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Global Partnerships Improved the Mental Health of 60.000 High-Risk Children

Background

Accelerating global urbanization and migration stress parents and professional systems, leading to poorer child mental health. Parental stress creates large numbers of children placed in non-parental care: some 153 million children are de facto orphans according to UNICEF. To meet this challenge, large-scale interventions are required to build local professional capacity in caregiver training.

Method

In 2006, the presenter invited an international network of researchers whose recommendations form the basis of a program to educate staff in partner NGOs and government agencies. From 2008-13 the presenter [designed educations](#) in the training of local foster parent and orphanage staff groups. The Danish School of Social Health in Aarhus were project managers, financed by EU Lifelong Learning grants. Foster care and orphanage leaders from ten EU countries were educated and trained their staff.

In 2012, subsequent requests from outside EU caused the presenter to co-found the NGO www.firststartfoundation.com. Examples: for SOS Children's Villages Denmark, local government and university staff in nine East African countries have been educated in six-month online classrooms to train local groups of foster families, as part of the Danida and SOSCV funded project Quality in Alternative Care. For Greenland's Social Board, 50 municipality staff have been educated. Pre-and-post questionnaires for the stress level of caregivers and child development have been [externally validated](#).

Results

Today, 700 partner staff in 32 countries have been educated via local startup seminars and six-month online classrooms, and have trained caregivers, teachers, social workers of some 60.000 children and youth in alternative care. Results show a 20 % improvement in child development. Fairstart group sessions used by students are online in 20 languages, adapted to local culture. Experiences from the project are shared by presenter in [papers](#) and as a member of [APA Division 52](#), the [PCUN](#) Work Group for Migrant Children, and [EFPA](#). In 2020 the presenter received the APA Award for International Humanitarian Work for Underserved Populations.

Conclusion

Intercultural partnerships, virtual classroom educations, and program adaptations to local cultures seem to offer low-cost dissemination opportunities, requiring further research.