

Less Fearful, More Active

*The Psychosocial School Project
for Children Affected by
the 1999 Earthquakes in Turkey*



*A Project of the
Ministry of National Education and UNICEF
1999 – 2002*

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*Tunalı Hilmi Caddesi, 88/114
06700 Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey*

*Title page:
students at Halidere Primary School, Kocaeli,
exhibit a group drawing of their ideal village*

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UNICEF

*Seninle gülmeyi
Seninle eğlenmeyi
Seninle sevmeyi
Öğrendim ben UNICEF*

*Seninle arkadaşlığı
Seninle dostluğu
Seninle sevgiyi
Seninle tattım ben UNICEF*

*Hareket dansımla sevmeyi
Resimlerle benliğimi
Oyunlarıyla eğlenmeyi
Anladım ben UNICEF*

S.E.,
8A Donanma
İlk Okulu,
Kocaeli

UNICEF

*You taught me to smile
You taught me fun
You taught me to love
I learned from you, UNICEF*

*You taught me friendship
You taught me intimacy
You taught me affection
I learned through you, UNICEF*

*Loving through dance
Self-discovery through drawing
The joy of play
I understand through UNICEF*

S.E.,
8A Donanma
Primary School,
Kocaeli

*This page: a
ruined house
in Derince*

Foreword

Between August and November, 1999, the industrial northwestern Marmara region of Turkey was devastated by two massive earthquakes. Eighteen thousand died, many thousands more were injured and over six hundred thousand were made homeless as a direct result of the two catastrophes. The cost of the damage to the infrastructure has been estimated at \$1.5billion.

But the true cost of the disasters will never be fully accounted for in any currency: over a quarter of a million children and their families continue to cope, daily, with the traumatic after effects of bereavement, physical injury, near-death experiences, homelessness, dispossession and memories of the profoundly disturbing sights and sounds they witnessed during the earthquakes.

As part of it's response to the needs of these children, their families and teachers, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) initiated the *Psychosocial School Project* in collaboration with UNICEF and with technical and professional support from the Centre for Crisis Psychology in Bergen, Norway. The aims of the project were to reintroduce a sense of normality in the children's lives as quickly as possible, to alleviate stress responses and to prevent any further increase in the incidence of such responses. This was to be achieved primarily within the classroom setting, through the medium of the teachers. Consequently the first step involved the process of *debriefing* those teachers, most of whom were survivors themselves.

As such, the *Psychosocial School Project* was broad in scope because of the vast number of people it sought to reach, and Turkey has never before witnessed such a wide-ranging collaboration between communities, the helping professions, academics and the government at local, national and international levels. In order to implement the *Psychosocial School Project* many technical and organisational problems were overcome as well as those inevitable questions of a more intricately emotional nature. Nevertheless, the project proved to be successful in its objectives with many expected and, happily, unexpected results. It is hoped that the lessons learned from this unprecedentedly ambitious intervention will serve not only Turkey but that they will prove to be of benefit in global terms following any catastrophe, either natural or man-made, which may occur in the future.

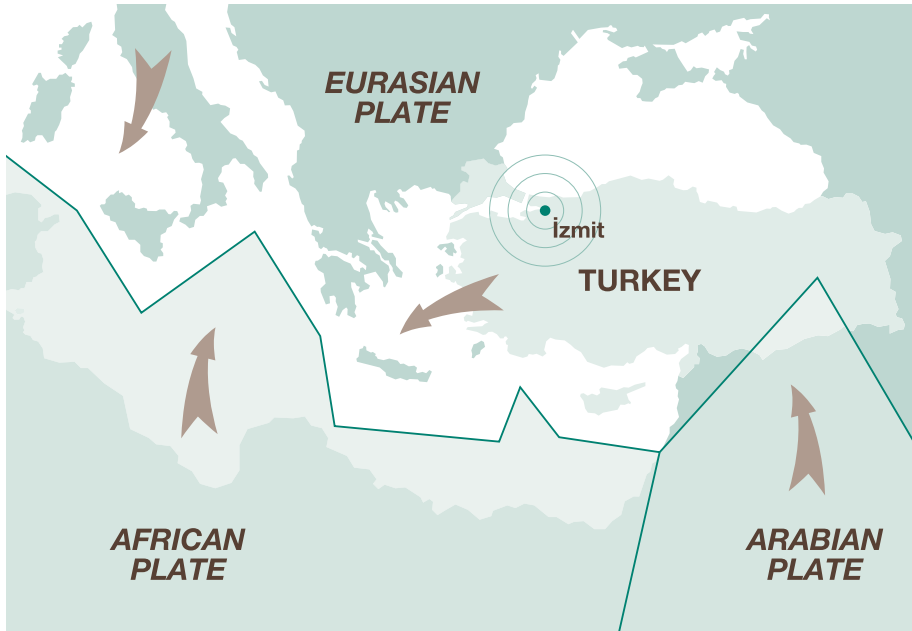
This is an account of that response.

*Below:
Classroom
Based
Intervention
at Mustafa
Kemal
Primary
School,
Düzce*





*This page: a
child in the
prefabricated
city at
Uzunçiftlik,
İzmit*



Left: how movement of continental plates affects the Turkish microplate

Disaster Strikes

In less than half a century, Turkey has had over twenty earthquakes registering more than seven points on the Richter Scale (RS). The estimated total of deaths has been over one hundred thousand, most of them in rural areas. The country's propensity for these natural disasters is due to the opposing movement of the Arabian/African and Eurasian plates, squeezing the Turkish micro-plate westward towards Greece. Fifty-six provinces and forty-five and a half million Turkish people are in the first and second high-risk areas for such disasters.

The Marmara Earthquakes

At three o'clock in the morning of August 17th, 1999, a tremor of between 7.4 and 7.8 RS spread over an area of thirty thousand square kilometres to strike eight provinces in the industrial northwestern region of the country: the provinces of Yalova, Kocaeli, Sakarya and Bolu bore the brunt of the damage. The districts of Adapazarı and Gölçük, the epicentre, and the cities of İzmit, Yalova and Düzce lying within the ten thousand square kilometres high impact area were devastated. Another two provinces, Bursa and Eskişehir were affected to a lesser extent. İstanbul also suffered peripheral damage mainly in the district of Avcılar. More than one hundred and forty-five thousand houses and nearly

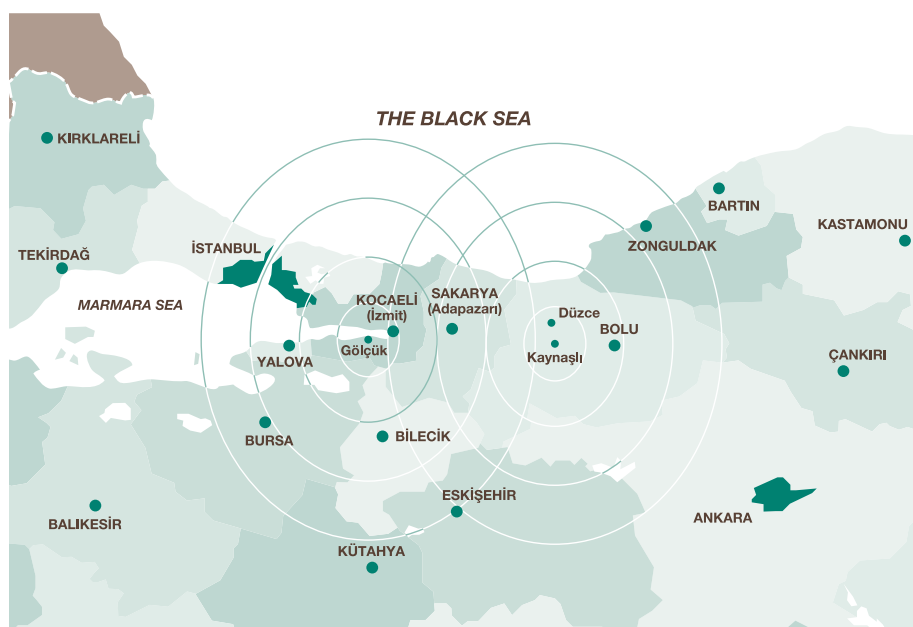
twenty-two thousand service buildings were destroyed. Seventeen thousand one hundred bodies were recovered from the destruction along with forty-four thousand injured. The effects of the destruction were amplified by a rupturing of the infrastructure where roads and railways became unusable, water and sewage was cut and the electricity grid no longer functioned.

On November 12th, a second earthquake struck the Düzce province at six o'clock in the evening, registering 7.2 RS at the epicentre in the town of Kaynaşlı. Losses were much lower at eight hundred and forty-five dead and just under five thousand injured, since most of the residents of Düzce and Bolu were already sheltering in tents on the surrounding plains. However, a hundred and twenty-four thousand buildings were razed by this equally devastating tremor.

A further one thousand three hundred and ninety-one aftershocks, measuring between 2.4 and 5.2 RS, were recorded between August 17th and December 14th, representing an average of twelve per day.

Prior to August 1999, the total population of the five worst hit provinces stood at two million six hundred thousand. Just under eighteen thousand deaths were recorded after November 1999 as a consequence of the earthquakes and, of more than six hundred thousand made homeless, four hundred thousand departed for safer parts of the country leaving two hundred thousand in the hardest hit provinces of Yalova, Kocaeli, Sakarya, Düzce (which became a province afterwards) and Bolu, living in tents and later, prefabricated housing.

Right: how the tremors at Gölçük on August 17th and Kaynaşlı on November 12th affected northwestern Turkey





Left: the remains of a ruined street in Gölcük

The Aftermath

When an earthquake of the magnitude of those in the Marmara region strikes, the ground shifts a distance of up to eight metres within the first minute. At the epicentre, vertical displacement extends to as much as seventeen metres. Buildings list, crack and rotate on their foundations or sink up to two storeys into the ground as it undergoes the phenomenon of liquifaction. Less stable structures collapse, pancaking onto themselves or disintegrate into a pile of rubble where the largest piece to be found afterwards would be no larger than a washing machine. As the ground sunders, windows begin to vibrate at stomach-churningly low frequencies, adding to the overpowering rumble of the tremor, before shattering into thousands of pieces. Power is cut. Lights go out.

People are gone. All around, voices are crying for help. For the fortunate ones, the children and their parents and families who survive such an ordeal, the world has turned upside-down. The house in which they had been living moments before is no longer a home: in many cases, it has become a tomb for the less fortunate ones. The psychological impact on the survivors, the fortunate ones, is indescribable. The physical effects of the earthquake would be, perhaps, the closest analogy to the internal suffering which ensues.

Right: the Sports Centre at Gölcük



Among the thousands of volunteers who gave their help to the survivors in the weeks following the disaster there were psychologists from the Turkish Psychologists Association (TPA) – which has four branches in İstanbul, Ankara, Bursa and İzmir – and psychologists, social workers and medical staff from all over the country and abroad. Living in tents themselves, the psychologists gave

Right: total population, number of deaths and damaged houses in the first earthquake

<i>Province</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Damaged Houses</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Number of Deaths</i>	<i>Percentage of Deaths in Total Population</i>
KOCAELI	1,177,586	113,586	10.36	9,419	0.79
SAKARYA	731,800	66,154	11.06	3,894	0.53
YALOVA	163,920	40,688	4.02	2,505	1.52
BOLU & DÜZCE	553,020	33,610	16.45	1,078	0.19
TOTAL	2,626,120	254,038	10.33	16,896	0.64

their services to the tent cities, providing group counselling and recreation on a spontaneous basis, operating by rotation in order to ensure continuity of services. However, having regular jobs and families of their own, they found it increasingly difficult to maintain sufficient numbers in the field. Within a month, UNICEF provided support and, through a basic understanding about the provision of services, enhanced their activities. Under this agreement, the TPA was able to maintain a constant presence of fifty psychologists in the field through a fortnightly rotation of over four hundred members.

HOUSES	KOCAELİ	SAKARYA	YALOVA	BOLU & DÜZCE	TOTAL
Official	32,445	23,969	13,989	11,427	81,830
	5,367	5,069	674	2,180	13,290
Collapsed or heavily damaged	38,987	17,759	14,014	11,012	81,772
	5,462	3,579	1,087	2,231	12,359
Moderately damaged	42,154	24,426	12,685	11,171	90,436
	5,791	2,349	1,881	1,519	11,540
Slightly damaged	113,586	66,154	40,688	33,610	254,038
	16,620	10,997	3,642	5,930	37,189
Total					

Left: the number of buildings damaged by the Gölçük tremor

During the course of field assessments following the first tremor at Gölçük, UNICEF psychosocial consultants interviewed many children and their families. The children displayed a number of post-traumatic symptoms, their parents reporting that they were unable to close their eyes and sleep, or that they were unable to remain asleep, fearful of a recurrence of the disaster. Other typical reactions included the recurrence of intrusive, distressing thoughts and images of the disaster, numbness, a sense of detachment, general irritability and nervousness. Some parents reported feelings of anger towards their children. Grief was profound among the many who had been bereaved. Such reactions can be overwhelming and, if not dealt with, may cause long-term psychological problems. It was plainly apparent that a psychosocial intervention programme was required to meet the needs of the children and that their parents and those who represented points of reference in the children’s lives, such as teachers, should be included within the scope of the programme.

Back To School

While the traditional health and mental health services are crucial providers of specialised services to children and adults in general, for children traumatised by catastrophic events, the ability to attend school, under the guidance and supervision of a teacher and in the company of their classmates, is fundamental to regaining the all-important sense of normality: the daily routines and studies at school are a refuge in a world deranged by uncertainty, a reference for lack of other reassurances.

Acting on the findings of the field mission, UNICEF initiated an emergency response programme with four main components; *Health and Nutrition; Water and Environmental Sanitation; Education* and the *Psychosocial School Project*. MoNE had plans for a psychosocial school programme of their own at the time, immediately established a close relationship with UNICEF for the development and implementation of the fourth component.

Right: the numbers of teachers who departed the Marmara region after the tremors

PROVINCE	NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO LEFT
<i>Bolu & Düzce</i>	368
<i>Bursa</i>	124
<i>Eskişehir</i>	68
<i>İstanbul (Avcılar & Bağcılar)</i>	609
<i>Kocaeli</i>	1,664
<i>Sakarya</i>	1,096
<i>Yalova</i>	431
TOTAL	4,360

Twenty-five per cent of teachers had left the area and although many newly qualified staff replaced them, nearly thirteen hundred positions remained vacant, the staffing requirement of a hundred schools catering to almost fifty thousand children. Initial activities reached out to the families of those teachers who remained. Having suffered also, they would clearly be the first priority in the minds of the teachers themselves. This point was expressed by professional partners and project consultants and by MoNE itself, the rationale being that in order for teachers to concentrate on school activities, they and their families would of necessity have to feel secure. At the same time, the most affected children would be reached in the tent camps through complementary activities.

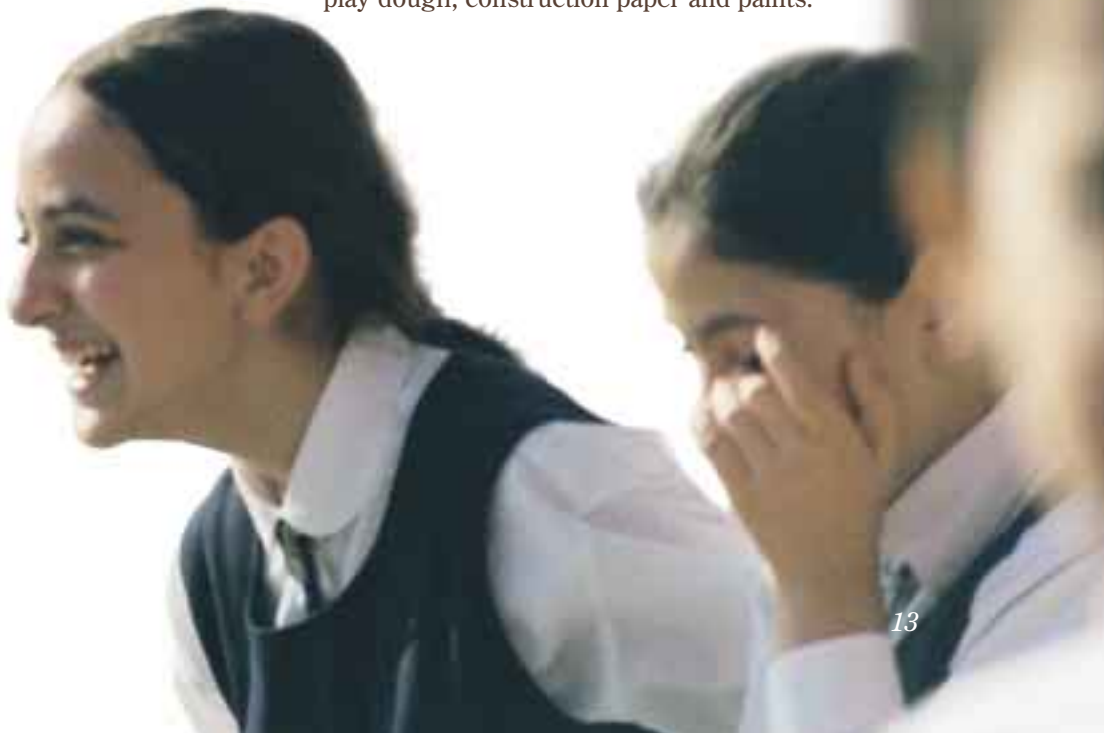
The tremors had wrought havoc on school buildings: of a thousand primary schools in the region, half of them had either collapsed or sustained major damage. A hundred school buildings were completely destroyed and a thousand five hundred were damaged. MoNE estimated the damage at US\$125million.

With frequent aftershocks, fear and apprehension persisted among the traumatised populace. Many mothers refused to allow their children to enter a building. In many cases, the children themselves refused to go.

Immediately following the first disaster, UNICEF airlifted forty standard educational kits ('schools in a bag') from the Supply Division in Copenhagen. Supplied in duffel bags or boxes, the kits can equip a class of forty children with all the basic materials required to run full educational activities. UNICEF followed up by canvassing local manufacturers to assemble a basic primary school kit and a recreational kit for pre-schools. The benefits were enormous: UNICEF procured and distributed over twenty thousand pallets which served a total schooling space for nearly fifty thousand children on a triple shift system.

Turkey does not have many special needs schools as the occurrence has yet to be accepted as a normal, if sporadic, event. The existing centres had suffered damage in proportion to the school infrastructure, however, and as the special needs schools were rehabilitated through the dedication of the teaching staff, counsellors and family members of the children, UNICEF provided twenty-five centres with materials and equipment in the form of a 'special needs kit' containing recreational toys and equipment for motor co-ordination enhancement exercises and cognitive skill development as well as trampolines, ball pits, balance boards, sand bags, swings, building blocks, play dough, construction paper and paints.

*Below:
students at
Seğmenler
Primary
School near
Gölcük*



*Right:
breaktime
at Zafer
Primary
School,
İzmit*



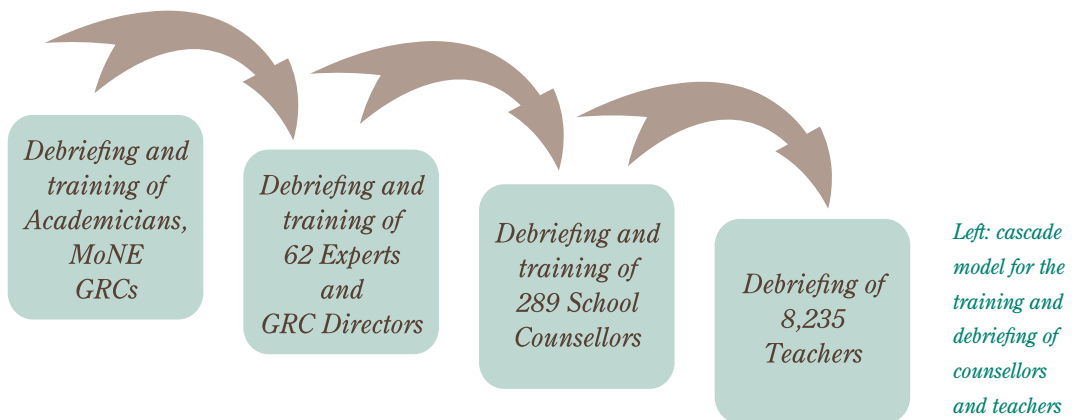
The Psychosocial School Project

In addition to school teachers, Turkey has a number of school counsellors per province who are co-ordinated by the General Directorate of Special Education and Counselling Services (GDSECS), at central level, and the provincial Guidance and Research Centres (GRCs) of MoNE. Consultants had to design a project that would be effective in reaching up to a quarter of a million children – a challenge not only by dint of the number of children involved but also because of the intrinsic problem of their distribution over a large geographical area. It was decided to adopt the cascade model of training as being the fastest, most efficient course to take in implementing the project. A core group of experts would train a larger group of counsellors who would then debrief the teachers who would subsequently offer the intervention to the children.

At the beginning of September, consultants from the Center for Crisis Psychology in Bergen, Norway held the first seminar on trauma psychology and debriefing techniques in Ankara. Eighty-five academicians from the universities of Ankara, Gazi, Hacettepe and Kocaeli attended along with executives from MoNE. Sessions lasted up to three hours and the meetings were also used as a medium to identify those teachers who needed extra psychological support. Consultations with local authorities in the Marmara region followed and, with the supervision and support of MoNE and UNICEF, a National Expert Team (NET) was formed. The NET consisted of sixty-two counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists, divided into project groups of eight, each group being responsible for the support of an affected province.

The Strategy Of The Project

A key point of the project was to strengthen both governmental and non-governmental resources at local and national levels. This would be achieved through a programme of continuous and gradually more intensive training by international authorities on trauma psychology. Eventually, selected school counsellors and members of NET would become trainers in different components of the programme. To this end, the psychology Department at Ankara University designed a pre- and post-evaluation study and reported on the project in the Spring of 2001.



The first essential step, required the setting up of a network of facilitators: the *Teachers Debriefing* (TD) would show teachers how to cope better themselves, thus helping to re-establish educational/support activities for the children they work with.

The second step, *Classroom Based Intervention* (CBI) would be implemented by school counsellors using expressive-behavioural therapy methods to help the children cope with the after effects of the disaster.

The third step, seven sessions of *Group Counselling* (GC) would follow up on CBI in the case of those children who would be identified as being moderately-to-severely traumatised.

A fourth component, *Psycho-education* (PE), was planned as seven sessions to be implemented in classrooms, reaching out to children, their teachers and parents who could not be involved in the more specialised activities.

Originally planned to run for six months, from September 1999 to February 2000, it was decided after the first term to extend the project to June. Following an evaluation in June, it was decided to extend it for a further school year.

Teachers' Debriefing Groups

The *Teachers' Debriefing Groups* sought to help teachers cope with the normal reactions to their traumatic experiences of the catastrophes. Participants would be encouraged to express feelings, thoughts and reactions related to important losses which they had suffered in order to develop these coping mechanisms.

Following the first seminar on trauma psychology in early September, a second seminar to train the core group of sixty-two NET members and the directors of the eight provincial GRCs was held on the 22nd to the 23rd of September in Ankara. A manual, *Psychological Debriefing Following Critical Events, Traumas and Losses*, was produced for the purpose. Following that, the NET debriefed and trained two hundred and eighty-nine school counsellors in debriefing techniques before the end of October. After three months, they had, in turn, debriefed over eight thousand two hundred and thirty-five teachers in the Marmara region.

Through the Teacher's Debriefing meetings we became a natural support group for ourselves. I learned so many things. I guess I had difficulty freeing the child inside of me but I learned how to do that soon enough.

I saw that I could solve problems with love.

FROM THE FIRST TD IMPLEMENTATION, SPRING 2000

What Is Psychological Debriefing?

Out of several debriefing models, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is the best known and most widely used. It is designed to prevent or alleviate the traumatic consequences of abnormal events. It was developed to help workers in the emergency services, although versions have been used to help victims, and other survivors, including children. Three principles of *Proximity* (reach them at the disaster site), *Immediacy* (as soon as possible) and *Expectancy* (with the aim of returning them to their daily routine in a better psychological state) characterise CISD. It teaches more constructive ways of dealing with loss, based on grief counselling, and uses therapies to minimise the avoidance symptoms of post-traumatic stress, focusing on the 'mind-body' relationship to show how an event can influence the individual's physical reactions. The object is to obtain cathartic relief within a structured environment, that is, the counsellor-led group. Good leadership skills and an understanding of group dynamics form the essential link between the counsellor and the participants.

Professor Atle Dyregrov's model (1989) was chosen for the programme.

Described as *Psychological Debriefing* (PD), it facilitates the review, in detail, of facts, thoughts, impressions and reactions experienced in a traumatic situation. It is a cohesive tool, rather than a form of therapy, providing openings for mutual support and the sharing of feelings, accelerating recovery and providing a cognitive 'grip' for those concerned on the passed situation.

Benefits Of The Teachers' Debriefing Programme

The teachers who participated in the evaluation were considerably affected by the earthquake, both physically and psychologically. Roughly one fifth of them had damaged homes and had suffered traumatic experiences. Most found the TDs helpful, reported that they applied the information gained in their daily lives and expressed the desire for more sessions.

The TD meetings were demonstrably successful in building confidence and imparting knowledge of the effects of trauma on the individual. Counsellors interviewed as recently as Autumn, 2001, said that the programme was a

I learned so many things ... There were times when I felt unable to face the crowded classroom, I was afraid that I might make the children's problems worse given my state of mind. But very gradually I found my self-confidence again, learning not to be afraid of the problems which came my way.

FROM THE FIRST TD IMPLEMENTATION, SPRING 2000

Below: a student at 8. Boru Primary School, Kocaeli

relevant intervention not only in the context of the disasters in the Marmara region but also in terms of future contingencies such as fire, terrorist atrocities, traffic accidents and recurring natural disasters. It is a remarkable achievement that the interventions were actualised in a country where the techniques were previously unknown, but it may still be said that there is room for improvement and attention should be paid to the timing and frequency of meetings in the future as a priority. As a result of the programme, an improved communication network has since developed between the regional GRCs, carrying with it many benefits beyond the area of psychological debriefing, opening an arena of inter-provincial dialogue which had not previously existed to such an extent.



Activities For Children And Parents

While the initial *Teachers' Debriefing* phase was in progress, the second, more complex, phase was planned in three parallel components which aimed to reach the children through a comprehensive range of services. The primary component, referred to as the *Classroom Based Intervention* (CBI), was designed to reach children directly in the classroom. The second component, *Group Counselling* (GC) complemented the first and was designed to provide further in-depth support to the more seriously affected children identified during the CBI sessions. The third component, known as *Psycho-education* (PE) encompassed teachers and parents as well the children themselves, providing basic training about the normal reactions for those who have lived through an abnormal event.

Classroom Based Intervention

*Below:
'Arkadaşlar'
at Zafer
Primary
School, İzmit*

Conceived and developed at the Boston Trauma Centre specifically for the children who survived the Turkish earthquakes, *Classroom Based Intervention* (CBI) was implemented through school counsellors trained in CBI techniques by a team of trauma psychologists from Boston. Two three-day training sessions were held between the 6th and 11th of March for school counsellors where a total of three hundred and twenty attended.

The primary objectives of the CBI were to stabilise traumatic stress responses, to facilitate normal school activities, to engage the children in creative activities which would enlighten their perception of traumatic experiences



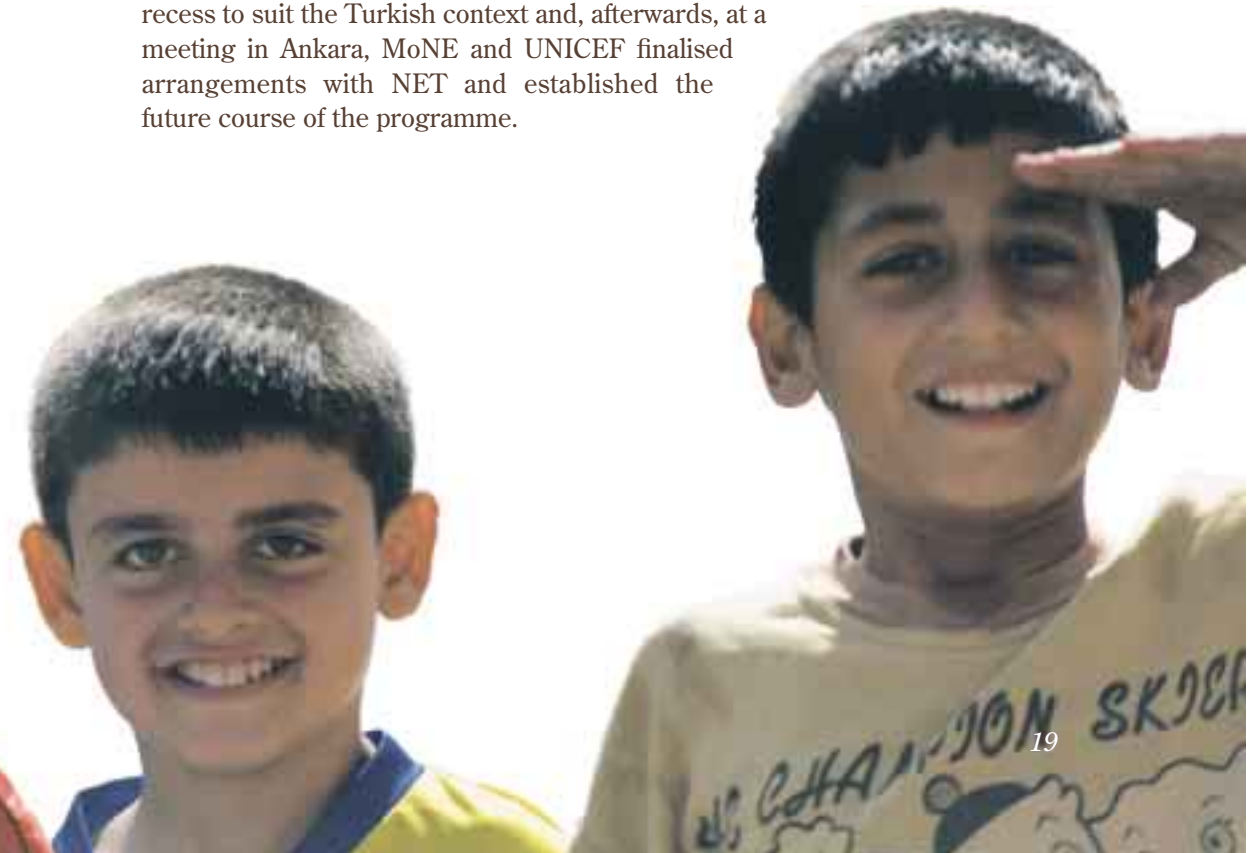
We were sleeping when the earthquake struck and as soon as we felt the tremors we ran from the house. My father went to help the neighbours and I went with him. As I watched him trying to help a man from under the rubble, I thought I heard a deep voice crying for help from under some rubble nearby.

I was shocked and stunned. I couldn't speak. I wasn't able to tell the others that I had heard a voice beneath the rubble. After that, I couldn't get over the feeling of guilt. I kept thinking that I might have saved that man. But, through CBI, I have been able to understand that my reaction was normal and finally to overcome this feeling of guilt.

G (BOY) 7TH GRADE, ORHANGAZI PRIMARY SCHOOL, SAKARYA

(thereby helping them to cope more efficiently) and to show them that such experiences can be safely studied, expressed and understood by trusted care-taking adults within the classroom context.

Where MoNE had been cautious to make changes to the national curriculum in the past, many alterations and adjustments were made, often in the space of a day, in order to facilitate urgent need for the intervention. The training manual and intervention methods were refined during the Winter recess to suit the Turkish context and, afterwards, at a meeting in Ankara, MoNE and UNICEF finalised arrangements with NET and established the future course of the programme.



At Kaynaşlı Primary School, in Düzce, a school counsellor was taking the class for What have I lost and what has changed? One girl had drawn a female figure which she said was her mother who had lost her life during the earthquake. She said she wanted to share her picture. Then she began to cry. Soon the rest of the children were in tears.

The counsellor managed to collect herself and said “I believe your mother is an angel now, above us, and that she is watching down on you.”

This calmed the girl somewhat but the tears continued to flow. She said that she hadn’t even been able to say ‘goodbye’ to her mother. At this point, the counsellor asked her if she would like to say ‘goodbye’ now. The girl nodded ‘yes’ and the counsellor asked her whether or not she would like to do so with her friends. Again, the girl nodded ‘yes’. The counsellor invited the whole class to close their eyes and to imagine the girl’s mother.

Altogether they said ‘goodbye’ to her.

During the course of the next class, the counsellor noticed that the same girl was drawing a bicycle and she asked her about it. The girl said it was her bicycle which she had lost during the earthquake — a healthy sign that she had completed the process of grieving for her mother and had begun to grieve for the other things she had lost.

FROM THE FIRST CBI IMPLEMENTATION, SPRING 2000

*Below:
sports
activities
at Zafer
Primary
School,
İzmit*



The Structure Of The CBI Sessions

The programme was structured so that the children were guided step by step through each session by a routine of three stages: *opening circle*, *central activities and games* and *the closing circle*. An important feature of the sessions was the *single voice* principle whereby no one, child or counsellor, could be interrupted when speaking. Neither was laughter or any other distracting behaviour permitted to interfere when a participant spoke. Through this simple discipline, the children would learn self-control, self-confidence and self-assertion, to externalise their feelings and develop mutual respect for one another within the group. With the resumption of school activities, it became rapidly apparent that parents and teachers had become over-indulgent towards the children, perhaps compensating for the disturbance of the earthquakes. To start with, there was chaos in the classrooms. School counsellors had to learn to communicate with their charges more effectively. One counsellor, working with the 7th and 8th grades noted that his pupils had great difficulty obeying the rules: "I could not make myself heard. However, in the CBI we kept reminding them of the rules. We never raised our voices and simply held our patience. Eventually the children settled down. They became less aggressive. Where they used to get together in cliques and make fun of the activities, with time, they learned to trust and now they generally participate without making fun."

Evaluating Classroom Based Intervention

Before and after the intervention, a survey of symptom measures was collected from six hundred and forty-four students above the age of twelve and seven hundred and eighty-nine parents of children below that age. Comparisons were made between students participating in the CBI and those of a similar age in a Wait-List Comparison Group (WL). It was generally understood by all parties concerned that students in both groups identified as being *at risk* should be referred for treatment immediately. Although the authorities were asked not to introduce systematic or formal psychosocial interventions in any of the WL schools, it was impossible to control interventions delivered by teachers of their own accord or delivered outside of school.

Activities commenced in the first week of April with the collection of pre-intervention symptom measures. The programme utilised many proven methods of processing the often fragmented memories and physical fears surrounding a traumatic event. Sessions were spread over a period of six weeks and utilised movement, silent story telling, music therapy, art therapy and highly structured confidence building games to encourage the children to express their fears. The objective was to rebuild their self-esteem and trust in the environment. Each week would feature a specific theme such as: *information; safety and stabilisation; awareness; control and self-esteem; thoughts and reactions*

during and after the earthquake; resource identification; coping skills; resource installation and future planning. A number of props such as beach balls, fabric dyes, frisbees, paints and an innovative particoloured parachute were used to enhance activities, often to musical accompaniment.

There was the very interesting case of a boy in primary school at Adapazari who had been withdrawn and generally reluctant to take play with his classmates even before the earthquake. When CBI sessions began at his school, his attitude was not surprisingly to remain disinterested, unwilling to join in the group activities, despite efforts to engage him with the others.

The counsellor was advised to leave him be and allow him the space to become more relaxed about what was happening. After two sessions, the counsellor and also — it should be said — his classmates were pleasantly surprised to observe him joining hands with others in the circle.

From that day, he has ceased to be withdrawn and continues to take part in all classroom activities. It would appear that, in this little boy's case, the CBI reached further beyond the effects of the earthquake to mitigate a more deep-rooted problem.

*Below:
breaktime
8. Boru
Primary
School,
Kocaeli*

FROM THE FIRST CBI IMPLEMENTATION, AUTUMN 2000



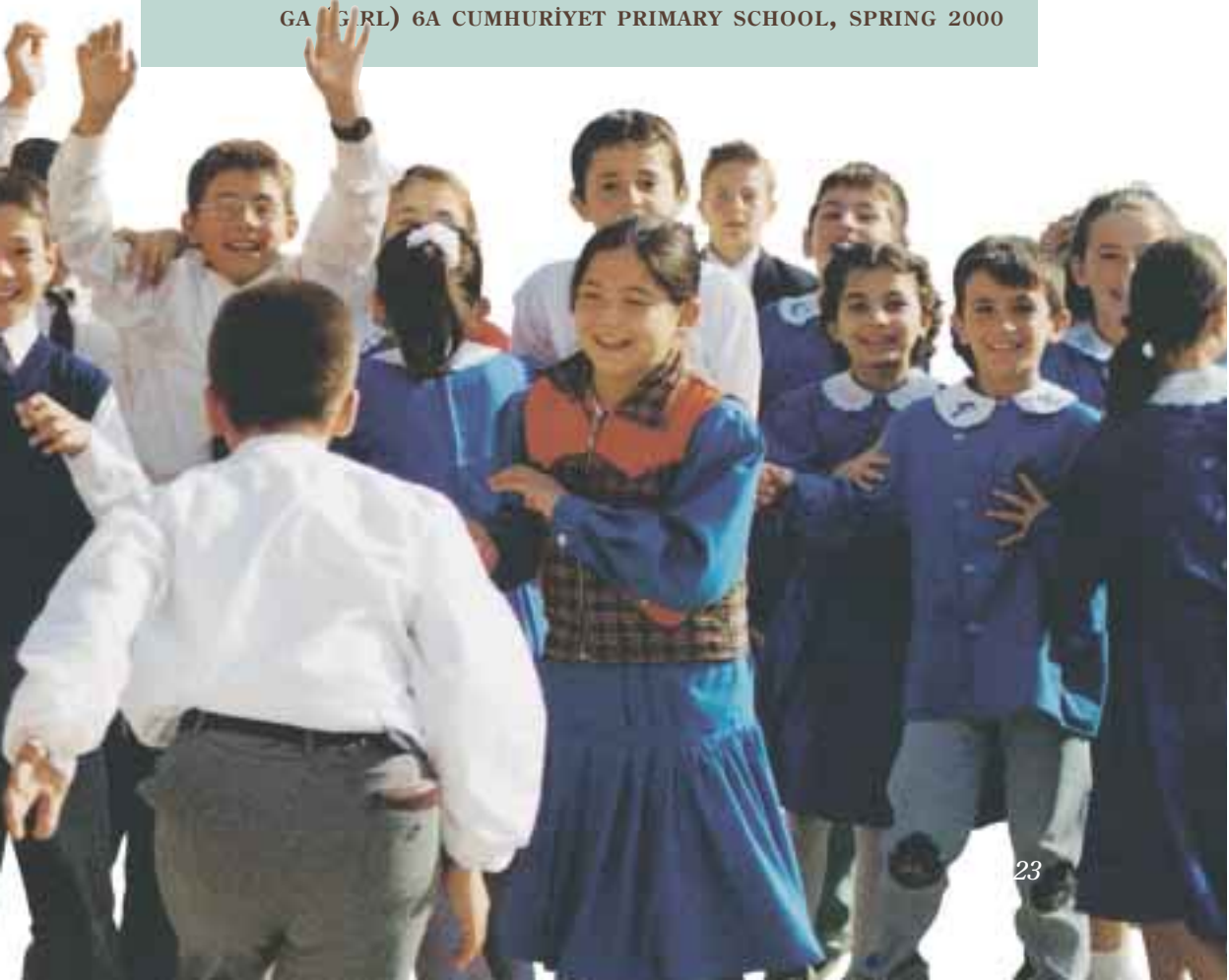
What Did Classroom Based Intervention Achieve?

Post-intervention symptom measures were collected simultaneously one week after the completion of the last CBI session. Comparisons of the students' symptoms before and after the CBI showed that the programme was most effective in reducing anxiety, depression and the physical side-effects of trauma in the more distressed children. Distressing symptom clusters such as these, common to the survivors of traumatic events, are damaging to the everyday functioning of the child and therefore their reduction can only be viewed in a positive light. The programme seemed to have had little effect on less distressed adolescents who may have had little room to improve within the brief span of the

I had been very happy before the earthquake. Then I lost my brother, my sister, my aunt, my uncle, my grandmother and cousins when it happened. I felt that my life was over.

Then you came and showed me how to love life all over again.

GA (GRL) 6A CUMHURİYET PRIMARY SCHOOL, SPRING 2000



Right: a co-operative drawing session at 8. Boru Primary School, Kocaeli



study. Neither did the programme have any obvious effect on the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) although it should be emphasised that it is extremely unlikely counsellors could address PTSD in a classroom setting in any way that would be helpful or that the children would accept. That said, results of the study suggest that CBI would be best targeted at adolescents with higher levels of PTSD. When used as a first step towards post-trauma normalisation, the intervention can reduce the impact of PTSD on other aspects of their emotional functioning.

An aftershock of 3.6RS shook the school at Yalova during a CBI session. The children told the counsellors that they had breathed in deeply during the shock, just as they had been told to do. Surprisingly, the principal thanked the CBI counsellors after seeing that those students who had participated in CBI had left the school quietly while others had been panicked during the shock.

Counsellors observed that, following the shock, many of the teachers took psycho-education more seriously.

FROM THE FIRST CBI IMPLEMENTATION, AUTUMN 2000

Results were apparent by the second or third session, and by the end of the sixth week, children were showing signs of improvement and an eagerness to take part in more sessions. Counsellors reported reduced externalisation of fear, less aggressive behaviour increased attention and a general improvement in performance at school. There were significant reductions in disturbances of sleep, digestive problems and elimination, improved peer and adult relationships, self care and play behaviour, a sense of safety, a sense of self-control and a sense of the future. Preliminary results from the evaluation study indicated significant changes in those children who received psychosocial intervention during the previous school year.

In many cases, children said they had learned to associate certain problems with the disaster and to view their reactions to them as normal. They were beginning to develop friendships, to listen to each other, to share their problems and to look for solutions to those problems together. One child observed that: "Following the rules has taught me to be less fearful, more active."

For the school counsellors, themselves, there were many unforeseen but nonetheless welcome benefits: "I learned a great deal. After working with adolescents for eight years, I thought I knew them. But many of the children rejected us and I soon discovered that there was plenty that I had to learn about them still. By the time we completed the CBI, however, we were getting so much positive feedback from these children that I can't help but feel we'd done a good job."

Between April 2000 and June 2001, twenty-eight thousand children took part in the CBI and five thousand parents were reached through follow-up meetings.



Left: the opening circle of CBI at Bahçelievler Primary School, Yalova

Right: the
gesture dance
at the closing
session of
CBI at
Ulaşlı, Nuri
Bermek
Primary
School,
Kocaeli



Group Counselling

While the CBI proved to be successful in facilitating and accelerating a return to normalcy for most of the affected children, a number of the more severely affected, requiring additional support, were easily identified as being *at risk* by counsellors during the course of the sessions. These children had problems concentrating, were reluctant to take part in community games, showed a lack or an excess of initiative and, at times, a manifestly aggressive nature.

UNICEF's approach took two paths. The first, additional to the CBI, entailed seven sessions of *Group Counselling* (GC) by counsellors trained and equipped with the necessary tools. Children with more severe traumatic reactions would be referred through the Guidance and Research Centres by CBI counsellors themselves. The second approach was to establish a fully functioning referral system between the *Psychosocial School Project* and the MoH mental health referral system. A manual developed by the CCP/Foundation for Children in War was translated into Turkish and revised. Training seminars were held in April for sixty counsellors and members of NET.

The Group Counselling Process

The main body of the course was structured in five parts for groups of six to eight children. *Group Counselling* addressed intrusive thoughts, distressing memories and emotions and dealt with symptoms of hyper-arousal by teaching

relaxation and focusing techniques in order to dispel worries and aid concentration. Relaxation problems and sleep disorders, the symptoms of physiological arousal, were also dealt with. Thought management techniques were taught in order to counter avoidance reactions — the cause of distracted and inattentive behaviour. The sessions involved practical instructions and activities with homework assignments designed to consolidate skills learned in the group setting. An additional two sessions involved parents in order to strengthen bonds and improve understanding of the child's experience at home.

EARTHQUAKE EXPERIENCES	12-16 YEAR OLDS	6-11 YEAR OLDS
TEMPORARY SEPARATION		
<i>From both parents</i>	19.4	11.3
<i>From either parent</i>	22.6	21.2
INJURY EXPERIENCES		
<i>The child was injured</i>	16.1	5.7
<i>A loved one was injured</i>	48.4	22.1
<i>The child witnessed injury to others</i>	51.6	25.5
DEATH EXPERIENCES		
<i>The child lost an immediate family member</i>	61.3	33.6
<i>The child lost a relative</i>	29.9	18.1
<i>The child lost a friend</i>	41.9	12.3
<i>The child lost a neighbour</i>	16.1	12.5
<i>The child saw someone dying</i>	19.4	5.4
<i>The child saw dead bodies</i>	48.4	17.4
<i>The child saw dismembered bodies or body parts</i>	35.5	5.8
<i>The child carried or touched a dead body</i>	16.1	4.8
<i>The child thought he or she might die</i>	67.7	N/A
PROPERTY DAMAGE EXPERIENCES		
<i>Moderate to serious damage to home</i>	29.1	59.7
<i>Any loss of belongings or property</i>	38.7	47.5
<i>The child saw a building collapse</i>	22.7	33.5
<i>The child was rescued from rubble</i>	1.9	3.3

Left:
earthquake
experiences of
adolescents
and children
in the
Counselling
Groups

Evaluating Group Counselling

By the end of the the pilot phase of GC in January 2001, a hundred and fifty children had been reached. A sample group was made up of two sub-samples of sixty-two adolescents of 12–17 years of age and forty-six children of 6–11 years. Each sub-group was divided so that half of the children received GC and the second, being the control group did not. Great care was taken to match the subjects in the control groups with the GC participants in terms of symptom severity, earthquake experiences and other demographic characteristics.

What Did Group Counselling Achieve?

Comparisons between GC participants' symptoms and those of the control group showed that while the GC participants improved on all measures of post-traumatic stress, high-risk for PTSD subjects in the control group either stayed the same or became slightly worse over time. The only exception was that avoidance symptoms decreased over time in the control group. The results clearly highlighted the persistent nature of post-traumatic symptoms in highly traumatised individuals who do not receive treatment. In general, GC proved to be a highly effective intervention for the reduction of post-traumatic symptoms in adolescents, particularly those who were most affected by the earthquakes.

Conversely, this part of the programme appeared to have little or no effect on the younger children. Possibly the interventions were not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of young children or, it is equally possible that real improvements may have been achieved, but that the measures for symptom change were not as accurate as the assessors would have liked. It should be noted that assessment tools such as the *Demographic Information and Earthquake Experiences Questionnaire* and the *PTSD and Perceived School Performance Scales* were completed by parents in the case of the younger group and that as such, the data compiled was less than adequate since they tend to over/under-estimate their children's symptoms.

Between May 2000 and June 2001, four hundred and twenty-four students and their parents had been reached through *Group Counselling*. The sessions are set to continue. In order to replicate the programme's success with adolescents, it has been suggested that it would be more helpful to develop interventions which are sufficiently sensitive to the needs of younger children. Furthermore, an accurate method of collecting symptom measures from the younger children themselves would enhance evaluation and therefore improve the programmes general performance.



Right:
playtime at
8. Boru
Primary
School,
Kocaeli

Psycho-education

In the immediate aftermath of the Gölcük earthquake, several non-governmental organisations took part in a range of psycho-educational activities designed to inform survivors' about the psychological effects of trauma. The object being to increase the survivors' sense of control, reducing anxiety related to the trauma and helping to prevent the development of stress reactions. The seminars were augmented with booklets, brochures and flyers designed to inform survivors about the kinds of experience people usually suffer in the wake of catastrophic events. Information about signs of disturbance requiring professional help was also included. The contents of some brochures were reprinted in newspapers or explained on national television. Within a relatively short space of time, field workers were able to disseminate the information to a large number of people within the structured environment of the seminars.

UNICEF and MoNE initiated the *Psycho-education* (PE) programme as part of the *Psychosocial School Project* in order to ensure continuity of support for these activities. The material was compiled and elaborated by NET members and took the form of group seminars. The first two PE were held in June 2000 for teachers, counsellors and others who were involved in the programme. Further activities followed at schools throughout the nine affected provinces during the course of 2000 and 2001.

The primary objectives of the *Psycho-education* programme were: to give information to the teachers, parents and children on normal psychological reactions after natural disasters; to give the participants opportunities to share their reactions with the others and to show them the normality of such reactions; to form or strengthen the bond between the two systems of the school and the family; to emphasise the effective coping mechanisms and ensure their use among the attendants and to establish an environment in which the reactions of the children are normalised so that their learning and development capacities are enhanced.

There was the case of a student in the province who had lost trust in his mother. During the earthquake, she had fled the house, leaving him inside to fend for himself. Ever since he had been blaming her for deserting him.

Following psycho-education, however, the boy came to understand the normality of his mother's reactions under such abnormal circumstances. He eventually stopped blaming his mother and forgave her.

PSYCHO-EDUCATION, KOCAELİ, AUTUMN 2000

The Psycho-education Programme

Again, a cascade training model was adopted to train the school counsellors who then trained the teachers in the schools, in groups of three sessions, to implement the programme in conjunction with the counsellors, within the classroom context. The school counsellors held PE seminars with the teachers, in groups of three sessions for the children and a further two sessions with the parents. The programme had a strong social mobilisation component, aiming to improve communication and support systems amongst and within schools, between school staff and parents and with the GRC counselling services. Between March 2000 and June 2001, the PE reached one hundred and fifty thousand children, five thousand teachers and thirty-five thousand families.

*Below and opposite:
a pensive moment at
Adapazari
Primary
School*

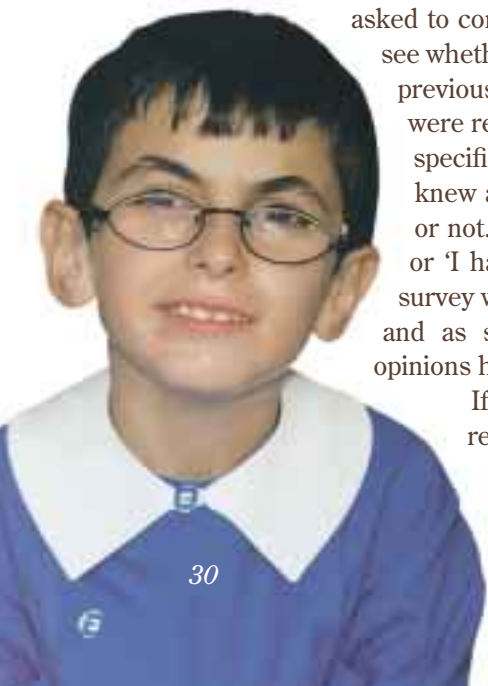
A teacher had lost her husband during the earthquake. When the Psycho-education programme came to her school, she brought her daughter, who had been attending another school, to the activities. They shared their earthquake experiences with the others though they had previously been unable to do so with anyone — even between themselves.

PSYCHO-EDUCATION, KOCAELI, AUTUMN 2000

Surveying The Participants

In order to evaluate the programme, a sample group of parents and children who had attended the seminars and a sample of those who had not were asked to complete an extensive questionnaire. The object was to see whether or not the seminars had any impact over and above previous sources of information. While most of the questions were related to material covered in the seminars, some were specifically designed to reveal what the participants already knew and whether they knew the information to be correct or not. These would have responses such as 'Yes (I agree)' or 'I have no idea' but they were few in number since the survey was conducted with regard to the needs of the survivor and as such the reciprocal aim of correcting any wrong opinions he or she may have had beforehand was paramount.

If the seminar was effective, it was assumed that the response 'Learned from the seminar I just attended' would show that the individual had successfully absorbed the information and also that responses



such as 'I already knew it' and 'Learned just now, reading the questionnaire' would be less frequent. Also, the 'Learned just now, reading the questionnaire' responses would be less frequent among those who had attended the seminar than among those who had not. It was expected that those who were satisfied with the seminars would endorse more of the 'Learned from the seminar I just attended' responses, whereas less satisfied participants would endorse 'Learned just now reading the questionnaire' or 'I already knew it' more frequently.

How Successful Was The Programme?

The study found that the PE was beneficial to the parents. Most thought that the information they received would help them talk about their earthquake-related experiences with teachers and others close to them. Content was important for parents and students alike: the more topic variety a seminar had, the more impact it had. Students also found the number of activities particularly beneficial. In terms of prior access to information about the disaster, children preferred television while adults read more printed matter. However, given the wide range of sources of information outside of the project, it was clear that the PE seminars were useful. The exercise of the survey itself, proved to be very successful in focusing the survivors' attention.

Developing The Psycho-education Programme

It would be helpful if more exercises were built into the programme for children while a wider variety of issues for discussion should be developed to accommodate parents. Additional attention could be given to the linguistic content of the interventions, fine-tuning the language used according to factors such as the age and literacy of the target groups. A questionnaire such as the one used in the survey might be reworded with items framed as questions rather than statements in order to stimulate curiosity at the outset. This is very pertinent when considering the fact that the greater part of parents taking part in these seminars were mothers. The rate of illiteracy in Turkey is higher amongst women than men and for this reason psycho-educational activities should not be restricted to the distribution of printed material but should also include lectures, additional visual material and also reserve time for questions and discussion. The participation of the audience is the key issue to ensure the retention of information presented in this context. It is important to not only increase the motivation of the participants but also to ensure that the issues are clarified and that the solutions to real problems are sought in a group atmosphere.



*Right: an
outdoor CBI
drawing class
at Sakarya*



What Have We Learned?

MoNE and UNICEF's *Psychosocial School Project* is a collaboration between a number of institutions and many individuals who share the common aim of reaching out to the children of the Marmara region in order to support them in their distress and to alleviate the effects of their trauma. The goal is to restore their self confidence and to instill in them a renewed faith in the future. The project was developed 'on the hoof' as an immediate response to the catastrophes of August and November 1999 and has been subject to numerous refinements and improvements during the course of it's implementation. Prior to 1999, a project of such scale and reach was unknown in Turkey and as such, it has proven to be an invaluable learning experience for the institutions and other interested parties involved, as it has been of benefit to the children and adults whose suffering it has sought to alleviate. Inter-provincial relationships between school authorities have been reinforced and broadened as the dialogue between schools, teachers, students and their families has grown. The success of the multi-institutional collaboration overseen by MoNE will serve as a model for future co-operation in similar situations.

The School Counsellors

In particular, the *Guidance and Research Centres* (GRC) counsellors have found a new role in the school system and in the communities which they serve, becoming active as helpers and facilitators, perceived by all concerned as relevant and important to the future of their communities.

“Direct contact with the professionals of the NET team gave us comfort and the strength to reach the children.”

The school counsellors have been the primary facilitators of the *Psychosocial School Project* at the community level. Reports of improved moral, high degrees of professional satisfaction, feelings of usefulness and increased productivity have been forthcoming. Their opinions of the project are that it was a timely and important step towards communal recovery when so many felt overwhelmed by the extent of the disaster, lost in the confusion of its aftermath, and that the project gave them professional direction in order to contribute to recovery.

I'm very happy to have been a part of this programme. Although the working conditions were very hard, I enjoyed the experience of working with the children. On the final day of the CBI, they didn't want us to go. I was very moved by their tears.

Counsellors said that the spirit of co-operation within the community and throughout the school system on a local and inter-provincial level was enlightening and liberating in the face of their own difficulties with the disaster. Many found the opportunities to meet with other counsellors throughout the region, discussing the practical details of implementation and sharing responses to personal problems to be a natural, confidence-building experience. Improvements in trauma-counselling and communication skills have been cited as the most important professional advantage of the programme. Counsellors feel that, in professional and personal terms, the project was successful in its aim of reaching the children in need. Furthermore, many felt that their guiding role had been enhanced beyond the exigencies of the disaster, becoming more relevant to the children's everyday needs.

The school counsellors enjoyed working with, and training other teachers and adults as well as with the children. Working with NET, counsellors are optimistic that the extra dimension of study and research will improve their professional skills in the future. In terms of improvements and adjustments to project structure, it has been said that there should be more support — to ‘help the helpers’ — since the demands of the project are heavy on all concerned.

*Right: the
gesture dance
at the last
session of
CBI at
Bahçecik
Körfez
Primary
School,
Kocaeli*



The Children

Outside of the various evaluation procedures which MoNE and UNICEF used to quantify the three primary components of the *Psychosocial School Project*, there were several marked benefits of the project which were apparent from the impressions of counsellors directly involved with the children.

The most striking benefit, of course, would concern the effects of the project upon the children themselves and counsellors reported many observable changes amongst the child participants. There was a general increase in activity and a notable acceleration in the recovery process which exceeded initial expectations. The more seriously traumatised children became significantly 'less fearful, more active,' and becoming less withdrawn, took a greater part in school activities and were inclined to play more. Those children who had been reluctant to return to school either through fear of an earthquake recurrence or more generalised disturbance had no trouble resuming normal school activities after participating in the intervention programmes.

An increase in motivation to work hard, to read and study was noted as a general effect of participation in the programme with increased academic success being the notable, expected, result. Social skills were honed to some degree and there have been reports of the reduced incidence of sex discrimination amongst adolescent participants.

The programme provided a platform for the children to talk about their experiences and confront many of the related issues and problems and here a general improvement in communication skills was noted. Through this aspect, the children also developed a keener awareness of their own behaviour and reactions, increased their self-esteem and sharpened their problem solving and coping skills — qualities which are easily transferred to daily life

This is a very humanistic project. The children feel and see that someone cares about them, thinks of them and is there for them. They feel that they are valued and that has a positive effect on them.

The structured routine and the subtle discipline of the CBI successfully improved the children's capacity to accept authority, to co-operate and empathise and to once more to feel the sense of community which is a vital antidote to the traumatic effects of disaster. It would seem that the intervention of adult counsellors was itself apparent to the children as a model of co-operation, showing them how to help one another, increasing their sense of solidarity. On a reciprocal note, it was observed by many of the children that the teachers themselves had improved in their ability to play.

Below: the prefabricated city of Uzunçiftlik, İzmit



Right:
a student
thanks the
school
counsellors
for CBI,
Kocaeli



The Families

The programme, in particular the *Psycho-education* (PE) component was helpful to the parents and children alike since it broadened the arena for informed discussion of the disaster and its effects. Adults, as much as children, suffered tremendous psychological ‘fall-out’ following the earthquakes and the PE aimed to increase awareness among the population of the Marmara region of the difficulties and problems they might expect to experience.

The results of the information seminars were heartening in that many parents showed that they were prepared to encourage dialogue within their families and with teachers and school authorities about the disaster. A more open communication about feelings, thoughts and reactions, altered behaviours and relationships between adults and children was sought and gained.

Many parents reported that more openness and tolerance of problems had increased their children’s well-being and lead to a greater sense of self-esteem and general improvements between themselves and their partners.

Future applications of the PE will undoubtedly benefit from refinements to linguistic presentation which would accommodate differing age groups and levels of literacy. It was also noted that the questionnaire which assessors used to evaluate the programme actually enhanced the goal (i.e. increased understanding of normal reactions to disaster) and that future Psycho-

educational programmes would benefit from elaboration of the questionnaire as a tool to stimulate participants' interest, 'priming' them for the information they are to be given.

The National Expert Group

When the *National Expert Group* (NET) was constituted in support of the project, Turkey had never before seen such a wide-ranging collaboration between the professions. Members discovered resources of knowledge and experience which hitherto had been outside of their professional remit. With so many professionals, of various disciplines, working together it was, perhaps, inevitable that many would find it as difficult to work in a team setting, to start with, as they would ultimately find the process beneficial. Away from the universities, for instance, academics were appreciated for their contributions in the field. Counsellors, psychiatrists and psychologists learned more about the inter-dependence of their professions and improved their practical functions as a result. When academics found that their commitment to the programme was potentially compromised with the resumption of the academic year, universities and other institutions proved to be tremendously helpful in allowing leave or arranging sabbaticals to facilitate their involvement in the programme.

The theory of the potential effects of trauma on the individual was well understood between the various academic institutions and professions involved. Through the Psychosocial School Project, however, there were many practical opportunities to study these effects, to measure the effectiveness of the interventions and to refine the methods used to deal with them.

We learned to work together. Coming from such disparate backgrounds, it was not easy, in the beginning, to share our expertise. But the survivors' needs were extremely urgent and thus co-operation was vital to the project's success so we quickly learned to combine our various disciplines more efficiently.

The experiences of the NET team have led to many proposals for improvements within Turkey's educational system such as the implementation of courses in trauma theory and trauma counselling for instance. The helping professions will endeavour to fill the gaps in knowledge and remedial practice which were exposed by experience in the aftermath of the disaster. In this light, the expert team reported improved understanding about the timing and intervention procedures following a major traumatic event.

Right: the potential for further earthquakes in Turkey'



The Future

UNICEF and MoNE reviewed the project in September 2000 and developed new plans based on previous experience and results of the 1999–2000 school year. Proposed activities would include both basic and advanced training for school counsellors. Project manuals and other materials have been reviewed by national and international experts in order to ensure their efficacy and have been refined where possible.

The next step for the *Psychosocial School Project* is to reach those children of the Marmara region who have not yet benefited from the interventions and to expand the project to another six provinces in Turkey. An estimated sixty thousand children and twenty thousand parents and some one thousand teachers will be reached through the *Psycho-education* programme and a further one hundred will benefit from *Group Counselling* activities. While MoNE will be responsible for the overall implementation of the programme, UNICEF will continue to provide training, materials and technical and financial support until the end of the school year 2001 – 2002.

Having proven to be a valid and effective intervention, the next step is for MoNE to expand the programme nationwide. The GRC network is already in place and, providing training in the components of the Psychosocial School Project, the GRCs will be perfectly ready to cope with any disasters or traumatic events as part of a disaster preparedness plan.

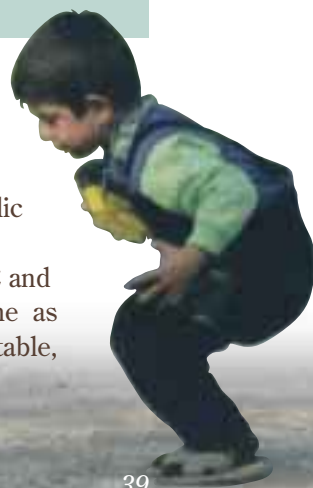
Other features which would enhance the project's goal would be the development of a disaster intervention manual which would explain the

TARGETS & ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MONE/UNICEF PSYCHOSOCIAL SCHOOL PROJECT SEPTEMBER 1999 – JUNE 2001	
<i>Counsellors reached</i>	289
<i>Teachers reached</i>	13,235
<i>Students reached</i>	178,424
<i>Parents reached</i>	40,424
<i>Total</i>	232,548
TARGETS OF THE MONE/UNICEF PSYCHOSOCIAL SCHOOL PROJECT SEPTEMBER 2001 – JUNE 2002	
<i>Counsellors reached</i>	200
<i>Teachers</i>	1,000
<i>Students</i>	59,000
<i>Parents</i>	19,000
<i>Total</i>	79,200
TARGETS OF THE MONE PSYCHOSOCIAL SCHOOL PROJECT SEPTEMBER 2001 – JUNE 2005	
<i>Counsellors reached</i>	300
<i>Teachers</i>	361,000
<i>Students</i>	2,050,080
<i>Parents</i>	620,000
<i>Total</i>	3,033,380

*Below:
a child in
Seymenler*

strategies, resources and activities which have proven to be useful in the case of major disasters. A nationwide trauma prevention programme will educate people in the fundamental aspects of trauma and this will add a useful dimension to public consciousness.

Having actualised the programme through the efforts of MoNE and UNICEF, Turkey will have the nationwide capacity to intervene as quickly as possible in the wake of the next, unfortunately inevitable, such disaster.



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Less Fearful, More Active

At three o'clock in the morning of August 17th, 1999, a tremor measuring between 7.4 and 7.8 on the Richter Scale wrought havoc in the Marmara region of northwestern Turkey. Later that Winter, on November 12th, a second equally devastating earthquake struck the Düzce province. Eighteen thousand died and more than six hundred thousand were made homeless as a direct result of the two catastrophes.

As part of it's response to the needs of the children and mothers of the Marmara region, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education, initiated the Psychosocial School Project, which aimed to help over a quarter of a million children and their families to cope with the traumatic after effects of the disaster.

The project is broad in scope and Turkey itself has never before seen such a wide-ranging collaboration between the communities, the helping professions, academics and the government.

This is an account of that response. It is about the children and their families and teachers and how so much was done to restore their confidence and to renew their faith in the future. As one child who took part in the programme put it: 'I have learned to be less fearful, more active'.

Cover: a child in Sığmen

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