

KWD 100 Projects for Peace: Child Development Center, Karachi, Pakistan.
Marya Husain '09, Claremont McKenna College

Introduction:

In Pakistan, the province of Sindh is burgeoning with an ever increasing child labor population. The National Child Labor survey conducted in 1996 by the Federal Bureau of Statistics estimated the number of so-called “economically active” children (otherwise known as child laborers) to be approximately 300,000. As a child’s education can determine his or her pattern in life, my proposed peace project will work toward combating the exploitation of child laborers at the threshold of an industrial area in Karachi. This project will be based on a two pronged approach: providing educational and recreational opportunities to approximately 400 working and street children, and maintaining close ties with employers and parents in order to support and sustain the children’s self-development.

My proposed peace project would be initiated at the Child Development Centre in Sher Shah, Karachi. The Child Development Centre (CDC) is a component of the Sindh Education Foundation’s Child Labour Education Program. The Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) was established in 1992 as an autonomous organization with the goal of undertaking educational advancement in more impoverished areas of Sindh. Currently, the SEF has an extensive and diverse portfolio of projects and programs geared toward the qualitative and quantitative improvement of educational services in 20 districts of Sindh, including the CDC. Karachi is my home, and I have personally witnessed the level of commitment and dedication shown by the CDC and its employees. Their two main concerns are the lack of funds which prevent the execution of many projects, and the deficiency of educated youth interested in developing a career with non-profit organizations. Their director has been very appreciative of the interest I take in their projects, and has ensured me of the organization’s full support and encouragement at every step of my project.

Overview

With the help of resources provided by the CDC and student volunteers from various local high schools, the implementation methodology of my peace project will work under the following objectives:

- To support working and non-working children through provision of open, challenging and free learning opportunities. I will personally facilitate group building activities and hold discussions in safe space in order to ensure that each child’s privacy is maintained.
- To introduce health interventions for children and promote awareness regarding critical health issues amongst employers, parents and community. Due to the fact that the importance of health is generally under stressed, my program will focus on addressing health concerns in order to improve children’s wellbeing so that they are active and driven to make a future for themselves. I will arrange a weekly talk by a professional physician on the basics of hygiene and health care.
- To introduce opportunities for vocational skills for children as part of learning and income generation. Through vocational skills not only will children gain academic education, but they will also be able to secure financial independence for themselves in the future.
- To establish effective communication with parents to make them aware of the need to educate their children, as well as employers and other stakeholders for their participation in children’s self-development process and in improving the efficacy of CDC. Parents often vehemently discourage their children to go out and seek education and force them to contribute to the households’ insufficient finances.

Peace Project for Working Children:

The 400 children who will be selected to participate in my peace project will belong to diverse backgrounds of ethnic groups, castes, and faiths. As part of the evolving learning framework adopted by the CDC, my peace project will create a learning environment that will promote critical thinking, appreciation for diversity, value for culture, care for environment, and love for self, family and peers. As a result, my peace project is anticipated to foster an open environment and a healthy atmosphere at the CDC. The program is reliant on a significant number of volunteers, many of which who have already expressed interest and commitment to the program. The provision of incentives and recognition given to volunteer staff members will be entirely my responsibility.

After its successful execution, my peace project will be sustained through its volunteer staff members who will commit to working with the children one day a week during weekends. At the end of the program, I will

KWD 100 Projects for Peace: Child Development Center, Karachi, Pakistan.
Marya Husain '09, Claremont McKenna College

choose a head volunteer who will report to the CDC on a weekly basis and provide monthly reports on the progress being made by the children. With my family located in Karachi, I will be able to maintain a moderate amount of involvement in the program after the summer.

During the two-month implementation of the Peace Project, multiple social and intellectual ventures will be put into action by my entire team. Some of these include:

- **Academic education:** High school juniors and seniors from local private schools will be recommended to participate and recruited as volunteer teachers [including myself] for the program. An academic teaching session will be held every day for 3 hours, which will also include time to complete homework. Volunteers will be given recognition for their community service and level of contribution.
- **Creation of small documentaries on a variety of cultural practices:** Children will be taken to a local university, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, where they will partake in two or three sessions conducted by a current student about the basics of using cameras and other necessary technology. The children will be asked to work in groups under my supervision, and the topic of these documentaries will be left to their creativity.
- **Awareness sessions on themes of tolerance, peace and manifestations of violence:** A major cause of civilian violence in Pakistan is due to religious animosity between various sects. These educational sessions conducted by myself, other volunteers, and professional educators will emphasize, and be geared towards, bridging the gap between Shia's, Sunni's, and other religious sects prevalent in Pakistan. These awareness sessions will encourage students to reach out to others who are dissimilar to them.
- **Peace Walks/ Rallies:** These will be held in collaboration with other non-profit, non governmental organizations working towards the advancement of human rights. I have personally spoken to various NGOs such as Aahung, a voluntary social welfare agency, and the Human Rights Group of Pakistan for their support in my efforts, to which they have consented.
- **Candle light vigils**
- **Center-level student activities:**
 - Poetry competitions
 - Speech competitions
 - Arts and crafts exhibition of children's work on 'peace' theme. The exhibit will be hung in each of the schools that draws volunteer teachers and staff members.
 - Celebrating Peace day alongside Independence Day on Tuesday, August 14th, 2007.
- **Visits/talks with notable individuals:** I have organized regular visits/talks with notable individuals such as Anita Ghulam Ali, former minister of Education in Pakistan.
- **Seminar on *Recognizing Diversity at home, community and the world*:** This seminar will be held in the last few days of the program. It will serve as a culmination of everything that the students have gained in the past 2 months. Renowned speakers, well known sports men and women, parents, and famous educators will be invited to this day-long event where students will perform acts, be given awards for their involvement, and have the opportunity to not only listen to, but also meet some famous individuals.

For learning to be meaningful, parents, employers, and community members will be closely involved in my peace project. They will be invited to the Centre-level exhibition, celebrations, feedback sessions, seminars and discussion circles, and will be encouraged to give their input and maintain contact with the CDC to work towards a better future for their children.

My peace project will help guide children to appreciate diversity in the tribal, cultural and indigenous practices, customs, and traditions of the people residing in the *Sher Shah* area. Addressing the Shia-Sunni debate, educating children in the workings of the world so that they can be a financial asset to their families will function as the first step towards peace on a micro as well as macro level. This, in turn, will result in more harmonious relationships at the grassroots level, as well as across communities.