and northern Uganda. These Child Centered Spaces are also effective in countries ravaged by natural disasters like the massive tsunami of December 2004 that hit India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Thousands upon thousands of children and young people have participated in community-based activities in these centers, which have helped restore their sense of safety, connection to caring adults and hope for the future.

In open areas or in new and existing structures, these spaces provide rapid psychosocial support by engaging children in activities that restore a sense of normalcy and safety. This also enables emotional expression, addresses health risks and fosters social integration. The staff are local community volunteers, including teachers and youth workers, who are trained and supported by specialists in child protection.

The spaces provide a safe place where children can play and learn, surrounded by caring adults. Children’s sense of normalcy and predictability is restored through structured activities, such as singing and dancing embedded in the local culture. Nonformal education, provided when schools have been destroyed or disrupted, is an important part of the normalizing process, and fosters psychosocial health by providing normalizing activities plus social interactions with peers. The centers promote children’s health through the education of staff in hygiene and physical hazards as well as disease diagnosis, prevention and treatment. This may also be supported through the provision of nutrition monitoring and therapeutic feeding for
infants and toddlers. Using art, play, storytelling and drama, children express emotions and are better prepared to cope with distressing events.

The centers also benefit older children, who develop life skills and leadership abilities through participation in sports, youth clubs, and community activities such as cleanup campaigns and the mentoring of younger children. Caretakers receive psychosocial support through participation in child development and health education activities, and workshops on parenting skills that enable them to attend to children's physical, emotional and social needs. Trained staff can refer severely affected children to mental health specialists or traditional healers. (Typically, this would be less than 15% of a disaster-affected population.)

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From The Lancet...

Psychosocial Aid to Children After the Dec. 26 Tsunami
by Kathleen Kostelny and Michael Wessells*

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The Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami had profound effects on children, who have unique vulnerabilities, needs, and strengths. The tsunami ravaged children's sense of safety and predictability, and increased their vulnerability. Many of the children involved feared for their lives or narrowly escaped death, and many suffered the loss of parents, siblings, friends, and neighbours. The tsunami destroyed children's social supports by devastating homes, schools, and communities, and overwhelming the adults caring for them. Adding to children's risks were ongoing threats to their protection, such as separation from parents, sexual exploitation, trafficking, recruitment into armed groups, and dangerous labour.

Previous research and our observations indicate that most children experiencing disasters, conflict, and other traumatic events have mild to moderate levels of distress but remain functional. Typically, less than 15% of a disaster-affected population express mental disorders that require intensive mental-health care. What most children need is not therapy but community-based activities that help to restore their sense of safety, connection to caring adults, and hope for the future.

To support children, Christian Children's Fund, working with local partners, established 240 child centred spaces in tsunami-affected areas of Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia, involving more than 38,000 children from birth to 18 years of age. In open areas or in new or existing structures, these spaces provide rapid psychosocial support by engaging children in activities that aim to restore a sense of safety and predictability, enable emotional expression, address health risks, and foster social integration. The staff are local community volunteers, including teachers and youth workers, who are trained and supported by specialists in child protection. Previously, child centred spaces have been started by Christian Children's Fund in conflict and post-conflict situations in Afghanistan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and East Timor, where the scale and nature of the devastation have affected children.

Activities in the children's centres aim to help to restore young children's sense of safety by providing a safe place where they can play surrounded by caring adults whom they trust. The centres try to restore children's sense of normalcy and predictability through structured activities such as singing and dancing activities that are part of the local culture. Informal education, provided when schools have been destroyed or disrupted, is an important part of the normalising process, and fosters psychosocial health by providing a routine, and social interactions with peers. The centres try to promote children's health through education about hygiene, physical hazards, and disease diagnosis, prevention, and treatment; and by providing nutrition monitoring and therapeutic feeding for infants and toddlers. Through art, story-telling, and drama, children express emotions and have space to cope with distressing events.

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Strategically, CCF seeks to fill this protection gap by focusing on child protection in emergency situations. Worldwide, CCF is a strong voice for child protection and a leader in the development of concepts, practices and policies regarding children’s well-being in emergencies. In such situations, CCF seeks to reduce risks to children’s well-being and makes children’s rights a reality by creating an enabling environment that supports the healthy development of the child. CCF’s distinctive approach to child protection and well-being reflects extensive learning from different programs conducted in countries ravaged by disaster or conflict, such as Timor-Leste, Angola, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Liberia, northern Uganda and, more recently, tsunami-affected areas in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Child Protection: Promoting Well-being and Resilience

CCF seeks to promote children’s well-being by strengthening the social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral competencies that promote their positive coping, resilience and well-being.

In the humanitarian community. However, despite this development, child protection remains a low priority in most countries’ emergency responses. The gap in child protection must be addressed since children typically comprise half the population in emergency situations. Children have special vulnerabilities and require additional protection from armed conflict and its associated ravages such as disease, hunger, malnutrition, displacement and child soldiering.

Child protection cannot be defined solely in terms of freedom from risks, since rights protection entails positive development and well-being. Nor is it limited to emergency contexts alone. Indeed, CCF seeks to promote children’s well-being by strengthening the social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral competencies that promote sustainable resources for child protection programming. In addition, there is support for community-driven processes of child protection and the strengthening of local networks that enable child protection, care and well-being. For older children and youth, programs seek ways to support their voice and agency.

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CCF’s Child Protection Activities Around the World

Creating safe havens for families facing war and civil strife is a crucial component of child protection. Child Centered Spaces provide a safe place for children to play. Here, in a Child Centered Space in Chad, a CCF staff member holds a baby whose family fled conflict in Sudan. In this program, CCF worked in conjunction with a Doctors Without Borders’ nutrition program.

Child protection is an issue of critical importance throughout CCF’s programs, and CCF values the input of the children themselves. In the case of CCF’s well drilling program in Afghanistan, children expressed fears of falling into old well holes. This was one of the reasons CCF chose to launch a major well drilling program. These children and parents are gathered around a new safe well.

Children and parents in India celebrate the opening of a new CCF Child Centered Space following the tsunami. Here, CCF offers activities designed to help them begin the long healing process. Even in the face of adversity, these people look toward the future and a fresh start.

Following the massive India earthquake that struck northwest India during Independence Day celebrations in 2001, CCF opened Child Centered Spaces to help survivors. As part of the healing process, children put the finishing touches on an outdoor space where they told their stories, drew pictures about their losses, and sang the song of independence the earthquake had interrupted.

This drawing portrays a Sri Lankan child’s view of what happened during the tsunami. The drawing gave this child an opportunity to express his fears and memories of the devastation left by the tsunami.
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Child Protection:
Promoting Well-being and Resilience

Framed by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, CCF’s work to promote children’s holistic development aims to strengthen family and community systems that support child protection and well-being. Consistent with its mission, CCF strives to promote the children’s best interests and create positive environments in which children grow up amid respect, hope and social justice. Appreciating the inherent worth of each child, CCF recognizes its responsibilities to protect children from harm, to promote children’s rights and to ensure children’s healthy development. Since CCF works in situations that present serious physical, emotional and social risks to children and involve unequal power relations, it is vital to define clearly CCF’s commitment to child protection.

Protection has an increasingly prominent place in the humanitarian community. However, despite this development, child protection remains a low priority in most countries’ emergency responses. The gap in child protection must be addressed since children typically comprise half the population in emergency situations. Children have special vulnerabilities and require additional protection from armed conflict and its associated ravages such as disease, hunger, malnutrition, displacement and child soldiering.

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The Child Centered Spaces, in Aceh Besar, Indonesia, where 370 children participated in a youth empowerment workshop following the tsunami and learned skills to last a lifetime.

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