

Learning Centers Network Program

The centers implement the following programs:

Child-Centered Learning Programs. Each Learning Center will implement these programs:

School Preparatory Program – Ages 5-7. During the year prior to beginning primary school, or preschool if already available in their communities, children are the central beneficiaries of this program. Using arts, music, and play activities the program focuses on developing the social skills necessary for children to adapt to primary school and on language skills necessary for participation in the school of the community where the children live. Language skills will be enhanced through learning songs, using that language with teachers in active and creative ways, alphabet exercises and games, play, etc. World-wide studies demonstrate that preschool and kindergarten programs significantly improve school success. For socially disadvantaged children, the potential benefit is profound.

Language Club – ages 7-9. The Language Club focuses on assisting children in the first two grades of primary school in order to develop confidence with their active language skills, to understand their teachers and other pupils and to participate in class. Language support will include singing, help with reading, simple writing exercises, games, etc.

Homework Assistance – Ages 7-15. Children are given assistance with their lessons in daily tutorial sessions. The Learning Center space provides a stable atmosphere where they can work on their lessons, ask the tutors and facilitators for assistance as needed, and get help on understanding what is being taught in school even when there are no homework assignments as such. Tutoring as a Peer-to-Peer support program, engages the wider community. In addition to the assistance and guidance provided, children have a space appropriate for learning as many children do not have home environments conducive for study.

Summer Program. The summer program includes two weeks of staff training and six weeks of “theme” activities, programs arranged around themes such as The World Around Us, People and Puppets, Maps and Orientation, Natural Exploration, Music and Beats, etc. The programs are meant to keep children mentally active during the summer, stimulate interest in education, and demonstrate practically the relation of education to our everyday reality. During this time, staff are also actively engaging with parents to make sure children are enrolled in school.

Tutors Program. The peer tutors are mostly secondary school students. They are engaged with the Homework Assistance Program, the Language Club, the Pre-School Program, and the Women’s Literacy program. In addition to a monthly stipend, tutors receive school books, in-service training, and tutoring for their lessons, and great experience. Past experience has demonstrated that tutors develop a strong sense of team belonging and self-esteem through their mentoring. Further, The LCN provides a training opportunity and context that few programs in the region can match. Training is not in isolation. Participants do not go away to a weekend and then return home with no context in which to apply the training they have received. Youth, along with staff, are constantly in a context to test, apply, and incorporate what they learn.

Supplemental Support. Other activities and programs contribute to the well-being of the children in the center, the larger community, women in the community, families.

Women’s Literacy. In 2009-2010 Women’s Literacy programs were initiated in two centers. Using UNICEF Kosovo’s curriculum, women learned to read and write, completing the first stage of a literacy journey.

Hot Food Program. Each day food, usually a hot meal, is prepared by the cook and provided to every child. The provision of a hot meal increases the children’s capacity to concentrate and learn more efficiently. The hot food program is seen as an important aspect of the overall project because the children will be able to concentrate and perform better when provided with nutritious food. Being served hot food will also encourage the children to stay at the centre longer. This is necessary if they are to receive homework and language learning assistance.

Kids-in-School Support Package. The project provides school books, notebooks and pencils, clothes and hygiene materials to children attending primary school based on their attendance in the school and participation in the Homework Assistance program.

Network Program. Each Learning Centre is responsible for developing and maintaining regular contact with five networks:

- Parents in their community through regular meetings and regular home visits, and encouraging parent visits to the Centre;
- The primary school where the children attend or will attend, developing positive relationships with the director and teachers and discussing with teachers the progress of children in the school who are attending the Learning Center programs;
- Education officers in their municipality, as well as other relevant governmental institutions including the Centers for Social Work;

- Other BSF Learning Centers. The project facilitates meetings and exchange visits between the Learning Centers, bi-weekly coordination meetings, and team building activities.
- Other local NGOs working within the particular communities and in the education sector.

Parenting Life Skills Program. In addition to the regular meetings with parents and home visits, each community will have at least 4 programs during the year inviting parents to participate in Parenting Skills exchanges. These discussions will use audio visual materials around questions of children support: role models, discipline, supporting school attendance, nutrition, hygiene, care, attention and neglect, etc. Parents and their commitment to the education of their children will play a large role in prospects for sustainability of this project. The more they can help to "convince" the community to help support the centers through modest in-kind contributions, i.e. services, small repairs, contacts the better chance there is of an effect on the pupils since their parents will develop a sense of "ownership" of the program and its benefits to their children.

Every aspect of the Learning Centers Network program impacts human rights fundamentals: children have the right to an education; children have the right to equal treatment and equal opportunity in the classroom; children have the right to believe they can succeed. Young people learn how they make that happen, how they can have an impact, how they can lead by both intention and example. They are taking leadership in their communities in helping set-up working groups with other NGOs, reaching out to parents, and recommitting themselves to more success in their own educations.