



IACT: LITTLE RIPPLES

iACT is a Los Angeles-based international organization that provides humanitarian action to aid, empower, and extend hope to those affected by mass atrocities. All of iACT's work is grounded in community collaboration, trauma-informed approaches, restorative practices, and peacebuilding skill-development.

iACT provides a cost-effective and replicable early childhood development program called Little Ripples. The program empowers refugee communities affected by humanitarian crises to implement child-centered, quality education that supports the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children aged three to five years old. Program activities can be adapted to take place in schools, child-friendly spaces, community centers, and home compounds (referred to as "Ponds"). Ideally, each learning space employs two teachers from the community to care for and instruct up to 45 children. Currently, the majority of teachers are women over 18 years old.

Most communities served by Little Ripples are in protracted crises and from communities that are often "forgotten" like Darfur, Burundi, and the Central African Republic. In Darfur, the refugee population indicated the need for support for young children. iACT worked with experts and practitioners in the areas of child development, early learning, trauma recovery, and mindfulness to develop the Little Ripples program. It has reached to date 12,892 children.

Little Ripples' story begins with iACT's work in eastern Chad to support Darfuri refugees, documenting life in the refugee camps to help spur global action. The team asked the Darfuri refugee population what services they needed and wanted most – the answer was support for young children. Unfortunately, at that time, there was a lack of organizations offering early childhood education.

The model used in Little Ripple empowers communities to make decisions on the program implementation through capacity building. Little Ripples does not impose activities on the teachers. It provides communities with a framework adaptable across cultures and contexts, with three pillars that guide the daily activities and atmosphere: peace, helping, and sharing. Based on these three pillars, the facilitator of the program leads the discussions among the community, and from this discussion, the program content is created. The daily activities instead are discussed during teacher training: the selection of community songs, play-based activities, readings, creation of their own stories.

SOLUTION

Criteria	Category	Details
Technological Readiness	No technology	No technology is needed. Children attend to a physical establishment where they learn from two trained educators
Content availability	No	The Little Ripples curriculum was uniquely developed in collaboration with experts in several areas. The curriculum focuses on teaching literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning and can be used alongside any pre-primary academic curriculum.
Personalization	Yes	The curriculum contains a framework designed by experts in early childhood education. However, teachers adapt the activities as they prefer. Each community decides most of the aspects concerning the program: the place where the pond will be, hours per day that the classes will take place. The program always contains the same core pillars: peace, helping, and sharing.
Interactivity	Yes	The curriculum is grounded in play-based education, trauma-recovery approaches, restorative practices, and incorporates social-emotional learning, empathy development,

		positive behavior management, peacebuilding, and mindfulness.
Mode	Synchronous	Little Ripples activities are delivered in Ponds – classrooms.
Feasibility to replicate		
Time	Medium	The replicability varies for each case. It depends on the interest of the community, the availability of home space to build the pond but also the time of the year. For example, in eastern Chad, all activities are paused during the rainy season since most refugees are working on the fields. Once these elements are in place, the remaining steps are the construction of the pond and the teachers’ training.
Effort	Medium	
Money	Varies	

FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

iACT identifies refugee communities with local NGOs where they take the lead conversations with the local government and represent Little Ripples in local meetings held in the camp by NGOs or the community itself. They are camp-wide meetings, zone meetings, and education meetings. The teachers’ participation is around early childhood development and preschools.

Once the community has been involved, and the leaders have approved the program, iACT organizes a training schedule to identify and hire the teachers. The training process includes inviting 25-30 people interested in this role to take part in the training, during the training 7 candidates are identified, 6 of them will be hired as teachers while one will be hired as an education director. During the identification teacher training, the 7 selected decide the curriculum; as a team and select their Education Director.

At the same time, iACT looks out for families interested in hosting Little Ripples “Pond.” iACT visits the home to evaluate them and makes sure the facilities meet safety standards. Usually, the program in the host family is hired as a cook. The cook’s responsibilities include creating a safe space physically, cooking, and serving daily meals. The locations of the pond within the larger camp are decided at a community level where it is more needed, especially in-home centers, to make it as accessible as possible. Once the Pond is open, the kids start attending classes. At the

beginning of the program, a teacher’s rotation is encouraged, which means that one teacher will stay and the other will rotate to another pond for one week during the first three months. This system helps teachers learn new learning methods from other teachers. The cooks have also started the rotation system to learn more recipes.

Criteria	Category	Details
Preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate learning	High	Teachers are trained in a three-part training, within six months of each other, the third training can be within 8 months. This gives the teachers time to practice and design their own solutions. During teacher training, they go through different modules, where they can adapt the activities based on each learner’s culture (e.g., music, games)
Availability and ability of parents or caregivers to facilitate effective home-based distance learning	Yes	Teachers are encouraged to have weekly community meetings where teachers show parents what they do during the day, practice mindfulness activities with them, and engage in conversations around how they can play with their kids.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

When the pandemic started, iACT surveyed the community leaders in Chad, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Greece about the information they were receiving concerning the virus. iACT found that the refugee communities did not know how to handle the situation. As a result, iACT created a package of information to raise awareness that was shared via WhatsApp. These one-pagers contained useful information on preventing the spread of COVID-19 and home activities with the children.

Communities’ leaders identified that one of their biggest needs was the lack of soap. Hence, iACT started a fund-raising campaign and distributed the cash among the community leaders to buy what was needed. In Tanzania, for example, the community decided to buy a bicycle, and instead of reaching 100 families in a day, they could reach 600. In Greece, they bought masks for about 2500 refugees

The program is run in refugee camps where the internet connection is usually unavailable. It is run by the community and requires physical contact. Temporarily, during the COVID-19 crisis, the organization still managed to ensure education continuity via WhatsApp and volunteer visits.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Local Partner trust

It is hard for the local partner to understand the model and the existing techniques of iACT. As described, all decisions concerning the number of days that the classes will take place, home location, potential teachers, etc., are decisions that must be made by the communities and thus requires a deep understanding of the model.

Fundraising

Funding for refugee-led efforts can be very challenging as it means finding ongoing financial support for community ideas, which takes flexibility and trust. Also, understanding the process of implementation is as important as the outcome. The process is what fosters long-term resilience in community leaders and the community itself. Since every program is different, and some tasks such as finding the right place may take some time, iACT seeks dynamic funders who provide multi-year funding to ensure positive impact. Communities want more programs to reach more children.

Translation

Translation is another challenge in that turnaround times are slow for both common and rare languages of iACT beneficiaries. In a situation where time is urgent, speeding up translations and having resources more readily available becomes very important.

TAKEAWAY CHALLENGES

Takeaway Lessons

Young children's education has been identified as one of the key needs of the different communities of refugees that iACT has interviewed. Unfortunately, due to lack of resources and sometimes even lack of prioritization from the host countries, refugees are left alone with no support in terms of early

childhood education. iACT has shown that although it is not an easy task to ensure early childhood education in these communities due to the lack of continuous, flexible, long-lasting funders, it is not an impossible task either.

iACT has challenged the traditional education system by harnessing the strength of the community to create a system where children continue to learn. Most of these communities have been glad to participate in the Little Ripples program and are willing to dedicate time to learn and to spend with the children. This approach has proved that by giving the communities some guidance and leaving them the opportunity to make choices: each community is empowered and willing to run the childhood education program on their own. The emphasis on building strong community ownership results in the development of a model that is applicable in the absence of schools to ensure education continues.

Unfortunately, during the pandemic, most refugees were unaware of the information available on the virus. This was a consequence of their isolation but also of linguistic barriers as refugees speak – in most cases – a different language from their hosting country. iACT has shown that by working together with the community, even under such circumstances, people are willing to cooperate and do all that is necessary to ensure that learning continues regardless of any disruption.