



Randolph Oudemans, founder of REACT, with a resident of a Sumatran orphanage

TRAINING THE CAREGIVERS

In Indonesia's residential childcare facilities, which care for thousands of needy children, there is a drastic lack of training for the staff. A non-profit organization has stepped forward to make a change.

BY CLAIRE HENDY

Imagine sending your kids to a school where the teachers had never been trained. It can be a frightening thought, but today in Indonesia there are over 5,000 residential facilities caring for more than 500,000 orphaned and impoverished children. Among these institutions, there are vast differences. Some are public and some are private, some are Muslim, while others are Christian or Hindu, and some are located in large cities while the rest are in rural villages.

However, one thing that they all share is that few of them provide regular or systematic training for their personnel, whether it is for a childcare provider, manager or kitchen staff.

GIVING ADEQUATE TRAINING

That is why non-profit organization REACT based in Singapore, with a UWCSEA (United World College South East Asia) Global Concern organization called Bali Bridges, started an annual conference in 2008 called "Caring for the Caregiver". Their goal is simple – bring together those working in various children's residential institutions to increase their knowledge and improve their childcare skills.

REACT strongly believes that with adequate and effective training, there is a win-win – the morale and effectiveness of the staff increases, the quality and

effectiveness of the programs they have improved, and more importantly, the children benefit. The non-profit organization, which was originally registered in France in 2003 and later expanded with a Singapore registration in 2005, provides support to small-scale organizations working directly with children, their families and their communities. It helps in particular with fulfilling the children's most basic needs of food, shelter, education, self-esteem and love.

The work it is doing for the caregivers fills an important need and those attending acknowledge this. I Putu Franky Wardana, the head of a Widhya Asih orphanage in Bali, who participated in the program last year, shared his learning experience: "What I learned was to map the strengths and weaknesses of the team. The strong message of the conference was that the program had to be built around the children. As the head of an orphanage, I also learned a more productive and effective way to lead my staff."

Added another participant last year, Nengeh Swikrama, director of the Widhya Asih group: "It was extremely helpful to learn to create a strategic plan and a working draft based on our priorities. The orphanage management then has clear guidelines to follow in their work."

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He said: "Before taking the training, I had often been called on to address children regarding poor behavior. Since the caregiver training, I no longer scold and criticize. Instead I use one of the communication skills from the conference, i.e. to open a conversation with the child. Using this approach, I am able to give him or her the freedom to talk about himself or herself, about his burden, his or her family situation and relationships with friends and caregivers. You can imagine the results of that conversation – a significant change in attitude from negative to positive. The best way to talk to a child is 'heart to heart.'"

THE THIRD CONFERENCE

Successful, well-run orphanages are extremely complex and very challenging to administer. To be effective in their demanding jobs, the caregivers need coaching and training. This year, REACT will hold its third annual conference "Caring for the Caregiver," from 24 to 26 November 2010 in Bali.

This year's Caring for the Caregiver conference, participants will come from Sumatra, Java and Bali, and they will spend three days at workshops and lectures on a myriad of topics, including:

- Communications
- Building confident relationships
- Strategic planning
- Care planning and evaluation
- Child protection: Policy and practice
- Activities planning and community integration
- Building and sustaining donor communities
- Health – HIV/AIDS, sex education and hygiene

- Psychological and emotional challenges
- Preparing children for adult life

Speakers at the event are drawn from all areas concerned with the challenge of improving the quality and effectiveness of care in these institutions. They include: Randolph Oudemans, president and founder of REACT; Craig Coutts, principal, UWCSEA; I Nyoman Yohanes, director of Widhya Asih III Orphanage, Bali; Cynthia Owens, communications and public relations consultant, Singapore; Magdalena Sitorus, Indonesian Child Protection Commission; and Tata Sudrajat, head of Save the Children-Indonesia.

REACT also has big plans for next year. It plans to reach out to institutions in other countries as early as next year with the skills training. Training manuals for every module/topic are being developed by experts in each area in order to ensure that standards meet, and even surpass, local Governmental and social services guidelines.

To help the children, it starts with giving much needed skills to those dealing with them. Only then, can progress be made. 

Claire HENDY is the co-founder of REACT and manages outreach for REACT in Singapore and coordinates the organization's activities on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. Her husband Randolph Oudemans, the founder of REACT, grew up in Indonesia and worked as a teacher and youth director in several countries including Australia, France and US. He has a passion for working with children and youth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

REACT – www.react-react.com

Bali Bridges – www.balibridges.org



Acrobatic performance by the children



Workshop at the second REACT conference



A caregiver on an outing with the children



Caregivers



The orphanage manager