



Welcome to Timor-Leste's **CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES**

A partnership between:



Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls



A decorative graphic in the top-left corner consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of pink, red, orange, and yellow, arranged in a pattern that tapers off towards the right.

Welcome to Timor-Leste's **CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Child Friendly Spaces (CFS)
2. MHPSS intervention
3. MHPSS Activities
4. Voices of Children
5. Voices of Parents
6. The Volunteers
7. Child Friendly Spaces in Suai



CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES (CFS)

During and after an emergency like the Seroja Cyclone floods, and the covid-19 lockdown, the levels of children's and family vulnerability increase, at the individual, community and societal levels

Emergencies also tend to exacerbate pre-existing issues such as violence against children, and social problems such as poverty. It also causes disruption to a social network, community structure, resources, and services that impacted parents' ability to care for their children. Due to the age of the children, emergencies may greatly affect psychosocial well-being

The Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) and UNICEF designed and implemented a community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) intervention for children and families in vulnerable settings and communities affected by the emergency.



CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES (CFS)

Emergencies disturb children's and family protective factors at the individual, community, and societal levels. They tend to exacerbate pre-existing issues such as violence against children, domestic violence, and poverty. They also cause disruption of social networks, community structures, resources, and services that impact the parents' ability to care for their children. Emergencies may greatly affect the psychosocial well-being of children.

While the COVID 19 pandemic was impacting the country, in April 2021 Timor-Leste had to face the Seroja Cyclone flooding emergency affecting more than 45.000 people. In response to the emergency, UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) developed a community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) intervention. From April to May 2021, thirteen Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) were implemented in the evacuation camps in collaboration with eight NGOs and three youth organizations, reaching more than 1.300 children affected by the flood.

The CFS provided children with opportunities to access structured play, recreation, and leisure in a way that strengthens their resilience and existing protective factors. Sixty-one volunteers received weekly training to deliver the activities.

Some positive impacts shared by parents of children who participated in the activities include “Now, children sleep well and no longer wake up at night screaming”; “children laugh again as the activity brings their old friends back together after being separated by displacement”; “children learn a lot, and they talk more about their feelings.”



THE TRANSITION FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO A COMMUNITY-BASED MHPSS

After the flood emergency, the families and children began slowly to move back to their homes, hence the MHPSS activities needed to continue, helping to activate and restore natural support within the community and families, aimed to prevent and address domestic violence, child abuse and neglect.

The MSSl and UNICEF, in partnership with Ba Futuru, continued implementing the community-based MHPSS interventions and developed a toolbox to support children and families in vulnerable and emergency settings, according to the Child and Family Welfare Policy, where the government's commitment to encouraging community-based programming aimed at preventing and addressing domestic violence, child abuse and neglect.

Besides the activities for children, the intervention includes sessions for parents so that they understand better their children's emotional needs and increase their ability to talk about challenges, change gender norms and seek help.

It also provides parents with positive coping skills to care for their own mental health. Moreover, Ba Futuru, with the support of the MSSl and UNICEF, trained the Child Protection Officers, GBV-focal points, technical team of NGO, representatives of faith-based organizations and volunteers on Psychological First Aid and the MHPSS toolbox, so that the social welfare workforce becomes better equipped to provide psychosocial support for children and families.



THE TRANSITION FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO A COMMUNITY-BASED MHPSS

As a piloting phase, from July 2021 to June 2022, with the support of the Spotlight Initiative, UNICEF in partnership with Ba Furutu, were able to reach more than 1800 children and their families in 16 communities affected by the flood in Dili. 89 volunteers have been trained using the activities guidelines and toolkit, as well as to strengthen the community's resilience and protective factors to prevent and address violence against children and women.

The community-based Child-Friendly Spaces have been tailored to Timor-Leste context based on The Community Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Operational Guideline, 2019, developed by UNICEF.





FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO A REGULAR COMMUNITY-BASED MHPSS PROGRAMME TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In this regard, the MSSl identified that community-based MHPSS interventions could help activate and restore natural support within community and family care systems, essential in vulnerable settings, in times of emergency, and when organizations transition from emergency to recovery.

Therefore, UNICEF will support the Government and Civil Society Organizations to continue establishing community-based MHPSS interventions in diverse community-available sceneries to effectively restore, strengthen, and mobilize family and community systems and services with the goal of supporting child and family wellbeing in vulnerable and emergency settings, preventing and responding to violence against children and gender-based violence.

The CFS play an essential protective and supportive function for children in adverse circumstances, ensuring children have a safe place to gather for play, self-expression, and learning; ensuring children's mental health and psychosocial well-being and need to be established and operated in a way that engages and strengthen support systems within families and communities.



ACTIVITIES WE DEVELOP IN THE CFS

HEALTHY NON-COMPETITIVE SPORTS:

Sports Program to support Children's confidence. Child-Friendly Spaces offer weekly activities, of daily 1 to 2 hours, not competitive sports. Assistants have been supporting volunteers including safe activities during the weekend.

- Non-competitive sport gender equal, safe and positively empowered, and support positive peer and adult relationships. This free, safe, equal, happy, joyful, and fun experience can unwind or decouple these responses.



PLAY:

Child-Friendly Spaces offer consecutive weeks of daily 4 hours of general structured and free play.

- Play can be a natural and powerful promoter of learning and growth that provides manipulation and facilitates mastery, self-worth, and the development of essential competencies – including social competencies.
- Restores hope and creativity. It brings back pleasure and desire, which are the foundations of psychosocial life.
- Research shows that an increase in play can increase competence and function executively with a sense of positivity for oneself.
- Regaining their ability and space to play can dignify and encourage them back to normality. Start their creativity and hope. Playing bring back their joy and desire as the foundation of psychosocial support.

REFERRAL PATH:

A referral mechanism has been strengthened. Supported by UNICEF and MSSl, the volunteers have presented the referral path to leaders, assistants and families in the Child-Friendly Spaces.

- Often, the work we are doing with the young person is not enough, and their needs are more significant than what we can offer.
- In these instances, we need to help them reach the services they need. One way to ensure that you are aware of their needs is early screening, followed by a regular review of these findings.



PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Child-Friendly Spaces offer consecutive weeks of daily one-hour psychosocial activities, with tools like breathing, grounding, and expressing with art, dance, song, feelings and how to cope with difficult situations —learning to be thankful and feel safe, accepting each of our emotions.

- Psychosocial support involves a range of care and support interventions. It includes daily care and support offered by caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours, teachers, health workers, and community members.
- Why are psychosocial activities needed? Crises typically disrupt a person's life in many different ways. Psychosocial support can lead children and families to gain a sense of control over their own life and future, a sense of security, hope, initiative and dignity. Can support the social and institutional infrastructure and provide access to services

SUPPORT FOR ACTIVATION OF PRIMARY CAREGIVERS

Volunteers have been including weekly activities with family members, caregivers and community leaders, to be supportive and learn from Child-Friendly Spaces. Families have understood children's stress, and how best to cope with it, received information on the referral path and how best to support or look for help; and the importance of joy and play to support children to cope with a natural disaster.

- Child-Friendly Spaces when and where appropriate, creatively include the caregivers, to integrate and support children through their families, and explain the families, how best to support their children.



SUPPORT & ONGOING TRAINING FOR COACHES:

Volunteers received a 5-day training and receive periodic support and coaching; they hold knowledge and skills to support children and families in vulnerable communities.

- It is important to remember that volunteers supporting the children need support and a space to deal with their feelings. Working with this kind of population can bring with it higher stress and challenges. Attention should be paid to the emerging training needs of volunteers; to provide them with additional knowledge and skill-building opportunities.

BREATHING EXERCISE

The breathing exercises are an integral part of the CFS. It is done at the start and end of every CFS activity. The volunteers guided the children with soothing voices and clear instructions to breathe in and out slowly. However, once the children are comfortable, they will take turns leading the exercise. The breathing exercise helps the children to feel relaxed in their body, heart and mind. It is also an opportunity for the children to use their bodies to reduce tension and gain self-confidence.

It serves as a practical way for children to manage their stress and control their emotions wherever and whenever necessary.

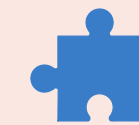


LET'S TRY & DO IT!



Breathe in slowly from your nose and count:

1 2 3 4



Hold the air in your stomach and count to 1, 2, 3 in your head



Breathe out slowly from your mouth and count:

1 2 3 4



Repeat this exercise 2 more times or until you feel calm!



VOICES OF CHILDREN

We interviewed four children: Ariana (5), Azeni (10), Aida (11), and Aicha (5). The conversation was conducted with four girls. When asked how they felt about the activities in the CFS, all the girls responded that they liked and enjoyed the activities taught by the volunteers.



“we are glad we came here, we learn a lot of things and play with friends every day. We didn’t have this in school.

AZENI AND AIDA

When asked about any activity they like most in the CFS activities, Ariana and Aicha, the youngest but active, answered with a little timid voice, “we like singing and painting.”

“we like singing and painting

ARIANA AND AICHA

The children do breathing and grounding exercises, because after the incidents they feel scared, sad, angry or confused. When asked about how they feel while doing the breathing and grounding exercises, the children shared that it made them feel calm. The children have also learned to use the breathing and grounding exercises whenever and wherever they feel scared, sad, angry, sad or confused.

VOICES OF CHILDREN

Larizinho Soars, a boy aged 7 from Becora Mota Ulun shared that he is very happy when he comes to play at Child Friendly Space. Larizinho went to school at 12 in the afternoon, in the morning before going to school, Larizinho and his friends goes to play at the CFS.

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We are very happy because our big sisters and brothers (volunteers) came and played with us. We draw, jump ropes, dance, play hula-hula, play hopscotch, and they teach us how to do math.

Back then our parents were always wondering where we were playing because it was far, but now that with the new activities here our parents are not scared anymore. In the past when there was a big rain, the river ruined our place and made us scared and we did not go out or go to school because we were scared. Our friend's house near the river was ruined. When we hear the sound of rain or see a big river, we become scared, but now we are not afraid anymore. We want to continue to play with the big brothers and big sisters (volunteers), we don't want them to stop.

LARIZINHO



VOICES OF PARENTS



Angelina B. J. Ximenes is a mother of two daughters ages 6 and 10 years old.

"Every day, the children all come together in this place to play with the volunteers. In my observation, the children are thrilled because the Child-Friendly Spaces is a perfect place to gather children to learn before and after school. My two children learn to paint, sing, and dance and are confident to talk with the other children. I see some minor changes in my children's drawings. When they come to this place to paint, they return home and show it to us, the parents.

I am very interested in children's rights because it teaches us to understand the rights of children and our obligations. As a mother, I feel that their rights are necessary. I teach them at home to become good children in the future, and we can understand that disciplining a child does not require violence, but we must teach them with words that help them know about life. -- Angelina



VOICES OF PARENTS

Angelina has also taken the opportunity to share this information with some of the women in their community.

"After getting all this information, I sat with my female friends in this neighbourhood and shared with them about Child Protection and Early stimulation."

Angelina added that as parents, it is essential to accompany their children because it is the parent's obligation to educate their children; she said,

"They don't just go to formal school, and then it is done, but the parents are obligated to accompany them when they are studying, and if there is some information they don't know, we can help them."

Angelina expressed that she wants this activity not just to stop here but to continue in other communities because, through these activities, the children can learn and improve their skills. It can help the parents immensely because their child does not need to play far from home, but they gather and play together safely in one place.



THE VOLUNTEERS

Sixty enthusiastic volunteers work closely with the children in all 16 CFS places in Dili. The volunteers have undergone intensive training on MHPSS Tools and disseminate the information to parents during the Parenting Sessions. The volunteers are equipped with PFA (Psychological First Aid) knowledge and skills to provide MHPSS to the children and facilitate the parents' parenting information. Most volunteers are from the area where the CFS is implemented.



THE VOLUNTEERS

The volunteers are always creative and flexible. When there is a challenge with scheduling, they would always find another way that could help them get through the challenge. For example, in some CFS, the volunteers decided to use the door-to-door method to pass on the parenting information because the parents could not attend the parenting session due to their busy schedules.

The volunteers work very well as a team and have shown fantastic communication and teamwork skills. Ba Futuru's project team has a monthly team coordination meeting with the volunteers to hear updates, and this is an opportunity for them to share their successes and challenges.



THE VOLUNTEERS

LUCIO DOS SANTOS

Lucio Saldanha Freitas dos Santos is a volunteer as well as the team leader of CFS in the Kintal Ki'ik suburb, Dili municipality. Before becoming a CFS volunteer, Lucio did activities with a few children at his home, where he teaches children ages 3-14 in his area because many children do not attend school since they have to help their parents' businesses.

"The parents are not worried about their children's school but more about their business because it supports their family. This kind of thinking is not good because children are the future of this country," said Lucio.

Lucio shared that when he was voluntarily teaching in his area, he used violence as his strategy, such as yelling and punishing the children when they didn't know about the material he was teaching. Back then, he thought this strategy was better for the children to become competent.

"Teaching the children with violence and pressuring them was my strategy to make them smart because I've experienced the same thing from my teachers. Some parents attend the studying activities, but they watch silently when they see me using violence because they agree with what I am doing." Lucio said



After Lucio attended the CFS trainings he expressed that he became aware of his past behavior.

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"After participating in the training, it opened my thoughts that what I have done to the children in the past was not the right teaching strategy. Even though I have good intentions, the process (method) I used was not good because I used violence if they were wrong. I began to use a different way of teaching, and the parents were surprised, so I explained to them that what I had done before was wrong and asked them not to do what I had done when disciplining the children at home."



While volunteering at CFS, he noticed that many children were becoming happier and showed positive changes in their behaviours and thoughts. The children know how to work together in a group, become more creative, and improve their skills.

"A success that I felt and am very happy about is that three children from the CFS who did not go to school went back to continue their studies. A 12-year-old is now in the second grade, and a ten-year-old is in the first grade. I encourage them to go to school and not be shy because if they need anything, we are here to help," Lucio shared.





CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES IN COVALIMA

In July 2022, terrible flooding happened in a few of the municipalities in Timor-Leste due to the heavy rain, including in Covalima and Manufahi municipalities. Many families had to evacuate from their houses to a safe space. Considering this is an emergency, Ba Futuru and UNICEF sent a team of 2 volunteers along with the Project Coordinator to Covalima to do the CFS activities with the children. The team of volunteers was also supported and accompanied by the Manufahi municipality's Child Protection Officer (CPO) of MSSl. The CFS activities were done in the suco office Luro (sede suku) on July 11th and 12th and continued by CPO and the assistants afterwards.

The CFS activities supported the children's mental health through activities that can make them happy and help them recuperate from the traumatic event they experienced during the flooding. In total, 89 children (37 boys and 52 girls) were engaged in the CFS activities in Covalima during the flooding.



The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between European Union and United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. **It is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls.** Launched with a seed funding commitment of €500 million from the European Union, the Spotlight Initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a demonstration fund for action on the Sustainable Development Goals, the **Spotlight Initiative is demonstrating that a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in gender equality and ending violence can make a transformative difference** in the lives of women and girls.



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