

LARGE GROUP PSYCHODRAMA PROJECT
(BOLLUCA CHILD VILLAGE PSYCHODRAMA PROJECT)
Istanbul, TÜRKİYE

THE PRESENTATION OF THE VILLAGE AND THE RATIONALS OF THE PROJECT

104 Children, 37 Staff, 3 Months

Protection and Welfare Village for Children (Bolluca) is a living space for children that are under the protection of the government through the Social Services Law. These children are not apt for adoption, are not physically handicapped and also are not separated from their siblings. The village consists of two style houses, in which the children dwell, youth houses, a library, a kinder garden, an administrative office and a storage. In each house a mother lives with a maximum of 7 children. Additionally aunts who manage the houses during the mothers' annual leave, leaders of male and female youths, guards, a gardener and other auxiliary staff members live in the village.

Most of the children in the village are under protection due to socio-economic deprivation and family disruptions, while some others due to risky life conditions, like physical and emotional neglect and abuse. The environment in which the child lives and is brought up, the bringing up approach of the care-givers and the quality of the relationships the child forms with other family members affect the child's whole life, relationships and mental health. Not only do the children establish relationships with their caregivers on the bases of physical upkeep and nurturing, but they also establish social and psychological bonds. This type of social and psychological relationship formed between the child and the caregiver constitutes the essence of the child's healthy development. The quality of the relationship between the child and the caregiver influences child's whole life.



In this sense, ***Istanbul Psychodrama Institute*** aims to improve the healthy family environment and supportive social surroundings of these children and train all the responsible staff as much as possible through the method of psychodrama. By doing so, the Institute also aims to help the children gain the necessary skills to be adults able to determine their own values and goals, and to possess the necessary skills for relationships and adaptation.

PSYCHODRAMA TEAM

All the work has been carried out by 2 therapists specialised in adolescence and 8 therapists specialised in child psychology, which adds up to a total of 10 psychodramatists, as a part of Istanbul Psychodrama Institute, and under the supervision of Deniz Altınay, president of the Institute. An international sponsor company funded all the works conducted in the process of the project.

PSYCHODRAMATIC PROCESS

In the project, for children and adolescents were systematically organised in psychodrama groups. Moreover for the younger children and the special children who needed individual assistance along the group process, individual sessions were held. At the same time, Sociometric Tests have been applied to all the children and adolescents in the village. Furthermore, for children with a question of growth deficiency, intelligence and development tests have been applied.

The project began with an *introductory sociodrama session with the large group* of attendees that include all the village workers and all psychodramatist. After the opening session, diagnostic scanning groups were applied for two weeks, followed by psychodrama therapy groups with children and adolescents. At the same time, groups with mothers, aunts,



youth leaders and male staff were held. The project was finalised with *Playback Theatre* in the village theatre, which was performed during the last week of the project.

Within the context of the project, a total of 95 people - 70 children and adolescents, 13 mothers-aunts and 12 male staff -- were included. During the 3 months of the project, a total of 108 psychodrama group works were held.

Warm Up with the Large Group: At the beginning of the project a large psychodrama session was held with a total of 42 people, including village staff consisting of 31 people -- management staff, village mothers and aunts, youth leaders and other staff -- and the psychodramatists consisting of 11 people. After the large group session led by Deniz Altınay, the group was divided into smaller groups. According to the needs and expectations of the groups, small groups continued with the psychodramatic applications. In the end, all the small groups were assembled for evaluation.

Small Groups for Encounter and Diagnosis: For the first two weeks of the project, the therapists evaluated the children in the diagnostic and scanning groups, which were divided according to the ages. As a result of this evaluation, psychodrama therapy groups were formed. According to the observations from the diagnostic scanning groups, children were gathered in appropriate groups and the therapists moved on to therapy groups.

Child Psychodrama Groups: The child groups were formed according to the evaluations from the first two weeks of scanning groups, and the development levels of the children. The groups consisted of minimum 4, maximum 7 children from the ages of 6-10. In the project, a total of 6 children groups were held. A therapist and a co-therapist carried out each group. Groups took place every week, and lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes per session. Main issues of the children to be worked on were deprivation, violence and poor living conditions that they had been exposed to in the environment they originally come from. Among these main issues, problems concerning the separation from their families and adaptation to a new mother and a new environment were included. In this context, the sample of children that were included consisted of very special groups with intertwined traumas and pathologies. For this reason, the group processes were pre-structured and included very delicately chosen warm-up games and limited anger release techniques. At the beginning of the groups, applications intended for cohesion were used. Following these applications, the subjects of sibling rivalry and communication problems within the family were brought up. By dealing with these subjects, works towards the development of empathy and problem solving abilities were held.

Adolescent Psychodrama Groups: There were 4 separate adolescent groups: 1 pre-adolescent group, 1 middle school group, 1 female adolescent group and 1 male adolescent group. In the adolescent groups a minimum of 5, a maximum of 9 adolescents were included. The groups were carried out once a week, lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes per session.

After the scanning groups, separate groups were organised due to the gender differences in adolescence. The main topics of the groups were gender identity and family and peer relationships.

Mothers- Aunts- Youth Leaders Psychodrama Group: This group consisted of 13 people, were carried out every week and lasted 2 hours per session. The mothers, aunts and youth leaders who spend 24 hours taking care of each child individually, taking care of all their problems and expectations, are under heavy stress. In accordance with their conditions, the group exercises were based on improving communication skills within the village and providing support for each other; moreover warm-up games which aim to develop individual awareness were included. The mothers-aunts, who were very much in need of these works for themselves, were later provided creativity and spontaneity exercises aiming towards awareness of their children, empathy and improvement of their problem solving skills.

Village Male Staff Psychodrama Group: This group was composed of 13 male staff. The group work especially based on being a role model, sharing responsibility and empathy skills.

Closure and Evaluation with Playback Theatre: In the last week, the whole village staff, children, therapists and a couple of authorised officers from the sponsor company participated as the audience in the Playback Theatre performance. Directed by Deniz Altınay, Istanbul Spontaneity Theatre (Playback Theatre) actors' performance was in the form of the whole project's feedback session. At the end of all applications, the children's development evaluation reports, written by the therapists, were included in the files of the children of the village.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT

Based on to the feedback from mothers-aunts and from the children themselves gathered during the playback theatre performance, main gains from the project can be summarised as follows:

The children and the adolescents:

- are in a better relationship with their siblings, mothers and have improved their communication skills among their friends,
- have increased their empathy abilities,
- show significant increase in self-expression,
- show generally less aggressive and impulsive behaviours,
- prepare themselves for an activity without being warned and have gain responsibility skills,
- are more positive and more motivated towards life,
- state that they enjoyed the groups very much and had much fun.

Moreover mothers and aunts stated that with the help of the mother-aunt groups, they gained a different point of view, relaxed, got to know each other more closely, now have more trustworthy relationships among themselves, and feel the increase of the support of each other. Moreover, they stated that this was the first time they ever really trusted a professional crew that has come to the village.

This project is important, in terms of being a social responsibility project, covering a large population. On the other hand, after this process, which lasted 3 months, significant and permanent changes were observed on the children, adolescents and the other staff. This fact is an adequate proof of psychodrama's therapeutic impact on large groups.

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