



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Rebuilding the Community around Children

Statement submitted to the

NGO Committee on 'The Rights of the Child'

December, 1997, Geneva, Switzerland

What does it mean to rebuild community around children?

Communities may evolve or be formed for different reasons, but whatever the reasons, the purpose of a community is to serve human needs. Normally, the parameters in which a community is formed will be such that the community will contain people who have differences on at least one level, be it age, nationality, ideology, culture or profession. On the other hand, it is also true that all these differences can be transcended by acknowledging the common denominator of the human worth of every individual. This is the foundation upon which the real strength of the community can be rebuilt creating the environment for children to be cared for and loved.

The first community that the child is exposed to is the home in which the role of parenting is pivotal. Care begins from conception and continues throughout the various stages of growth and development. From 0-5, children are mostly in contact with parents, siblings, caregivers and health facilitators. During this period, the child is most vulnerable and is exposed to influences from individuals with whom they interact intimately. The child responds to and molds his/her personality to the emotional and mental mind sets, attitudes and behaviors of those around them. The quality of the home environment is what determines the confidence, capacity and cognitive abilities in the initial stages of personal development. A foundation of values and principles should not be left to the mercy of television, movies and other such influences. Empowerment of the child comes from the inner strength of the parent/caregiver and the early years of development calls for personal commitment to the child's overall well-being.

The second community is the school and educators are being called upon to facilitate lifelong learning from pre-school onwards. The process of lifelong learning involves a close working partnership of parents, caregivers, educators as well as other stakeholders. Within the area of evaluating students, careful attention should be paid to the transitional points in the child's process of growth -- from home to pre-school, from pre-school to primary, from primary to secondary, from secondary to tertiary.

To complement the home and school communities, the community at large needs to provide holistic services such as welfare, nutrition, health, education and other social services. The policy, strategy and planning of programs must be holistic from the very inception and their principles should include the cooperation with and, support for community-based organizations. This will facilitate, coordinate and, mobilize leadership, involvement and participation of people at the grassroots level. Allocated resources from the various donors should be appropriately and equitably invested in the various areas to facilitate the overall development of the child. This would eliminate duplications and help facilitate resources being used in a worthwhile way.

Why are we doing what we are doing?

The next paradigm of development is not just sustainable human development but spiritual development as the spirit is the core of our being and nothing will change for long unless that changes. The highest values, such as love, justice, compassion and peace, are the most universal ones for they are spiritual values and spirituality is a universal phenomenon.

The holistic approach to rebuilding community calls for putting children at the center of its development. Health, nutrition and education are important factors in the formative years of a child's life. The Brahma Kumaris Worldwide are working in partnership with global educators, parents and, caregivers to look at education as providing children with a philosophy of living, thereby facilitating their overall growth, development and choices so that they may integrate themselves into the community with respect, confidence and purpose. There is special emphasis on children-at-risk in the inner cities, and programs to help eradicate violence, drugs and crime. In refugee camps children are unable to heal physically because of the grief that overpowers them; special skills and approaches have been developed which aim at helping children to heal these inner wounds.

Lifestyle has always been an area where the Brahma Kumaris have been active. Using the Mother and Child Care program of WHO to bring health and hope to the poor people of the villages in India has brought rewarding results to many. Largely uneducated and illiterate, the natives live in a time-warp, unaware of the importance of personal and social hygiene, basic immunization and other precautionary health measures that we recognize as basic human needs. Too poor in any event to afford prevention or cure, their lives are often plagued by health problems that could be resolved at a relatively low cost.

How do we do what we are doing?

**this part of the paper on LVEP was updated (March 2004)*

There are two main areas in which we work for the welfare of children: Education and Health.

Education

Living Values: An Educational Program (LVEP) grew out of an international project begun in 1995 by the Brahma Kumaris to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations. Called Sharing Our Values for a Better World, this project focused on 12 universal values. The theme -- adopted from a tenet in the Preamble of the United Nations' Charter -- was

"To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person" Living Values: A Guidebook was created as part of the Sharing Our Values for a Better World Project. The guidebook -- which provided value statements on the 12 core values, offered an individual perspective for creating and sustaining positive change, and included facilitated group workshops and activities -- contained a small section of values activities for students in the classroom. That sketchy classroom curriculum became the inspiration and impetus for Living Values: An Education Initiative (LVEI).

Living Values: An Education Initiative (LVEI) was born when twenty educators from around the world gathered at UNICEF Headquarters in New York City in August of 1996 to discuss the needs of children, their experiences of working with values, and how educators can integrate values to better prepare students for lifelong learning. Using Living Values: A Guidebook and the Convention on the Rights of the Child" as a framework, the global educators identified and agreed upon the purpose and aims of values-based education worldwide -- in both developed and developing countries.

Living Values Educators' Kit became available for piloting in March of 1997, and by late Spring that year was being piloted at 220 sites in over 40 countries. It is currently in 66 countries, and activities have extended to over 4000 sites.

Health

The Mother and Child care project serve the 3 basic pillars of the Mother and Baby Package of WHO: Ante-natal care, Clean/Safe delivery training and, Information on Family Welfare. This program is very popular as a village outreach program in Mount Abu, India among the area's 55,000 tribal people. The Brahma Kumaris are planning to expand this outreach program through their Health and Medical Section throughout India.

Obstacles encountered: Within the education program, values are still a new area for teachers, facilitators and parents. Even though there is the general recognition for a values-based approach to learning and to include new skills, pedagogical approaches and training programs, the main obstacles encountered are time, human and financial resources. However, because the need to expose the children to better lifestyles and to enhance their capacity to learn, the Living Values pilot program is progressing at a rapid pace.

Working on health issues, especially in the villages the question is always the funding of the outreach programs so as to make basic health and nutrition necessities available free of charge. The challenge is also how to train parents and caregivers to take proper care of the children and of themselves. When the mother's health is neglected, this affects the health of the children.

Even though the progress seems a bit slow because of the inevitable obstacles, the steady progress is notable with changes seen in people's lives and communities.

What are the ethics, values, principles and resources involved?

As the world becomes a global village, and people have begun to see themselves as global citizens, a change has also come about with regard to development thinking. An approach that often seemed to equate an increase in financial resources with greater well-being has

given way to an understanding of progress known as sustainable human development. This concept acknowledges that people require or aspire to the fulfillment of a variety of needs, rights and hopes that are not just economic in nature but also include social, gender-based, environmental, health, mental, moral and spiritual concerns. The continuum of major conferences held during this decade has documented resources that show a definite shift in the order of global priorities.

Any community that is to survive and flourish in the 21st century must respond to the needs of its members as human beings. A community which fails to take account of its children and young adults will eventually defeat its own purposes and, rather than progress and growth, will suffer disintegration. The time is now to put our children first.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The BKWSU is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with UNICEF.
The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.
It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

www.bkun.org

OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
Suite 436
866, UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.
Tel.: +1-212-688-1335
Fax.: +1-212-504-2798
bkun@bkwsu.org

HEADQUARTERS
Pandav Bhawan
Mount Abu 307501
Rajasthan
India
Tel.: +91-2974-238261
Fax.: +91-2974-238952
abu@bkivv.org

INTL. COORDINATING OFFICE
Global Cooperation House
65-69 Pound Lane
London NW10 2HH
U.K.
Tel.: +44-20-8727-3350
Fax.: +44-20-8727-3351
london@bkwsu.org

©BKWSU, 20010; extracts may be reproduced on condition that the source is indicated and a copy of the publication in which the extract is used is sent to the above New York address.