

Foreword

This issue of *Early Childhood Matters* is published just six months after a massive earthquake off the coast of Sumatra triggered the worst natural catastrophe in living memory. As many as a third of the more than 200,000 people who died in the tsunami were children. Of the 500,000 people who are estimated to be left homeless, again, a third are children, many of whom separated from their parents. The international community responded very quickly to the disaster, and the immediate relief effort was unprecedented in its scope.

Every emergency situation, whether it is man-made or natural, has potentially devastating effects on the lives of people, especially those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. But what constitutes an emergency? According to the Save the Children article in this issue, people hold two quite distinct views: it is either a direct and tangible threat to security, such as a clash, a curfew, an occupation or a shooting incident, or it is long-term process of deprivation of rights, chances and opportunities – in other words, the ‘silent’ emergencies that threaten the lives of countless children on a daily basis. How one handles these two types of emergencies, however, is quite distinct, as Dominic Xavier points out in his interview: “It is important to really know what emergency assistance is about – compared to long-term development”.

In emergency situations, involuntary separation from both family and community protection, sometimes across national borders, greatly increases a child’s risk of exposure to violence, physical abuse and even death. As the Christian Children’s Fund article shows, a rapid assessment is an effective method of determining children’s enormous protection needs, including in cases such as the tsunami catastrophe.

It is worth pointing out that emergencies such as the tsunami not only pose unprecedented coordination challenges for the humanitarian community, but also provide it with an opportunity to grow. In tsunami-stricken areas, agencies with a grounded

expertise in the field joined forces to make their relief efforts more effective, and they were able almost immediately following the disaster to issue guidelines that would help others to make their work more effective in the affected areas. Added together, the following pages present a set of ‘guiding principles’ in relation to work for unprotected children.

While this edition of ECM was inspired by the tsunami, it looks at other, similar situations that leave children unprotected and suffering. This ECM is meant to bring important information to organisations facing the needs of young children in emergency situations who otherwise would not have access to it. It has been compiled by organisations and agencies who have first-hand, hands-on experience in this area. We’re sharing some of the expertise of organisations specialised in dealing with children in emergency situations, present their different approaches with the diverse categories of children who fall victim to disaster, conflict or displacement. What all of the organisations have in common, however, is their aim to respond in a timely fashion to young children caught up in emergencies in order to restore some ‘normalcy’ in their lives as soon as possible.

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*Teresa Moreno
Jan van Dongen*
editors