

Lewis & Clark College
Cultivating Peace:
Empowering the Orphaned Children of Criamar in Ceilândia, Brazil
In partnership with Criamar, Escola Americana Brasília, and UNICEF
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PURPOSE

We seek to fulfill the fundamental need for peace and familial stability among the orphaned children of The House of the Child Ana Maria Ribeiro (Criamar) in Ceilândia, Brazil. Orphans are often neglected and abused and our goal is to create a family-oriented environment in which they may live a life undisturbed by violence. We aspire to both provide the children with resources and skills for their future and to nurture their potential to become peaceful contributors to society.

BACKGROUND

The presence of vast numbers of unsupervised and unprotected children is commonplace in Latin America, especially in Brazil.ⁱ Thirty-five percent of Brazilian children between the ages of seven and fifteen are not enrolled in school and 1,000 children die from malnutrition and hunger each day.ⁱⁱ These children demonstrate high rates of drug abuse and violent behavior. Many attempts have been made to mitigate these problems.ⁱⁱⁱ Orphaned children in Brazil are often sent to crowded, abusive treatment centers or reform schools.^{iv} They take a correctional approach towards the children, viewing them as delinquents. Orphans are not delinquents, but are the victims of circumstances outside of their control. Rather than a correctional or disciplinary approach, a rehabilitative approach should be taken.

Ceilândia, a satellite town near Brasília, was created by the government in the 1970s to reduce the prevalence of shantytowns within the capital's borders. Thousands of poverty stricken individuals were transported from Brasília to bare lots over twenty miles away from the city. Ceilândia was designed by the federal government to be a dumping site for the poor. The name Ceilândia comes from the abbreviation "CEI" for Centro de Erradicação de Invasões (Squatters Eradication Center). Due to exceptionally poor socioeconomic conditions within Ceilândia, hundreds of children have been abandoned and are deprived of family conviviality.

Criamar is a non-governmental, nonprofit entity located in Ceilândia that provides care for sixty children and adolescents. The children at Criamar have both been neglected and have suffered from physical abuse. Criamar provides them with a safe haven from the otherwise destitute environment. The founders attempt to provide each child with food, clothing, a basic education, and a family environment. However, funds for even basic living necessities are scarce.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

1) Interactive Learning Center—ongoing

Criamar strives to provide a safe, livable environment for its children. However, its infrastructure is poor: paint is chipping and rooms lack lighting and fans. With the help and direction of its current residents we propose to renovate existing structures. In *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell illustrates how a few environmental changes can lead to major changes.^v He argues that the decline in violent crimes that occurred in New York City in the 1990s was in a large part due to the elimination of minor signs of deterioration, such as graffiti. Our renovations at Criamar will have a similar impact on the promotion of peace.

We will also create an Interactive Learning Center. Currently there are no computers at Criamar. This center will provide the children with access to computers and educational software. Studies have demonstrated that access to technology provides valuable educational opportunities and increases motivation.^{vi} A basic knowledge of technology, such as typing, is vital for job placement. The computers will also serve as an important tool for social moms.

The last component of the Interactive Learning Center is the sustainable chicken rearing and gardening program. The benefits of this program will be threefold. First, it will provide nutritional food for the children. Second, it will increase the aesthetic appeal of the environment. Finally, the program will provide the children with valuable educational and leadership opportunities. We will train the older children to mentor the younger children, making the program sustainable. Programs such as these give children a way to "let off steam," therefore reducing the frequency of violence.^{vii}

2) UNICEF Training—first week

As Criamar does not receive any funding from the Brazilian government and must spend its money on food for the children, it can only afford to employ a staff of four and thus relies on permanent volunteers. These volunteers, or "social moms," have no formal training in childcare or child development. We have arranged to work with Ângela Mariconde, the UNICEF Brazil expert in childcare and child development, who works from Goiania, a city several hours away from Ceilândia. She will facilitate a weeklong training session. Because there are thirty-four people—four employees, twenty social moms, and the ten children above the age of fifteen—who need to be trained, the trainer requires our assistance to organize the workshops. The trainer will instruct the employees and volunteers on how best to simulate a family environment for the children. Criamar is striving to go beyond what most orphanages in Brazil must settle for. The dedicated employees and volunteers recognize that children need to grow up in a family environment in order to actualize their potential. This training would not be possible without our contribution and labor.

3) Peace Workshop Series—twice a week for six weeks

This section of our project directly addresses the need for peace among the orphans of Ceilândia. We will be working closely with child psychologist, Rose Ramondt, to develop a workshop curriculum appropriate for children of various ages. Each week we will explore a different theme tied closely to the troubles faced by the children of Criamar. We intend to enhance the prospects for peace, stability, and community. Below is a brief description of each peace workshop theme.

Self-Esteem: Violence and denigration can crush the self-esteem of a child. This workshop will foster a sense of inclusion and self-worth. It has two components: an art project where the children will be asked to draw how they view themselves and choose several words to describe their best qualities, followed by a focused group discussion about valuing ourselves and others.

Children's Rights: This theme follows the guidelines for children's rights outlined by the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child and aims to educate about basic freedoms and rights.^{viii} The children will draft their own bill of rights to explain what they need to live peaceful lives.

Conflict Resolution: Here we emphasize responsible social behavior and teach about fairness and avoiding abusive actions. Children will practice problem-solving skills as they work together to design skits that demonstrate peaceful conflict resolution. James Cotton is certified in non-violent crisis intervention and his knowledge in this field will be invaluable in implementing this section of the workshop. The children will learn to ask questions, discuss their feelings, cooperate with one another, grant forgiveness, and empathize with each other.

Response and Prevention of Sexual Abuse: Casey Nelson's experience in the coordination and implementation of sexual assault programming under the supervision of Melissa Osmond will be useful in creating appropriate material for this workshop. The workshop uses scenarios and pictures to discuss sexual abuse in a way that is accessible to children. Children's rights and self-protection are emphasized and communication will again be used as a tool towards peace.

Public Safety: For this workshop we will invite a police officer from the Federal District of Brasília to discuss public safety. In order to dispel fear children may have about the police, we will ask the officer to speak about the police's role as a protector of peace. The children will be asked to generate questions for the officer prior to his visit and after the presentation we will facilitate a discussion. We will also discuss what to do in violent situations outside the orphanage.

Healthy Communication: This workshop focuses on the importance of healthy communication, using respectful language, and listening to others. The children will learn how to rephrase unproductive and aggressive statements. The skill of effective communication will help ameliorate possible conflicts.

4) Finding Common Ground: Playing for Peace—once a week for six weeks

Sports and games reconcile people. An example of this is the Soccer for Peace program in Israel, in which Jewish and Palestinian children visit a soccer camp and learn to appreciate each other.^{ix} Inspired by this model, we would like to organize small-scale sports events at Criamar to make the orphans more comfortable with other children from the neighborhood. Playing for Peace will reach out to the Criamar orphans and other children, providing a safe space for integration, interaction, and peace building. We will begin with planning meetings where the children, especially the older ones, are closely involved in the design of their play space. Criamar has a designated outdoor recreation area that is in a state of disrepair and with the children's assistance we will restore and equip the play area. Each week, we will provide a nutritious snack and an opportunity for children from the surrounding community to play and mingle with the Criamar children. We will organize small soccer tournaments, employing the enthusiasm and experience of soccer players James Cotton and Betto van Waarden, and we will supervise games for the younger children. Through Playing for Peace we will enhance the children's cooperation, confidence, and help them to regain the trust in others that they may have lost through years of neglect. The Playing for Peace initiative will encourage more open and friendly relationships in the community and simultaneously give the children of Ceilândia a safe alternative to the violence and drugs of the favela.

IMPACT, SUSTAINABILITY, AND FEASIBILITY

The UNICEF training will reach thirty-four people directly. As the social moms use their new knowledge and skills at Criamar, the benefits will be passed on to all the children they care for now and in the future. In this way, the impact will be long lasting and sustainable. The Interactive Learning Center, which includes the computers and books, is a resource that the children will enjoy and benefit from long after we depart. The computer technician at Escola Americana Brasília, a partner institution of Criamar, has agreed to provide maintenance for the computers free of charge. The Peace Workshop Series will provide information and tools that can be incorporated into the everyday lives of the sixty children at Criamar. Playing For Peace will reach an estimated forty children outside of Criamar in Ceilândia and begin to breakdown the isolation of the sixty Criamar orphans. All of our program components seek to empower the Criamar caregivers (employees and volunteers) and the children by giving them both knowledge and resources that will remain with them after the completion of our project.

A vital aspect of our project is sharing our experiences with our fellow students and community members upon our return. We want to both raise awareness of the hardships these children face and inspire others to help. We plan to do this in three ways. Mr. Hank Stern, News Editor of Willamette Week, has agreed to write an ongoing article about our project in Brazil. He will follow our progress through a series of four articles: a preliminary article outlining what we intend to do and one article every two weeks while we are there. We will update him as to our progress by email every week. Because Willamette Week reaches 90,000 people each week, the impact of our project will stretch far beyond the Lewis & Clark College campus and affirm our presence in the Portland community.^x We will also be in contact with LC Associate Vice President for Communications Tom Krattenmaker while we are abroad. To ensure that the impact of our project reaches as many of our fellow students as possible, we plan to present our project to the Lewis & Clark community at Amnesty International, Speaking of Diversity, and the Multicultural Symposium. We also intend to recount our experiences to Professor Rima DasGupta's Global Inequality class and Professor Elliot Young's Latin American History class. In addition, two of us will not be graduating until 2010 and will therefore be a valuable resource to future 100 Projects for Peace applicants.

We realize that this project is ambitious. However, we are confident that with proper preparation throughout this semester, the timeline we have set, and a division of tasks between the four of us, we can achieve our goals.

ⁱ James A. Inciardi and Hilary L. Surratt. "Children in the Streets of Brazil: Drug Use, Crime, Violence, and HIV Risks." 1997.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Evelyn Eisenstein. "Street Youth: Social Imbalance and Health Risks." *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health* 29:46-49, 1993.

^{iv} Mark W. Lusk. "Street Children Programs in Latin America." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 16:55-77, 1989.

^v Malcolm Gladwell. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Little Brown, 2000, citing James Q. Wilson, "Broken Windows." *The Atlantic Monthly*. 1982, 29-38.

^{vi} <http://life.familyeducation.com/computers.com>

^{vii} <http://kids.garden.org>

^{viii} <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

^{ix} <http://www.soccerforpeace.com>

^x <http://www.wweek.com>