

# AÇEV-The First Year of the Earthquake

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Since we started our journey in 1993, we at the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) have been working to ensure that every child at an early age is safe, healthy, happy, and learning. We develop and implement evidence-based educational programs nationwide for children, parents, and young women in need. To minimize the effects of risks such as poverty, social inequalities, disasters, and migration, which cause primary unfavorable conditions regarding children's well-being and development, we keep children at risk at the center of our work.

Based on this core approach, we continue to work to keep children safe and support their development and learning in all disasters that profoundly negatively impact children's development and well-being.

For this purpose, in the immediate aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş that affected 11 provinces in Turkey, while we started our humanitarian aid-oriented initiatives in most of the earthquake-affected regions, we also focused on observing the conditions for children in the area and examining the services and opportunities provided for them. By interviewing children, families, public officials, and non-governmental organizations working on different issues in the region and observing the conditions for children on-site, we have conducted detailed studies on how to support the children and parents living in temporary shelters.

On the one hand, we had to act quickly, but on the other hand, we had to decide on a model that would ensure the best use of resources and be the most appropriate and correct regarding needs. In light of our investigations, research, and past experiences, we decided to establish AÇEV Child and Family Centers in the temporary shelters being established in the earthquake region.



In light of the observations above and investigations, we followed the following principles in the design process of these centers:

- Be places where children feel safe,
- Allow and encourage children to act in ways that support their all-round development,
- Provide evidence-based programs and environments that support children's development and learning,
- Provide spaces where children can play, have fun, laugh, feel at peace, and have a general sense of well-being,
- Create opportunities for parents to learn and build solidarity to support their well-being and also their children's well-being and their children's development under these circumstances,
- Be places where children and families' negative memories of the disaster are mitigated with pleasant and positive experiences.



Based on this core approach, within the framework of our cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and with the support of Vodafone Foundation, UBS, EBRD, Siemens Caring Hands Foundation and UNICEF, AÇEV established AÇEV Child and Family Centers in three different locations: Nur 1 Temporary Shelter Center in Nurdağı, Gaziantep; K-1 - Altınşehir Temporary Shelter Center in Adıyaman; and the Temporary Shelter Center in Orhanlı, Hatay.

In the aftermath of such devastation, it was crucial to have places where children could receive psychosocial support and regain their sense of safety and normalcy. As an institution constantly focusing on scientific knowledge, we have started developing and implementing evidence-based programs and activities designed specifically for different age groups and developmental stages in these centers.

Since the completion of the centers' establishment coincided with the beginning of summer, summer schools were organized in all three centers. These summer schools reached **349 children**.

Our activities in the earthquake region were wider than these three Child and Family Centers. We also tried to support children and their parents living in areas where these centers are not accessible. It was essential to meet children on the first April 23rd National Sovereignty and Children's Day after the earthquake and to make this holiday an experience that would make them forget the bad days they had left behind. For this purpose, we visited the tent cities in Adıyaman one by one with the AÇEV Mobile Vehicle and organized small-scale festivals and games with the children there. We distributed My Happy Bag sets in all the container areas we visited, which comprised materials contributing to children's learning and development. Within these bags were hygiene sets, stationery, toys, books prepared by our specialists, and post-disaster informative suggestions for parents and instructions on how to use the materials. During the April 23rd National Sovereignty and Children's Day week, **1050 My Happy Bags** were distributed in one-on-one activities with the children. In the following months, **4,350 additional My Happy Bags were delivered to children in need in different regions.**

As the summer ends and life in container cities becomes more organized, AÇEV Child and Family Centers started preparing for the fall semester.

Emphasizing from the very beginning the critical importance of permanent, periodic, age-specific, evidence-based programs with proven effectiveness, AÇEV had to resolve one more crucial issue before they could start implementing their programs in these centers they established in the disaster region: Finding and training the right specialists to implement the programs developed and adapted for the centers by the targeted outcomes. Considering this need, great care was taken to ensure that all specialists working in each center had the necessary qualifications but were also from the province where the center would be opened. Depending on the size of the center, around 15 preschool and child development specialists were identified for each center, and they were included in the AÇEV team. Following this, trainers' training for implementing programs in the centers began. The training of 37 new specialists to work in the three AÇEV Family and Child Centers was completed quickly. The development process of these employees, who are currently supported by supervision, continues with periodic reinforcement training.

Programs for three main target groups were implemented at AÇEV Child and Family Centers we established in the earthquake region.

First, at the Child and Family Centers, we implement the **Preschool Education Program (PEP)** developed by AÇEV specialists for children aged 4-6. This program aims to support all areas of children's development, especially language, social, emotional, and cognitive development, so they are ready to start primary school. The development of these programs was based on scientific principles such as age-appropriateness and inclusion of all aspects of the child's development. In general terms, the program consisted of a half-day schedule that included Big Group Time, Cleaning-Breakfast Time, Outdoors Time, Music Time, Reading Preparation Time, Planning-Game-Remembering Time, and Reading Time. Three hundred forty-nine **children** (134 in Adiyaman, 133 in Gaziantep, and 82 in Hatay) participated in the summer semester PEP in the three centers. **Three hundred eight children** (113 in Adiyaman, 107 in Gaziantep, 88 in Hatay) continue their education in the PEP that started in the fall semester.





In addition to these programs, thanks to the **Book and Toy Libraries** established in container cities, children between the ages of 3 and 14 were offered age-appropriate activities and games, and reading times were organized. The aim was for children to spend quality time playing games with their peers and to acquire a reading habit. Seven hundred thirty-seven **children**, 425 from Adiyaman, 204 from Gaziantep, and 108 from Hatay, were enrolled in the programs implemented here. These Book and Toy Libraries, located within AÇEV Child and Family Centers, also serve as study centers where children can study and prepare for exams and places where they can do research outside of school.

**AÇEV Mobile Vehicle** also continues to reach children who do not have access to Child and Family Centers. While various services and support for children can be provided at the institutional level in temporary shelters, providing these services in more dispersed settlements is naturally more complex. For this reason, a mobile learning unit was created to reach children who live in smaller-scale temporary shelters or in the same neighborhood they lived in before the earthquake, and this unit is still operational. The mobile vehicle team, which has been operating in Nurdağı, Gaziantep, since the end of summer, visits a village every weekday and provides the village's children with art and play-based activities developed by AÇEV specialists. The same service and model will soon be implemented in the Hatay region. Thanks to this vehicle, **209 children** and **66 women** have been reached so far.

Because parents have the most critical impact on children's well-being and development, according to us, AÇEV, supporting parents in disaster conditions is a significant responsibility, too. To this end, we continue to run the **Parent Support Program** (EDU) adapted for post-disaster parenting skills in earthquake-affected areas. To date, **565 mothers** (239 in Adiyaman, 193 in Gaziantep, 133 in Hatay) and **63 fathers** (50 in Adiyaman, 13 in Hatay) have graduated from these programs.

Mother Child Education Foundation also supported young women in the earthquake region. In this context, AÇEV shortened the **Empowerment Program for Young Women** (HDB), which it was already implementing, and adapted it to the earthquake region to improve the life skills of women between the ages of 18 and 40 affected by the earthquake and living in container cities, support their wellbeing, and empower them. A total of **280 women** (97 from Adiyaman, 63 from Hatay, and 120 from Gaziantep) and **29 girls** between the ages of 14 and 18 participated in this program, which continued for five weeks in 1.5-hour sessions with groups of 15 women.

In addition, in collaboration with the **Trauma and Disaster Mental Health Studies Association** (TARDE), mental health and psychosocial support services such as psychological assistance, interviews with the family and the child, psychoeducational sessions, awareness, and learning meetings were provided to individuals and groups by mental health specialists at the Child and Family Centers. **Forty-five thousand people** in Adiyaman, Hatay, and Gaziantep provinces have benefited from these services. Again, vocational empowerment programs were also carried out for mental health specialists working in the Provincial Directorates of the Ministry of Family and Social Services in collaboration with TARDE.

As an organization that has been implementing intervention programs for years and trying to draw attention to the importance of such programs, AÇEV knows very well what can be irretrievably lost regarding children's development and well-being, especially in disaster conditions where children are at particular risk. Therefore, to minimize and prevent such loss, AÇEV established Child and Family Centers in the earthquake region and has put its mobile vehicles into operation. All these initiatives conducted in the earthquake region had significant positive and meaningful impacts on the direct beneficiaries. In addition, AÇEV Child and Family Centers have substantially affected by creating a model and standard regarding the services to be provided to all children in the disaster area.









Although the development of the individual continues throughout life, there are critical and fast-moving periods in this development process. At this crucial period, defined as early childhood, which has always been the focus of the Mother Child Education Foundation, it is known that adverse experiences, apathy, and lack of expertise and stimuli regarding developmental areas lead to many developmental deficits. Many missed developmental opportunities due to harmful and inadequate experiences in the early years of life are very difficult to make up for in later years, and the effects of negative experiences can also last for many years. Acting with this awareness and responsibility, AÇEV will continue to be on the ground with all its knowledge, experience, and strength to reduce the hard-to-recover losses and protect children from all kinds of negative experiences by creating safe spaces for them during this period, which is the most critical period for children in terms of development and when development is the fastest.





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