

The Whole Child Vision

Whole Child International's **mission** is to elevate the quality of childcare worldwide. We are committed to the application of the most advanced knowledge and sophisticated research to childcare in orphanages, childcare centers, and other limited-resource institutions, implemented on a national level and envisioned on a global scale.

WHAT DOES WHOLE CHILD DO?

We work across a country's system of care to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.



NBC: 4 Ways to Improve Orphans' Lives: Whole Child's Karen Spencer & NBC's Cynthia McFadden (2016)



PROBLEM & SOLUTION

The Problem

Most childcare institutions, the world over, are run like a factory line, following centuries-old childcare practices that are known for causing tremendous damage to children. Among consequences of current practices is an extremely high incidence of attachment disorder and myriad other crippling developmental problems, all of which result in high levels of juvenile delinquency, victimization, prostitution, gang affiliation, imprisonment, failed adoptions, reinstitutionalization of subsequent generations, and generally the loss of productivity and hope for a satisfying constructive life for some of the world's most vulnerable children.



A Knowledge Vacuum

Caregivers who work in childcare centers for vulnerable children tend to work in a knowledge vacuum caused by their marginalization in the bottom professional echelon. Thus insulated from scientific developments, and coupled with intense need in the population they serve, caregivers and their administrators adhere to outdated "factory-line" methods for providing care which emphasize efficiency and cleanliness. The results are predictably bleak.

A Need for Our Work across Care Settings

These problems are not limited to orphanages — even children in childcare who live with parents who work long hours have been seen to exhibit disorders stemming from a lack of nurturing, stable caregiving relationships. Whole Child believes that whether a child lives in a family environment or remains in an institution, they must receive care that meets their basic emotional needs, and we also know that regardless of the setting of care, the societal costs of withholding quality care while in the current situation vastly outweigh the costs of our program.

Astonishingly, these problems are relatively easy to correct through the simple methods at right. Whole Child International is one of the only organizations in the world committed to solving these problems regardless of care settings — helping children in multiple forms of limited-resource group care for as long as the children are there.

Case Study: Reinforcing Childcare Principles Through Day-to-Day Routines

In this video, a caregiver from the Managua area describes how Whole Child's program incorporated the principles above into hands-on training and practical support within the childcare setting.



The Solution

We know that orphanages and other institutions can be dramatically improved at relatively small cost. Our rigorously *evaluated program* focuses our work on caregivers, teaching and implementing five basic and essential childcare principles.

Five Essential Childcare Principles

- 1. Responsive caregiving:** Caregivers shift the priority from speed, efficiency, and institutional cleanliness to meeting the developmental and emotional needs of each child under their care. Interaction, communication, and paying special attention to the child's cues are prioritized.
- 2. Continuous primary care:** Each child must be able to form an attachment to an adult caregiver, and maintaining this relationship is made a top administrative priority. Primary caregivers are given a special place in the child's life. On the child's birthday, when she needs medical attention, or any other key activity normally led by a parent, the primary caregiver takes the lead. Unfortunately, in many cases centers divide up these responsibilities to nurses, social workers, and administrators, wasting a valuable opportunity to build on the core relationship whose strength and quality is central to the child's well-being.
- 3. Small groups:** Without increasing existing numbers of caregivers, we reduce group size to best develop and sustain relationships between the children and their caregivers, peers, and environment. Being in a group of 20 children with two caregivers feels entirely different to a child than being in a group of ten with one caregiver. Again, at no extra expense, we can dramatically change the child's day-to-day experience, and impact the quality of primary caregiving relationships.
- 4. Freedom of movement:** Caregivers learn to prepare a safe environment that children are encouraged to explore, ending the dominant practice whereby centers and caregivers restrict children's mobility to maintain order and simplify housekeeping.
- 5. Individuality and identity:** Children are recognized as individuals and their development of identity is supported through simple, cost-effective changes such as spaces for personal effects and individual birthday parties. Even low-cost options such as a sewn fabric sack tied to the end of a bed where children can store personal belongings can make a big difference to a child's sense of identity.



The absence of these principles is in large part responsible for the poor outcomes typical for children raised in institutions. Even with limited resources and within existing facilities, they can be meaningfully implemented by working closely with childcare workers and administrators, connecting institutions' basic resources, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of these activities. By implementing these principles, Whole Child is working to realize its vision of helping ensure that every child has the chance to become a whole person.

