



www.ChildProtectionToolkit.com

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Several years ago, I went overseas to work at an US-based organization, which was assuming administrative management of an orphanage and school, they had previously *only* funded. The orphanage had been wracked by a child abuse scandal. Two different foreign administrators had been abusing children – one physically and one sexually. The US-based nonprofit was shocked and appalled when they found out and quickly stepped in as the perpetrators fled the country. I was part of a team newly hired to rebuild, strengthen, and heal after such a terrible event. Among my many hats, I was the child protection officer and spent a considerable amount of my time on these tasks. I learned mostly on-the-job, using any assistance I could get through the government and local child protection networks and scouring the internet for information and tools. I found that our organization was not alone in discovering child abuse yet most did not directly deal with the structural problems so as to prevent future abuse.

After leaving this position, I found this situation similarly repeated in many places around the world and began working to help organizations strengthen their child protection “safeguarding” policies. The more I learned, the more the enormity of the problem overwhelmed me. Helping organizations one-by-one is too slow; children are being traumatized and physically scarred for life. I wanted a way to provide international nonprofits with the tools they needed to prevent and address abuse – all the information that I took years to learn and find on my own.

From there the Child Protection Toolkit idea was born: a free, online platform for nonprofits to access the information they need to create a culturally-appropriate, context-specific child protection program for their organization. It would need to be more than just “how to write a policy” but address how to teach local staff the skills they need to do more than just protect children but help them thrive. Discipline and group management skills to replace the severe corporal punishment with which they themselves were raised are essential. There must also be information on child development, sexual health, and trauma coping methods so that employees can better work with children and understand how to help them. The toolkit must be supportive, empowering, collaborative, and self-sufficient; it must be able to stand alone as holistic and comprehensive support for organizations.

Credentials:

BA in International Relations, Saint Joseph’s University
Philadelphia, PA, USA

MA in Peace & Conflict Studies, European University Center for Peace Studies (EPU)
Stadtschlaining, AUSTRIA

Certificate for Child Protection, Monitoring, and Rehabilitation Training, Austrian Study Centre
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The Problem

Child abuse is a global problem. Not immune to abuse, international nonprofits have abuse occurring within them. An astounding, *one in eight* international nonprofits *self-reported* having dealt with accusations of abuse. Meanwhile, *one in four* know of abuse occurring in an organization similar to their own.¹

Child abuse can take many forms: sexual abuse, exploitation, physical abuse, “discipline,” bullying, and mental abuse. It can be intentional, such as an adult sexually abusing a child, or it can be unintentional, such as with discipline – a product of upbringing and lack of alternative skills.

Nonprofits’ lack of strong procedures, policies, training, and reporting mechanisms allow for child abuse to be overlooked, ignored, and ultimately perpetuated. When international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) do not properly vet potential employees and volunteers, sex offenders can easily access vulnerable populations. Weak reporting mechanisms and procedures can mean that abuse is not reported or intentionally concealed, investigations are improperly managed traumatizing victims and/or whistleblowers, and abuse is allowed to continue. Abusive discipline can be perpetuated because staff do not know of any other way to manage poor behavior, as they themselves grew up with abusive discipline. Children themselves can even abuse each other by demanding sexual favors, physically harming others, or verbally destroying other children’s confidence.

The Need

The most obvious need is because children are being maltreated. There are the immediate effects as well as the long-lasting trauma and physical and mental health issues. Abused children have substantially higher rates of depression, suicide, drug & alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, risky behaviors, poor health, becoming abusers, and being in abusive partnerships. This ripple effect means that the communities and countries that nonprofits are trying to help, now have additional traumatized individuals who are less economically productive, straining the health care system, and perpetuating abusive systems.

While the UN, alliances, associations, and larger INGOs, such as Save the Children and Oxfam, are working on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) within their organizations, these efforts only focus on sexual abuse and they do not take into account small nonprofits’ situations or needs. Thus, no one is working on child abuse at this level.

¹ Unpublished but submitted for publishing. Travis, Amy S. 2015. Child Protection: A Survey of Small INGOS. Note: Surveyed organizations were self-described as having a focus on “youth.”

Smaller international nonprofits are in a gap, between governments' oversight and jurisdictions and also not monitored by the larger humanitarian and development aid industry and their standards. In the US, INGOs are not monitored or tracked by the government as to what they do, standards they must meet outside of financial obligations. If the INGO does not receive government aid funding, which most do not, then they have few if any standards to which they are required to adhere.

As foreigner organizations, the people and organizations represent their home countries to the host communities. When abuse occurs at the organization, even if perpetrated by a local staff member, the organization and the home country's reputation is tarnished. The beneficiaries, local community, and host government will distrust the organization and possibly the sending country. It will be difficult for that specific nonprofit and those countries to rebuild trust.

The Difference

This toolkit effectiveness will lie in a few key areas. First, it is pooling resources and information. Many manuals, documents, and resources exist, but the information is not in a central location. The toolkit will highlight and capitalize on the work that has been done to improve child protection practice – no point in re-creating the wheel. However, much of the information that has been produced is geared more towards larger nonprofits and contains industry jargon and references that might not be clear to a smaller INGO. These will be clarified or rewritten to be useful.

Second, the toolkit provides comprehensive and holistic support. The abuse problem is not just about having a air-tight policy but also about implementation, consistency, and training. Each person in the organization must understand his/her roles and responsibilities. Staff who use corporal punishment need training and practice on how to use positive discipline. To stop one habit or bad practices, one must have replacement skills and good practice. Understanding children's development as well as learning difficulties, good nutrition, and health is necessary for moving beyond basic protection to helping children thrive.

Lastly, most nonprofits have limited resources for big dreams and needs. There is never enough money. The Child Protection Toolkit is inexpensive, easy-to-use, and can be tailored to fit the organizations specific programming, structural, context, and cultural needs. It will be designed for out-of-the-box usability. While some organizations may choose to hire someone to help with the process, it will contain everything in a centralize location for an organization to become oriented to child protection, find the areas they most need to focus on for risk, utilize the training videos and material to gain new skills and understand best-practices.

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