

We contribute to:



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is an important component of our community development programmes, to ensure that in their youngest years children receive the stimulation and care they need in order to develop to their full potential.

Help a Child focuses on two key aspects of Early Childhood Development: parenting and early learning. The past year has been challenging because of COVID-19. To respond to the increased stress within families and the partial closure of ECD centres, and to reach the least-served children aged 0-3, extra focus has been placed on strengthening parents and on support for early learning at home through home-based ECD. In Malawi, our community-based parenting programme was aired on radio and TV channels to support positive parenting nationwide. Another highlight was the opening of our first ECD model centre as a knowledge and training hub for other centres in the surrounding area. To evaluate and improve the quality of our ECD approach, partnerships have been developed with academic institutions. In Rwanda we launched a study to evaluate the impact of ECD interventions on children's school performance so as to advocate at the national level for better ECD facilities.

Key statistics:



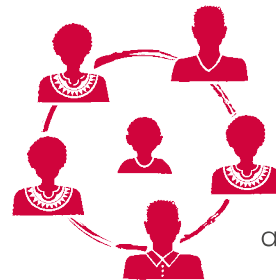
36,234

young children (0-7) supported



380

ECD centers supported



13,679

parents involved in parenting and awareness sessions



RWANDA

This is **holistic early childhood development!**



With funding from the Pharus Foundation, we have established our first ECD model centre in Rusizi, Rwanda. This offers integrated services to young children (0-7 years) and their parents, and serves as inspiration for twenty community-based centres in the surrounding area.

Services include health care, nutritional information, education and training in good parenting. To ensure quality, sustainability and ownership, a management committee has been established. This comprises community members who have received capacity-building training on the importance of ECD and on their role and responsibilities in managing and sustaining the centre. Through cooperation with self-help groups, parents are involved in maintaining the centre and are taught about the importance of investing in the early development of their children.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, however, ECD centres have been partially closed. As a result, the provision of technical and monitoring support to the surrounding centres has been delayed.

45 ECD caregivers trained



240 children served directly at ECD model centre

720 adults supported

42 school management committee members trained



Best performers

Research at primary schools in the neighbourhood of the Early Childhood Model Centre in Rusizi has shown that the **seven best performers in each class** were enrolled from the centre. It also showed that in each class the **ten least good performers** were not enrolled from the Model Centre.



KENYA

Positive parenting pays off

From reflection sessions with communities participating in our CCCD programme in Machakos, Makueni, Kisumu and Homabay counties, it became clear that poor parenting has direct consequences for children. These sometimes include serious violations of their rights, such as neglect and other forms of abuse.

With support from EO Metterdaad, the Kenya Positive Parenting Project has now been implemented. Initially, Help a Child trained 206 parents in positive parenting skills using our Parenting Challenge manual. These parents then went on to exchange their knowledge and skills with more than 3000 others. At the same time, the project has been addressing direct needs in terms of

food security and economic resilience by supporting 31 self-help groups with matching funds to acquire various assets, such as maize milling machines, water pumps and small-scale irrigation kits.

The results are positive: children seem to have more self-esteem and do better at school. Parents report that they are more involved in their children's lives and are less violent towards them. Instead, they talk with them if they have done something wrong. As an extra result, trained parents provided psychosocial support to teenage mothers who had dropped out of school, mainly as a result of the COVID-19 situation. This has resulted in eight young mothers going back to the classroom, leaving their small children with their grandparents.

Parenting Challenge goes international

Based on needs identified in our projects, Help a Child has designed the Parenting Challenge. Launched in 2016, this is a group-based method to improve the knowledge and skills of mothers, fathers and other caregivers. The parents are actively involved in discussions, exercises and group work, and share their own thoughts and ideas.

In 2021 the Parenting Challenge was adopted by Dorcas Aid International for use in nine countries in Africa and Eastern Europe. Two rounds of training have been facilitated: the first to induct trainers into the method and topics, the second to provide on-the-job coaching and answer additional questions.

be used without needing much adaptation. Participants discover that they have a lot of similarities. After all, whether parents live in a small village in Tanzania, the crowded city of Cairo or a camp for Roma in Albania, they all struggle to provide the best for their children. And they all appreciate the chance to share with each other.

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We are pleased with the results. In a diverse group of countries, the same intervention can

It works, too! At a Roma community in Romania, for instance, it had been very hard for children to go



For the very first time, Help a Child training materials have been translated in Arabic!

to school daily, on time and fed. But now they do arrive promptly every day, having had breakfast. And often bringing a packed lunch as well! In several other countries, it has been noticed that there is less domestic violence since the Parenting Challenge was introduced.

Dorcas has picked up the challenge!



Sarah: "I want all people to know that disability is normal."

UGANDA

"Disability is normal"

"Your child has been cursed." That is what parents of a child with a disability often hear from other members of their community. On top of the burden of raising a youngster in these circumstances, this negative community spirit can be very painful.

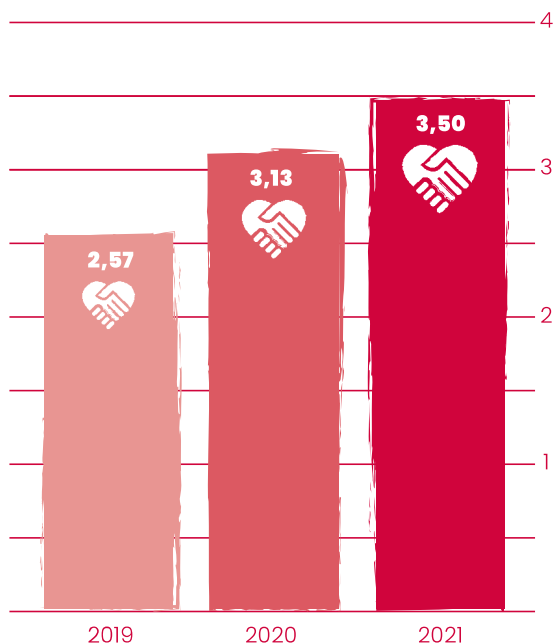
In Uganda, our partner organizations SAO and AEE are creating awareness about the real causes of disabilities and are helping to include children affected by them in daily community life.

Special services for children with disabilities are often not available in remote areas. AEE decided to train nine teachers from different schools in sign language to guide deaf children in their classes. Another nine teachers have been trained in using Braille to support blind children at their schools. And school buildings have been made accessible for children who have difficulty walking. In this way, children with disabilities can attend school together with their peers.

Some children have been helped through an operation. Amongst them Jacob, who is four years old and was born with hydrocephalus (giving him an unusually large head). He could not walk or sit by himself, so his mother Sarah had to carry him everywhere. After an operation at a rehabilitation centre in the neighbouring district, he can now walk and sit unaided. Meanwhile, Sarah is one of 30 caregivers who have been trained in disability management and support for children living with disabilities. She says: "I am now aware that disability is not a curse, nor a misfortune, and I can take care of my son without any fears. I am now a disability champion in my community, and I want all people to know that disability is normal."

Participation of people and children living with a disability

In Abim, where Help a Child works with SAO, for the second year in a row community members gave a higher score (between 1 and 4) for the 'participation of adults and children living with a disability in their community'.





Reaching parents in times of COVID-19

In many countries, lockdowns and school closures in 2021 caused households to become isolated. Especially for young and new parents, who would normally depend on the practical and mental support of people around them, this has been hard to cope with. In cooperation with implementing partners and other stakeholders, Help a Child Malawi has found creative ways to reach and support young parents.



"Even now, we have calls from media houses to continue with the programme."

Roreen Mzembe, Programme Manager, Early Childhood Development, for Help a Child Malawi

Parenting sessions for first-time mothers and fathers

Many countries saw an upturn in teenage births in 2021, due to child marriages and unplanned pregnancies as indirect effects of lockdowns and the closure of schools. These young mothers and fathers often face extra challenges, such as economic vulnerabilities and a lack of confidence, knowledge and skills. In Zilakoma (Malawi), implementing partner LISAP established five special groups for young fathers and mothers in response to this development. This is on top of another 22 "regular" parenting groups. In all the groups, the modules from Help a Child's Parenting Challenge were used to guide the conversations. Even more than imparting knowledge, the Parenting Challenge sessions are designed to facilitate exchange between parents. In the overwhelming experience of becoming a mother or father,

it is a relief simply to recognize common challenges and to share tips and tricks. By meeting outside, in smaller groups and at times when restrictions were eased, the participants were able to come together quite often.

Radio events

To reach out to even more parents, particularly in times of lockdown and restrictions, Help a Child Malawi – in cooperation with LISAP, WACRAD and the Social Welfare Office of the Ministry of Gender – reworked three modules to make them suitable for radio. Seven stations across the country adopted the programmes and together delivered 63 interactive broadcasts on three themes: child protection, the importance of play and handling critical family issues (positive parenting).

Roreen Mzembe, Programme Manager, Early Childhood Development, for Help a Child

Malawi: "Even now, we have calls from media houses to continue with the programme as it addresses a very critical need for parents to create an environment in every home for every child's optimal development. Some media houses are repeating the pre-recorded programmes from time to time."

