

Project in Syria - Tartous, narrative report from SOS Children Villages received jan 2021.

In general, the results of the action are satisfactory and of a good quality.

*R1 – Result 1: 150 unaccompanied or separated children in Tartous are protected in a temporary integrated shelter and 2500 children affected by the conflict living with their families in the community of Tartous find an appropriate support for their psychosocial recovery*

The project managed to shelter 150 children in the IACC. Admittance of children was carried out according to the procedures of SOS and followed the best interest of the child. All children in the IACC benefitted from the planned services (education, health, psychological support, life skills, recreational activities). In addition to the protective nature of the IACC, the findings of the external evaluation are supportive of the conclusion that beneficiaries were satisfied with the quality and diversity of the services provided in the IACC. In terms of impact, the external evaluation mentions that caregivers of IACC children stated that they observed great change in their children with an enhancement of their overall well-being. The most notable changes observed by the parents were that children were socializing and spending time with their family, having a sufficient self-esteem, and that children were socializing with friends, doing homework and were helping in chores around the house. They also noticed improved behaviour in the children that came back from the IACC with healthy habits and seemed more responsible, completing their chores at home, and only playing after completing their homework.

Regarding the CFS, 2,700 children benefited from the structured services, either through the static CFS centre in Bsireh or through the mobile teams reaching out to the neighbouring communities. All children in the CFS benefitted from a three-month support cycle, including psychosocial, educational and recreational activities. During the project duration, 1382 recreational, educational and life skill sessions, 614 psychological sessions, 59 children's rights sessions and 38 sessions related to vocational training were organized for children enlisted in the CFS. Moreover, the CFS organized 229 psychosocial support sessions and 82 small-scale vocational sessions for the mothers of these children. It is important to notice that the CFS reached out to a total of 3,468 children (the number that was also mentioned in the last quarterly succinct paper), but at the start of the project the CFS only worked with mobile teams and no comprehensive child files were kept that allowed for a qualitative follow-up of these children. Therefore, it was decided not to include these children as beneficiaries of the project, although they did benefit from its services. The external evaluation supports the fact that children felt happy and safe at the CFS centre and with the CFS facilitators and mentions that the diversity of the services under the project worked towards protecting children and enhancing their well-being. CFS services were received well by both the beneficiaries and the community and community leaders have noted that the CFS centre had a prominent place in the Bsireh community. The external evaluation also demonstrates that overall there was a positive change in almost all beneficiaries of the CFS. Parents stated that their children had improved behaviour, decreased aggressive tendencies (fighting with peers) and improved psychological well-being (less fear and becoming calmer). Community leaders expressed that they had relatives who were part of CFS programming and observed development in the cognitive, social and emotional skills of children. Additionally, they noted that children who participated in SOS programming have better academic performance, with some previously illiterate children learning to read and write. They observed increased awareness, self-confidence and self-reliance amongst the children.

Family Strengthening Program (FSP): in order to i) facilitate family reunification for children in the IACC ii) reduce risks of family breakdown or separation for families whose children were enlisted in the CFS, 63 families (coming from IACC and CFS) were enrolled in a FSP that started in September 2018. For all these families, an individualized Family Development Plan and a Family Financial Plan was developed, and depending on the needs of these families, a range of support activities was organized. These included Income Generating Activities (for 59

families), contribution to rent and housing rehabilitation (59 families), decent clothing (63 families), provision of legal support (for 13 families), support in school fees and school supplies (for 63 families) and coverage of medical costs (for 5 families). A total number of 2359 monitoring sessions (either through field visits to the families or by phone) were done to guarantee the qualitative implementation and to follow-up the progress of the Family Development Plans. The FSP was able to support families in their main challenges and to develop effective, long-term coping strategies. Families that participated in the FSP were able to create a stable environment for their children, had stable sources of income, and were able to focus on the wellbeing of their children. As such, the FSP largely contributed to the long-term capacity of families to provide the care needed by their children, and largely diminished risks of possible family separation. The quantitative and qualitative findings of the external evaluation also demonstrate that the FSP program was diverse and assisted the families through tailored and specific interventions and show the satisfaction of beneficiaries in the received services. The FSP was viewed positively by beneficiaries, SOS staff and external agencies. This could be attributed to the diversity and quality of services, coupled with the efforts of staff to provide the services with the ultimate goal of empowering the family to have a protective environment for their children. In terms of impact, the external evaluation also mentions that the FSP had a positive impact on the children since they allowed heads of household to meet the material needs of their children and keep them in school, since the family's economic situation improved and children did not need to work any longer. The FSP program helped caregivers in making a difference in many aspects of their family lives, most notably when it came to their relationship and communication with their children, or with the physical, emotional and social development of their children. Families who were supported through FSP received a long-term investment in their stability and economic productivity.

Overall, the external evaluation report mentions that the project was able to achieve its desired impacts on children and their families. Children overall had improved well-being through the efforts under IACC, CFS and FSP. Additionally, parents were more equipped with material support and support regarding their knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) to support their children's development and well-being.

*Result 2: 150 unaccompanied or separated children in Tartous are reintegrated in their families of origin, in long-term family-based settings or alternative-care facilities according to their best interest*

At the end of the project, 150 children have left the IACC and a sustainable solution has been found for them. 115 children could be reunified with their families, 34 children have been referred to other SOS programs based in Damascus and 1 child has been referred to a state held orphanage. As reasons for family separation were mainly due to socio-economic factors (lack of economic opportunities and lack of employment) and not to accidental separation due to the crisis, reunification of the children with the families proved hard and required large efforts in terms of reunification and post-reunification follow-up. In this context, post-reunification became even more important, and support to families had to be increased in terms of services and time, to guarantee families could take up their parental duties. Therefore, the project integrated a Family Strengthening Program (FSP) component in November 2018. As mentioned before, this FSP provided tailored support to 63 families.

The external evaluation report mentions that the process of reunification was subject to thorough study and back and forth between SOS and the family. Parents thought that appropriate measures were taken and awareness was raised and that they were made aware of the child's development once reunification occurred. Reunification did not occur unless the family was capable of meeting the basic needs of the child, children's well-being was assured and the family environment was supportive of the development of the children.

*Result 3: children from the target group, families of origins and extended relatives taking care of children, representatives of Tartous' communities are sensitized and empowered to report*

*children rights violations through capacity-building sessions on child protection, children's rights, prevention of separation, gender based violence (GBV)*

Children in the IACC and CFS benefitted regularly from awareness sessions or workshops related to child rights, child rights violations or GBV (early marriage, sexual abuse). Families of children in the CFS also benefited from activities and awareness sessions on communication with children, risks of early marriage, domestic violence, violence against women, health and hygiene, risks of un-prescribed drugs etc.

The project organized outreach activities to children and families in the neighbourhood of the CFS. In total, 253 awareness sessions for children were organized (with an average of 29 children per session) and 211 awareness sessions and workshops for families and 22 workshops community members were organized (with an average of 4 participants per session).

These awareness sessions addressed lacks of knowledge of children, their families and community members regarding children's rights. They contributed to a better understanding of the needs and rights of the children and how to address them. Caregivers also reported that this improved understanding led to changing positive behaviours and attitudes towards the children, and these sessions were perceived as having a great value for them. The project was able to create an informal network of community members and leaders to identify children in a vulnerable situation and to refer them to the most appropriate partner (SOS, other NGOs or local authorities). In the end, at least 182 children were referred to the project through these community networks, demonstrating the impact of the awareness-sessions that were organized.

However, the project also faced challenges to include some community leaders and authorities in awareness-raising workshops related to children's rights. Most community leaders and authorities are male, and most often they don't see the need for them to participate in activities they consider to be the field of action of women. The project was therefore not able to target this group in a structured way and decided, in the last year of the project, to focus more on other relevant community members who also had a broad reach and an informal authority in the community, such as teachers or owners of sport clubs or small enterprises. It proved to be a more successful approach.