

## Child Development Centers Support a Holistic Model of Education By Wes Eby, Global Representative

### A Holistic Approach to Education

Child Development Centers, commonly called CDCs, have been started around the world through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (NCM) to impact the lives of children with the gospel. While their purpose depends upon the country and the needs of the local community, all of them embrace the NCM holistic child-development model. Through this model, according to NCM, “children gain skills and opportunities to interrupt the cycle of poverty, dream about their futures, experience God’s love in tangible ways, and grow into people God created them to be.” This model helps children grow in five key areas: physical, emotional, relational, intellectual, and spiritual.

CDCs support education in many ways, depending on the needs of the children in the community. Often they are after-school programs that focus on tutoring/homework assistance, providing extra support that the teachers are unable to give at school. Many programs focus on providing supplies for schools, such as backpacks, uniforms, books, notebooks, etc. In some areas there is vocational



training. While education is one aspect of the holistic model, it is a crucial one. Education is a key component of every CDC whether dealing with academic subjects, instructing in health and hygiene, and/or teaching the Word of God.

Today there are more than 200 CDCs in 36 countries. The largest number are in the Eurasia Region. Bangladesh has 67-- one-third of all CDCs worldwide. Other countries with a significant number are India, Sri Lanka, Dominican Republic, and Mozambique.

### The Impact of One CDC

What is the impact of Child Development Centers on the education of enrolled children? I feel a good answer can be illustrated in a story written by Dorli Gschwandtner when she visited a CDC in Albania. The following story was published in the March 2017 issue of *Engage* online magazine. I’m grateful to Dorli and *Engage* for allowing us to use some of the article to take a snapshot of one CDC.

Dorli and Pastor Gesti, from the Church of the Nazarene, arrived in a small, rented room where the children were diligently engaged in their homework. When the pastor introduced Dorli to the children in this CDC, the children welcomed her, and several gave her hugs. “Their hugs were long and fierce,” Dorli said, “revealing how desperately they longed for affection. It also suggested that the children might say, ‘I can see that you’re different, that you care for me; I feel loved in this place.’”

### The Children

All the children who attend this CDC come from broken families. Their parents are unemployed; many are addicted to alcohol or drugs. Several of the families live in a complex of abandoned factories. The children suffer from poverty, neglect, and abuse. Some parents simply don’t care what happens to their kids. These families, several of whom are Roma or locally labeled as “gypsies,” are marginalized by society—the type of people that everyone avoids.

The CDC has become a haven of peace. Due to the home situations, most of the children would have no chance to succeed in school—or even bother to go. The CDC gives them a future as well as a present that’s worth living.

## **School Progress**

For two hours each weekday morning or early afternoon, 19 children receive homework assistance with their school lessons. The teachers explain with much patience and individual attention, especially for children who are slower learners. Since families cannot afford to pay for school materials or textbooks, the CDC provides these when necessary. Hygiene and other topics of everyday life are addressed in a respectful, loving manner.

The children have improved so much in their academic work that their schools have asked Pastor Gesti to allow more of their kids to join the CDC. The number of children has doubled.

The CDC isn't all work; it's also fun. Lessons include games and creative tasks. Trips to parks and picnics are highlights in the summer. Each child's birthday is celebrated with a cake and a song. Some special programs are offered for Christmas and during the holidays. At noon, the children enjoy a healthy lunch, usually soup, vegetables, and fruit. For several children, it's the only real meal of the day.

## **An Investment in Children's Lives**

Probably the most significant difference the CDC has made is showing the children that they are valuable, loved and accepted. The children are also responding to God's love. At lunchtime they listen attentively to the Bible stories and participate eagerly. "One day," Dorli reported, "the teacher asked if one of the children would pray for the food. A five-year-old boy prayed sincerely, and the other children followed his example. Now, before the food is served, each child says a prayer of thanksgiving or intercession."



For this Nazarene church, the CDC is truly a ministry. Church members pay for the utilities and food from their monthly tithes. For this small, not very affluent church in Albania, this is a significant amount. The congregation also invests much time and energy in the children. About ten people help on a regular basis, most of them as volunteers. In the weekly prayer meetings, the attendees pray for the CDC, expressing their excitement. For this congregation, "nothing like this program has ever happened in this church or in our neighborhood."

"It's wonderful to witness," Dorli concludes, "what a major difference the CDC has made in the lives of the children in a short time."

## **Another Example of a CDC's Impact**

Stephanie Phelps works in the Nazarene Compassionate Ministries office at the Global Ministry Center (Lenexa, Kansas, USA) with the Child Sponsorship program. She provided this brief report of a CDC she visited.

One of the CDCs she visited had been operating for about two years prior to the visit. When the children first enrolled, most of them could not read or write, even the older children. The dedicated teachers in the CDC rode their bikes several miles into a government-restricted area to reach the rural school. These teachers provided excellent instruction in the three R's (reading, writing, and arithmetic) along with other extracurricular activities. The boys and girls are now excelling due to the focused support of the CDC staff. "I have never seen children so excited to learn," Stephanie says, "and so focused on the work in front of them."

The children attend school in the morning, return home, then walk back for the CDC program in the

afternoon. Each child walks several miles each day to attend school and the CDC program. “As a result of the CDC and its staff,” Stephanie said, “we are seeing the incredible impact it is having on the children and their futures.”

These stories illustrate well the partnership between Nazarene Educators Worldwide and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries and the impact that Nazarene educators have on the students—whatever the setting and whatever the learners’ ages.

**Resources:**

- To read Gschwandtner’s full article, go to <http://engagemagazine.com/content/important-any-other-kids>.
- For more information about NCM, go to <http://www.ncm.org/>.

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