



## **Impact of our training on the work of child care professionals in Armenia**

A preliminary research study shows the positive impacts of ACT International's training programme for health workers caring for some of Armenia's most vulnerable children, including refugees from the Syrian conflict.

In November 2019, the Children's Support Center Foundation hosted training for Armenian child care professionals in the capital Yerevan. The Foundation cares for children who have suffered a range of traumas such as loss of family, persecution and abuse. The Foundation, which is assisting the Armenian Government's programme of social work reform, invited us to train 28 state and voluntary-funded children's social workers and psychologists in our Children's Accelerated Trauma Technique or 'CATT'.

To help us evaluate the impact of our training, we commissioned a research study by Eve Hatcher who has subsequently been awarded an MA in Human Rights by the University of Sussex. The aim of her research was to assess the impact of this child-focused therapy on professional practice and how it relates to the wider context of mental health and stigma in a country that is poorly resourced and struggling to emerge from a troubled history.

Of the 26 professionals who completed the CATT training, 16 agreed to take part in the research, which involved a questionnaire and in-depth interviews and was conducted in accordance with the University's ethical guidelines. Although the research was small in scale and hampered by restrictions related to COVID-19, its findings on the impact of CATT training are encouraging.

All those who took part agreed that it had helped them in their day-to-day work with children.

- "The training was informative and detailed, learning to be more flexible in my work, especially with children learning how to cope with stress, enriching the tools and knowledge I had before"
- "The information and the training was very good, well organised and that helped us to understand more precisely the child's problems"
- "I work with traumatised people mostly and it's enlarged my understanding of trauma, my understanding of some special effects of childhood trauma."

13 of those we trained had since used the technique and nearly 80 percent of those felt that the child had a reduction in distressing symptoms. One of them pointed out that the CATT protocol provided "a good way of non-verbal communication" for children who were too traumatised to put their feelings into words. Another commented, "In the case I worked on, the child became more relaxed, the troubles and anxiety reduced."

Participants said that their training had improved their knowledge of children's rights and how to apply them. They agreed that CATT's child-focused techniques were in keeping with wider social and cultural change. Furthermore, they were successful in empowering children, building their self-confidence and helping them think independently.

- "Empowerment is the secret. When you let the child understand that whatever they are doing is good, you are inspiring the child and making them feel more confident and giving wings to fly"

As well as helping to improve the outcomes for individual children, the research study indicates that CATT training has potential benefits for the wider community. Participants told us that Armenia's record on recognising and treating mental health was poor but 85 percent felt they were now better placed to educate families about mental health and thus reduce the stigma.

ACT International Chair of Trustees, Stella Charman, wishes to thank Eve for her hard work on this study, which would not have been possible without the support of Children's Center psychologist Anush Gabrielyan, who acted as both interpreter and adviser. It demonstrates that our training has made a valuable contribution to improving children's lives in Armenia, by enhancing the skill and knowledge of key professionals who work with them. Now we can move to the next stage of training some of them to train others, which will sustain and roll out these new skills to others.

**Summary by Jenny Cuffe, ACT International Trustee January 2021**