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Junior CAREGIVER PROGRAM



Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) led the design and implementation of the Early Childhood Caregiver Professional Development and Certification Program or Junior Caregiver Program (JCP), an initiative funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). This program addressed two challenges facing in Rwanda: school readiness for disadvantaged children and unemployment among female youth.

JUNIOR CAREGIVER
PROGRAM

EQUIPPING YOUNG WOMEN WITH MARKETABLE SKILLS

Over two years, the JCP trained and certified unemployed young women and promoted better school readiness among children attending local ECD centers. The training participants had completed at least nine years of basic education as early childhood development (ECD) caregivers and ranged in age from 16 to 37 years old, with an average age of 23.

Two local implementing partners trained caregivers in a new, play-centered approach to teaching pre-primary students that not only focuses on children's cognitive development (literacy and numeracy skills) but also prepares them for school through physical and social-emotional development. Upon completion of the ECD caregiver training, 158 of the young women were placed as interns with ECD centers where they used holistic child-centered teaching practices with pre-primary children. Additionally, Rwanda's Workforce Development Authority (WDA) approached EDC about aligning the JCP curriculum with the formal TVET¹ system to create new occupational tracks. Executive-level authorities from the Rwanda Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), Rwanda Education Board (REB), and WDA met with EDC technical staff to identify possible occupations that could use the curriculum. Discussions involved aligning these occupations with the TVET qualification framework to ensure future implementation of ECD training.

¹ TVET stands for technical and vocational education and training.



THEORY OF CHANGE



for the IfE project, funded by DFID (2013-2015)

1 EDC's Established Approach

ECD CAREGIVER CURRICULUM developed



TRAINING IN HOLISTIC ECD METHODS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP for unemployed female youth



INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT at ECD centers



2 Short-term Outcomes

HOLISTIC ECD METHODS USED IN THE CLASSROOM

Caregivers gain on-the-job experience and utilize holistic, play-based ECD methods



IMPROVED SUPPORT FOR ECD METHODS by ECD centers, parents and community



3 Long-term Outcomes

FEMALE YOUTH FIND JOBS OR START ECD CENTERS With ECD training and job experience, youth find jobs



IMPROVED SCHOOL READINESS OF CHILDREN (literacy, numeracy, physical development and social emotional development)



ECD TEACHING METHODS INTEGRATED INTO TVET CURRICULUM



Pilot starts Nov 2016



A caregiver from Musanze engaging children in the classroom with ECD skills.

Figure 1. JCP's Theory of Change demonstrates how unemployed young women benefited from short- and long-term outcomes.

AN ECD CAREGIVER TRAINING MODEL

EDC developed and utilized materials and training for the project that reflected the current knowledge and best practices in early childhood education established over the previous two decades. For example, research showed that exposing preschool children to new ideas while introducing new vocabulary and developing fine motor skills correlated with later educational success.

EDC's caregiver training curriculum assisted caregivers to purposefully work with children by (1) building on children's natural interest in play and (2) establishing a nurturing and supportive relationship between adult (caregiver) and child, a critical factor in any successful ECD classroom.

The ECD caregivers were engaged in a three-month internship in ECD centers, with coaching and mentoring provided by the project. After the internship, the project matched these caregivers with centers for permanent employment.

EMPLOYMENT BOOST FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN RWANDA

By the end of the program, female youth employment had increased from 24 to 40 percent. Currently, the majority of the JCP-trained young women (88.3%) are employed as caregivers at ECD centers, and about 5 percent of the employed caregivers have reported that they are running their own ECD centers.

All photos taken by EDC staff implementing the JCP.

PROJECT INDICATORS

Percent of trainees satisfied with training	92%
Percent of trainees with increased knowledge of ECD as a result of training	94.6%
Number of trainees placed in ECD centers	158
Percent of placed trainees applying ECD practices from the curriculum	99.3%
Percent of tested children with improved school readiness, compared with children in comparison centers	58%

IMPACT OF THE JCP ON CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES **ADDRESSING FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT**

A key component of the JCP's Theory of Change was to address female youth unemployment by training young women in ECD and placing them in internships. To assess the impact of the JCP on the young women who participated in the program, a follow-up survey was administered to 150 participants. Overall, participants reported that they were very satisfied with their experience, particularly with the skills gained through their internships, as well as with the ECD content itself, which they felt had adequately prepared them for these internships.

Participants also reported a high level of confidence that they possessed the skills to find and retain employment after completing the program. Before the JCP, the majority of the young women surveyed (48.7%) were "idle," neither working nor studying; one quarter of the young women were employed; and the remaining quarter were students. By the end of the program, female youth employment had significantly increased from 24 to 40 percent, which suggested that the project contributed to reduced unemployment for these young women.

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES

In addition to addressing female unemployment, another component of the JCP was to garner support for holistic play-based ECD instruction in Rwandan communities. The project's approach was two-fold: addressing the government needs of implementing their ECD policy, while raising awareness and mobilizing parents and communities to support ECD programs. EDC found that directors' and parents' perceptions about ECD instruction shifted positively due to the project's outreach efforts. Parents appreciated the changes in their children, especially in their increased interest in learning.

Additionally, ECD center directors who were involved in the project were impressed with the caregivers who interned for them. These directors noted a difference between the teaching methods of the JCP-trained caregivers and the existing caregivers, particularly their increased interaction with children in their classrooms, their use of positive discipline instead of corporal punishment, and lesson planning. Furthermore, the directors noted that children in classrooms taught by JCP-trained caregivers demonstrated improved interest in learning, a decrease in absenteeism, and stronger social development.

EDC also conducted a literacy and numeracy knowledge assessment to measure the cognitive development of children in the JCP. Analysis of urban versus rural children for both the literacy and numeracy tests revealed an interesting trend. While urban learners performed better in both subjects at pre-test, the gap between rural and urban learners in literacy and numeracy achievement closed from pre-test to post-test.

**"I am nowadays
encouraging other
parents to play with their
kids because I now know
the importance of games
in holistic development of
any child."**

—Parent from Kampanga

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“Starting a business doesn’t require a lot of money, even with a very small capital you can start a business if you are willing.”

—Pascasie Uwera (below), 25



EMPOWERED TO BE HER OWN BOSS

Before Pascasie Uwera enrolled in the JCP, she cared for the children in her neighborhood and volunteered at a nearby nongovernmental organization. During the JCP training, she explored the idea of starting her own ECD center because she knew there were no affordable child-care options in Gisozi, a low-income neighborhood of Kigali city. Pascasie spoke with parents in her community about the opportunity and gained the support of the local government officials. Parents were so thrilled to have their children in Pascasie’s care that some families transferred their children from other centers to her center, the EMEB Nursery School.

Pascasie opened her center in January 2015 with 15 children and has already outgrown the space. She uses games to teach her students, and she has observed a difference in the children’s learning gains.

“Other teachers don’t use games, and children can go home and recite, but it’s not practical knowledge,” says Pascasie. “My methods use games to show them rather than tell them.”

Pascasie’s earnings are enough to cover her center’s operational costs, as well as to pay for her university fees. Her goal is to move her ECD center to a larger space where she can offer three classes for different age groups.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SCALABLE SOLUTIONS

Prior to implementing the JCP program, EDC recognized the initiative as a promising opportunity that could address multiple issues: unemployment, a lack of school readiness, and the need for a more effective preschool experience for Rwandan children.

In 2010, the Rwandan government mandated that by 2017 each cell (small local unit) of the country be equipped with an ECD center. Schools however, struggle to find space for new children and qualified early childhood education teachers. Furthermore, early childhood education is not free. Parents are responsible for paying teachers’ salaries, as preschool is not yet under the mandate of the Ministry of Education.

The success of the JCP has laid the groundwork for the scale-up of a holistic, play-based ECD program and the related certification of ECD caregivers in Rwanda. EDC’s collaboration with the WDA and the REB has also catalyzed the process of aligning the JCP curriculum with the formal TVET system to create new occupational tracks within the TVET qualification framework. These achievements ensure that the ECD curriculum and practices will continue to be implemented in the future.



Education Development Center, Inc.
43 Foundry Avenue, Waltham, MA 02453-8313
Ph: (617) 969-7100 Web: edc.org

Boston | Chicago | New York | Washington, D.C.