



AÇEV CENTERS

As a science-based research, implementation, and advocacy agency with global reach and long-standing experience in ECD, ACEV is uniquely positioned to transfer scientific evidence into innovative programs and partner with key organizations to deliver results for women, young children, and their families. In the 30 years since its inception, AÇEV has developed and implemented programs and conducted advocacy in early childhood, parenting, and women's empowerment.



CONTEXT

SCALE AND URGENCY OF THE PROBLEM

The earthquake on February 6, 2023, directly affected approximately 15 million people and was recorded as the biggest disaster in Turkey's recent history. Recent appeals issued by UNICEF report that at least 9.1 million people in Türkiye are left in need, including 2.5 million children. We face the challenge of both immediate and long-term assistance to children and families affected by the earthquake. The emergency requires extraordinary action to ensure the affected population's care and development.

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AÇEV'S PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

AÇEV has thus far built tremendous experience responding to communities' needs after natural disasters. We would like to outline the scope of this experience as it guides current strategies and efforts. In 1999 and 2011, when Turkey was struck by the devastating Marmara and Van earthquakes killing over 25,000 people, ACEV was one of the first organizations on-site to assist in relief efforts. Our extensive experience in post-disaster efforts starts with the İzmit Rehabilitation Center (IREM), an outpatient clinic for physical and psychological rehabilitation after the 1999 Marmara earthquake. It also immediately saw the need for projects to cater to longer-term needs and assembled a group of partners to establish the İzmit Rehabilitation and the Pediatric Center. These centers enabled children to continue their preschool education and for their parents to be supported psychologically and physically for them to develop the resilience to continue to provide their children with a nurturing family environment. ACEV was the lead organization coordinating this multi-partner project including the İzmit Municipality, Kocaeli University, and Project Hope. IREM was later handed over to Kocaeli University and not only continues to serve patients in the region but is a training center for physical, occupational, and speech therapists.

Furthermore, following the Van Earthquake in 2011, in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, and Psychological Trauma and Crisis Intervention, Education and Research Association (PAYE) ACEV established a Family Counseling Center. The center provided psychological rehabilitation and psychosocial support services for earthquake survivors, primarily for women and children, and capacity building for post-trauma psychological support and intervention in Turkey. The Center's operation was turned over to the Van 100th Year University at the end of 2013, while Özyeğin University and AÇEV continue to provide support.



Following the mining disaster in Soma in 2014, ACEV galvanized an initiative in partnership with the local municipality to form a community center serving preschool-aged children and their mothers living in the underserved, remote, and death-stricken villages of the Soma region. This family and child education center was established in Soma, the place of the 2014 mining disaster killing 301 miners. In partnership with the municipality and Ministry of Family and Social Affairs, ACEV founded a center to provide a community space for young children and families who were closely affected by the reality of being a member of the mining community. The Center provided early childhood and parent education programs.

Most recently, after the 2020 Elazığ earthquake, AÇEV promptly made a collaboration with the provincial directorate of the Ministry of Family and Social Services towards jointly implementing psychosocial services. Under this collaboration, the social workers and psychologists employed by the ministry were trained by experts from Bilgi University's Trauma and Disaster Mental Health Studies Program and the Association for Trauma and Disaster Mental Health Applications. Continued supervision and capacity building were also provided to these professionals for sustainable implementation of psychosocial support. AÇEV has also utilized a mobile multi-purpose vehicle (truck) to bring psychosocial services to the five container cities that were built in the region after the earthquake. These efforts have contributed to both local capacity building in trauma-informed social service applications and made psychosocial services sustainably more accessible.

Building on the experience in disaster relief and rehabilitation through the many earthquakes (İzmit 1999, Van 2011, Elazığ 2020) and disasters (Soma Explosion 2014, Wildfires 2021) Turkey has suffered, AÇEV is now mobilizing relief efforts through a multi-year recovery and development strategy, beginning with urgent humanitarian provision, shifting to systematic basic services and then longer-term rehabilitation and recovery.

The Rationale for a Community Center to Support Vulnerable Groups AÇEV will set up and operate Child and Family Support Centers within the container cities to be able to host and implement programs that will support the resiliency of vulnerable groups. Based on evidence and AÇEV's own experience, these centers are deemed necessary to provide holistic support that is multi-faceted (educational programs and one-on-one psychosocial support) and serve multiple groups (young children, parents, and young women). Below we explain the necessity for a physical space to host support services and the kind of support services AÇEV will provide.



INVESTING IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

In crises like this earthquake, children are the most vulnerable and have urgent health and developmental needs that go unmet. In addition to being exposed to violence, many children are experiencing loss or separation from their caregivers as well as the loss of their support systems, including health, welfare, and educational services. Children are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of disasters and crises in the early years of life when the brain undergoes its most rapid period of development. In this critical period, children with prolonged exposure to extreme stress and deprivation without adequate support can build “toxic stress,” which can have long-term implications for their physical cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial development. All these impacts are disproportionately felt among children from marginalized groups—refugees, young girls, and women, children with disabilities, low-income families, and children and youth living without parents or in rural areas already without adequate services. This is a major threat to children’s lives and to their long-term health and development, the impacts of which will be felt for generations by families and their communities and countries[1]. Field observations after the disaster report threats to child safety and security, such as sharp building construction materials laying on easily accessible public spaces, risk of fire in the tents, and vehicles driving by tents dedicated to children[2]. The proposed project prioritizes this age group and seeks to provide the basic needs of a safe and supportive environment, ensuring children receive nutrition, early stimulation, learning opportunities, care, and protection.



WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN?

The arguments in favor of promoting the development of children and mitigating the risks exacerbated in emergencies are clear. ACEV is uniquely positioned to address the needs of children through the “Nurturing Care” framework. The comprehensive model includes children having access to essential quality nutrition, protection, and early learning services key to reaching their potential,[3] while their parents and caregivers are supported in nurturing care practices via parenting programs.

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Children receive essential services to address the immediate and long-term threats to learning, health, and well-being – impaired ability to recover from physical and psychological harm due to prolonged exposure to stress, violence, neglect, trauma, deprivation, and instability: To address these threats, caregiver support is critical to ensure a stable, nurturing relationship with the parent or other caregivers and family. To provide healthy and responsive caregiver support, programs to empower parents through resiliency, as well as caregiving skills, are key. In addition, cognitive stimulation, learning through play, and opportunities to express and process emotions are necessary for children to build the cognitive and emotional resiliency that will prevent the long-term destructive effects of the toxic stress they are experiencing post-trauma.

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Caregivers practice nurturing care and receive psycho-social support for their well-being: Mental health, psychosocial and emotional support for caregivers is needed to enable them to responsively care for their child, teach them through play, and support the development of neural networks is essential to learning and development. Parenting programs not only teach parents the necessary skills but also provide social network building during the rebuilding phase post-trauma.



INVESTING IN YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women and young girls are at increased health and security risks after disasters, and this earthquake has been no exception. UNFPA has reported that the destruction of medical supplies has left healthcare providers ill-equipped to manage life-threatening conditions, especially emergency obstetric and newborn care. Additionally, based on estimations 300.000 people may require medication for sexually transmitted infections, and in such emergencies, there will be a need for sexual and reproductive health services to manage cases of gender-based violence, including clinical management of rape and access to emergency contraceptives. Women and girls are also at heightened risk of violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation, and reporting mechanisms are severely disrupted. Awareness-raising sessions, education about rights and entitlements, and gender equality initiatives are necessary to support women in coping with increased caregiving responsibilities and limited access to basic needs. Access to basic necessities and dignity supplies is a significant concern in the earthquake-affected provinces. Private and safe toilet facilities and menstrual hygiene products are crucial, particularly for women, for maintaining health and dignity. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the number of people who cannot afford to buy these products increased, further exacerbating the already severe problem of access to basic menstrual necessities. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is another critical concern during emergencies. The risk of SEA increases substantially, necessitating the establishment of clear structures and procedures to ensure compliance with a zero-tolerance policy. It is vital to inform affected communities about the risks of SEA and provide them with reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and prevent impunity. This approach requires a comprehensive awareness-raising program, including training for all response personnel, volunteers, and partners. A transparent and safe reporting system that ensures confidentiality and protection for survivors and whistleblowers must be put in place, as well as an effective system to monitor and respond to allegations[4]. These post-trauma risk factors necessitate a mainstreaming to address the unique needs of women and girls. Especially for young women who are neither at work nor in education (NEET), empowerment is key through an awareness of how they can build agency and resilience around taking steps to claim their rights for access to services. The services that are currently being planned or provided by multiple government agencies, as well as civil society, should be centered around feedback and needs voiced by the women themselves. Therefore, interventions to enable women to identify and voice their needs are urgently needed. Such programs will not only empower women to build their lives for the better post-trauma but also inform policymakers and service providers as to the critical elements to make sure girls' women's unique needs are taken into consideration.



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY & TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

ACEV will set up and operate three “safe spaces” namely Child and Family Support Centers providing integrated programming for young women, children, and families. The three centers will be set up in prefabricated container cities located in Gaziantep (in Nurdağı district), Hatay (Defne district), and Adiyaman. Each center ranging between 600 to 700 M2 includes (1) four classrooms for young children; (2) one multi-purpose room for weekly workshops and activities with parents and caregivers; (3) one room allocated for young women’s empowerment; and (4) one room dedicated to one-on-one psychosocial support sessions.



DISTRIBUTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT KITS

“Oyun Kutum” (My Play Box) is a light emergency response for young children who have lost all their play and educational materials. The play boxes provide young children with age-appropriate toys and stimulating activities that can help them feel secure in their new prefabricated homes, help them to interact with caregivers, and support the beginning of stimulating early learning activities. We know during emergencies caregivers also experience extreme levels of stress and depression that may inhibit their ability to provide their young children with the positive and emotionally nurturing environment they desperately need during times of instability and uncertainty. Even basic activities allowing children to express feelings, and establish social relationships are critical for young children and can help restore a sense of normalcy and stability. The design of these play boxes aims to help caregivers to meet the needs of young children during such emergencies and re-focus their attention on the children and their development. These kits are just the first step in aiming to build a bridge from emergency to normalcy.

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Accelerated School Readiness Program and Children’s Play Groups:

As stated above, young children are at an increased risk of toxic stress, which can severely and permanently dampen their optimal development and resiliency. To address this and associated risks, AÇEV will implement programs targeted at two different age groups: (1) Three-to-four-year-old children will benefit from ACEV’s daily semi-structured, child-centered, play-based curriculum. Facilitators with Early Childhood Education backgrounds will be trained by AÇEV’s early childhood education (ECE) experts to provide the play-based curriculum. (2) Five-to-six-year-old children will benefit from AÇEV’s flagship Accelerated School Readiness Program. AÇEV has been implementing this model under the title “Summer Preschool Program,” since 2003 in Southeastern Turkey in low-resource settings and more recently in the past decade with Unicef with Syrian refugees and host communities. The program features a center-based 10-week accelerated preschool program totaling 250 hours, where closing the school readiness gap is a primary objective. The school readiness model encompasses gender-responsive, early learning, stimulation integrated across the daily routine. The program bridges children to begin primary school by supporting their physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.

These programs will be scheduled to serve the highest number of children possible. To this end, there will be a morning and an afternoon group. There may be up to 3 groups daily to provide enough space for the maximum number of children. A rapid analysis conducted in the container cities in April-May, once the residents occupy the prefabricated containers will determine the exact number of children reached. Initially, ACEV anticipates reaching 960 children.



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Parent Support Programs and Post-Trauma Support Groups for Responsive Caregiving:

The central aim of ACEV's parenting programs is to ensure every child is supported and learning through positive and responsive caregiving practices by helping to create a safe and secure play and learning environment. Parents are fundamental to children's development and the most effective pathway to enhancing child wellbeing. The Mother Support Program and Father Support Program target the most socio-economically disadvantaged parents and provide them with training to better care for, and support, their children's learning and development. Primary caregivers are ACEV's most powerful partners in galvanizing change for children.

These evidence-based programs have proven effective through more than two decades of implementation in Turkey. Studies show mothers that who have participated in the Mother Support Program exhibit positive child-rearing attitudes and behaviors, spend more quality time with their children, and show greater involvement in children's education. Similarly, the Father Support Program has been shown to effectively promote gender-responsive parenting, increase fathers' positive involvement in their children's development, and reduce domestic violence.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, parents need extra support, where their psychosocial needs are addressed and they are equipped with skills that will enable them to continue caregiving in an even more deprived environment with their children also demonstrating post-trauma stress. As mothers face unique risks as women, fathers can remain invisible and overseen in such post-disaster contexts with the assumption that they do not need as much support as women. Nevertheless, men are equally in need of psychosocial support, and as AÇEV has advocated since its inception, they have equal responsibility in child rearing and therefore should be supported alongside mothers in post-disaster contexts to be able to support their children's development as well as coping skills of the whole family.

In addition to its flagship parenting programs, AÇEV will implement a shorter intervention in the form of support groups, whereby six weekly sessions of 90-minute group conversations will take place with the facilitation of AÇEV-trained implementers. This program will serve a more urgent need for social bonding and networking, where parents cannot commit to longer programs given the post-disaster circumstances. This program will be structured more loosely in the form of chat groups, yet will aim to support parents in their parenting role, as well as meet their psychosocial needs. Program sessions will cover the following: the concept of well-being and how to support our well-being, practical information on child development and communicating with children, family resiliency and well-being and practical information on how to support it, and access to social support networks and resources. While some of the content for this semi-structured program will be informed by AÇEV's existing expertise on parent support programs, content development, and adaptation support will be received from outside experts, as well.



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POWER Program for Young Women:

As stated within the rationale for these spaces, women are one of the more vulnerable groups with unique post-trauma needs. Currently, and generally after such disasters, the focus for this group becomes vocational skills, whereby efforts in the field are mostly towards vocational training. Our focus will be on girls aged 14 to 17, who are neither in education nor in employment (NEET), aiming to empower girls to express their needs and to raise awareness of their rights as well as ways to receive support from institutions in an effort to protect these vulnerable groups against gender-based violence and reduce the risk of child, forced, and early marriages (CFEM). The POWER program, consisting of 6 to 8 sessions of 90 minutes each, will be developed for girls between the ages of 14-17. Additionally, For NEET young women aged 18-40, the POWER Program will again be designed and implemented as 6 or 8 sessions of 1.5 hours each. It was aimed to cover the issues of violence prevention, security, health, and well-being and demanding rights to access services. Suggestions and feedback will be received from HDB trainers from the region while the contents are being prepared. Trainers based in the affected provinces will be selected and trained by AÇEV. These trainers will be selected among young women over 21, who have a minimum of a high school degree. POWER trainers according to the region where the program will be suitable; It will be provided by recruiting (full-time or part-time) old and experienced HDB trainers or by assigning experienced municipal employees who have implemented the POWER program to the region. The program covers issues that are central to the lives of adolescent girls, which involve continuing education, women's health and basic hygiene, prevention of violence (dating violence, gender-based violence), fundamental rights, protecting psychological and physical well-being, and getting support from institutions. Through the participation of young women in the program, we expect increased representation of the needs of these women, where service provision will be based increasingly on the actual needs of this vulnerable population.

3.1 Distribution of Girls and Women Hygiene (Dignity) Kits, which cover essential supplies for the basic hygiene needs of adolescent girls and young women: disposable and reusable menstrual pads, washing powder, soap, underwear, a flashlight, a comb, a toothbrush, and toothpaste, slippers, and toilet paper. The goal is to prepare the materials in the kit in a way that will meet the personal needs (waxing, bra, etc. additions) of women by obtaining up-to-date information directly from the region.

3.2 Psychosocial Support (one-on-one sessions): Based on AÇEV's previous post-trauma psychosocial support experience, we will be collaborating with experts in the field, whereby teams trained by post-trauma psychosocial support experts will deliver one-on-one sessions with adults. AÇEV has ongoing collaborations with Bilgi University's Trauma and Disaster Mental Health Studies Program. Academicians from the program will train field experts who are locally based.



CAPACITY BUILDING: TRAINING OF TRAINERS AND ON-SITE SUPERVISION

AÇEV will utilize its model in training field implementers, whereby volunteers selected from the local community will be trained by AÇEV experts. The training of trainers (ToT) covers the theoretical background of the programs and provides hands-on, practical applications for 10 days. AÇEV has an existing volunteer base in the region who are currently available to implement these programs. New volunteers will also be recruited through an open announcement and selection process. During the program, facilitators will receive supervision support, where they can report issues about implementation and receive guidance on how to resolve these issues. AÇEV prioritizes recruiting volunteers from the region so as to contribute to local, sustainable capacity building in post-trauma psychosocial interventions.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The project will recruit human resources from the local community, which includes management of the safe spaces and coordination of program implementation, as well as cleaning and maintenance. There will also be assistant teachers and an early childhood development (ECD) specialist on board. There will be several occasions for capacity development:

- Training of trainers (ToT): AÇEV's master trainers for the POWER Program will train local young women in implementing this women empowerment program. The ToT will first and foremost serve to raise awareness in these women on critical issues concerning their safety, resiliency, and empowerment and raise their capacity as program implementers. A 3-day renewal training will be provided to the trainers (trainers from various NGOs in partnership and Municipality employees) who have previously implemented the POWER program in the region. The focus will be on how to apply the contents suitable for the earthquake zone.
- Field staff well-being: AÇEV will take special measures to prioritize the well-being of those recruited for the implementation of this project, since working with recent trauma survivors in a setting far



from normal life routines and amenities will pose them an increased risk of burnout or secondary trauma. These measures include HR-related measures, such as ample leave time, as well as capacity and resiliency building, such as awareness raising on working with trauma survivors and secondary trauma.

- Key to our success has been the structured framework of our program models based on decades of evidence-based research. The program manuals, educational materials, delivery method, and training of trainers are all documented and standardized to enable expansion and replication. The content of school readiness, parenting, and women's empowerment program models are adapted to local needs, making it replicable.

- The models have a quality assurance framework encompassing Training of Trainers to field supervision to beneficiary impact, rendering this a best practice model in early childhood, parent training, and women's empowerment. We incorporate a seamless system of rigorous monitoring and supervision. Our quality assurance framework is a seamless cycle that begins with the training of trainers, following them through field supervision and a structured system of monitoring and supervision that prioritizes participants' feedback and the trainers' continuous development as dedicated advocates and proactive implementers of the AÇEV model. Program facilitators and beneficiaries benefit from continuous improvement in delivery methods and curriculum development.

OTHER PARTNERS INVOLVED

- Bilgi Üniversitesi Travma ve Afet Çalışmaları Uygulamaları Ruh Sağlığı Programı
- Travma ve Afet Ruh Sağlığı Çalışmaları Derneği (TARSÇD)
- Local municipalities and NGOs (POWER program trainers) in Gaziantep

[1] The ECPC Calls for Urgent Action & Support to Protect Children and Families Affected by the Recent Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. Early Childhood Peace Consortium. February 2023.

[2] Acil Durum Raporu. Hayata Destek. 07.03.2023.

[3] Early Childhood Development and Early Learning for Children in Crisis and Conflict. UNESCO, 2018.

[4] Türkiye Earthquake Situation Report #5. UNFPA. 2-8 March, published on 10 March 2023.



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