

PROJECT REPORT 2020

COVID-19 RESPONSE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, UGANDA



“My son David is happier and more active having received physio therapy during the home visit from Angel’s centre in August 2020. Due to the high fare costs as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown prevention measures, I was unable to take him for his therapy sessions for four months. This caused him to draw back in his motor skills and mood.” Alice mother to David from Nansana village.



“Every child matters.”

2020

Introduction

In 2020, Cerebral Palsy Africa partnered with Angel's Centre for Children with Special needs (ACCSN) to provide home based care for children with special needs in response to the effects brought about by the COVID-19 novel virus. This is a report showing what was done, what was achieved, successes, challenges and possible solutions. ACCSN worked has reached 71 children in 70 homes in Wakiso district. Cerebral Palsy Africa supported Angel's Centre with 15,000 Euros

Children with special needs necessity routine therapy to avoid secondary health effects such as weight loss or gain, contractures, decline in motor skills and among others. Moreover, some caregivers are not well equipped with knowledge and skills as well as equipment to provide therapy for their children. It is important to note that many of these caregivers are women who have other gender household roles as well as earn income for their families. Some have been abandoned by their spouses and families hence the care burden is heavier on them with the economic constraints brought about COVID-19.

Much as the project was supporting children, it was also reaching out to caregivers by providing psycho social support to help them deal with the stresses of the current situation.

The project objectives were:

1. Increase access to integrated therapy services which includes; Physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language using the home-based approach
2. Train parents in offering home based therapy services to ensure continuity of children receiving services in their homes
3. improve the early learning by ensuring access to water, hygiene and lighting system.

Activities carried out

Conducted a needs assessment to identify the need of every child.

This was conducted among 120 homes to ascertain the physical and psychological need of every child. The needs identified included weight gain and weight loss as a result of poor nutrition practices, decline in motor skills, untreated illnesses such as flu and cough. This was because caregivers could not transport the children to Angel's centre or hospitals due to the tripled fare costs. We worked with Village Health Teams to also identify children that had never been prior supported at Angel's centre. We produced a report to guide our interventions specific to each child and caregivers.

Procured and purchased protective gear for the project staff and care workers

We purchased personal protective gear including overalls, masks, gloves, sanitizers for the 10 project staff and care workers to avoid the spread of COVID-19 especially to the vulnerable children. The workers have also been protected from infections hence improving their level of efficiency and effectiveness.

"Every child matters."



Care workers at ACCSN wearing masks as PPE supported through the project.

Conducted trainings in rehabilitation and parenting skills among caregivers.

70 caregivers were provided with knowledge and skills in rehabilitation for their children. The trainings were practical to enable them administer routine exercises for their children. Caregivers were trained in hygiene activities of daily living training (bathing, dressing up, washing, brushing teeth), social skills training (interactive play, group play activities etc.). The social skills training came in handy for siblings and other family members. The trainings enabled caregivers to understand better ways of handling their children while performing self-care routines, in ways that are safer and more comfortable for both the child and caregiver. The trainings were conducted during the home visits and were suited to the child and family need.

Noeline is one the caregivers who appreciates this training. She is able to exercise her daughter's limbs, do play therapy and properly feed her. This process is helping her bond with her child unlike before. She expresses that it is a two-way therapy for them. Her older child is also involved and in a way it is helping her play and bond with her sibling. Such support has been possible for her through this home based care provided in this project.

"Every child matters."

Napeera Lukia is a mother of 7 with Aminah her second last born having spastic type of cerebral palsy with varying severity and complexity and learning disability. Betty's condition became more severe over time because of irregular physical and occupational therapies which were key regimens of assisted stretching, strengthening, functional tasks, targeted physical activity and exercise.

Since the COVID-19 travel restrictions, Salma had not been able to attend to Betty's therapy at Angel's Centre for four months March 2020. This has compromised Betty's health; she developed contractures, started drooling, lost appetite and got insomnia. Through provision of home based therapy, the secondary disabilities, Betty has gained more appetite and sleeps more peacefully. The home based cared through this project made this possible. As told by Charles Suuna therapist ACCSN.



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This contributed to ensuring safe and friendly community to children with special needs and promoting functional independence through use of assistive devices for families that had them.

Conducted therapy and counseling sessions in the rehabilitation program.

The project supported 3 professional therapists and 3 counselors to provide rehabilitation including Mental stimulation, Therapeutic play activities, mobility and transfer training, Vestibular & sensorimotor stimulation and behavioral modification. At least 2-3 homes were reached in a day. Caregivers were further equipped with knowledge and skills on daily living among children with cerebral palsy including feeding, eating, dressing, toileting, hygiene (bathing, oral hygiene and among others), motor skills. This depends on the child's age, interests, family environment, level of physical and mental functions to mention but a few.

Children and caregivers were equipped with life skills of Instrumental Activities of Daily Living" i.e. actions that were important to independent living but are not necessarily required activities on a daily basis. These were needed for a greater degree of independence for instance moving by one's self in community, handling money.



A therapy session conducted at Daniel's home with the full support of his family.

"Every child matters."



Therapy session to support mobility and transfer training.



Therapy session for sensorimotor stimulation and Behavioural modification.

“We caregivers also feel comforted and encouraged to know that Angel’s centre is committed to the well-being of our children. The therapy and counseling sessions are a great help to us because we are equipped with knowledge and skills to cope and support our children,” said one mother.



ACCSN therapist during a home-based session.

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Installed a power and water supply system for the early learning centre.



Children learning using television and radio at the centre.

The project supported the installation of power supply and plumbing system for the early learning centre. This included. Installation of the system has enabled smooth running of equipment used for the early learning centre such as televisions, speakers for visual learning, edutainment and dance classes. The plumbing has enabled timely access to water for the kitchen, toilets and bathrooms leading to improved hygiene among the children and the entire facility. In addition, children and caretakers have clean water for drinking.

"Every child matters."



Tank installed to provide water at the centre



Tamale- beneficiary at ACCSN washing his hands at one of the sinks.

"Every child matters."

“Children with special needs require great attention when it comes to hygiene. Having access to clean, safe and enough water enables us to attend to them in time. This is also a standard operation procedure for such a structure offering these special services.” Resty caretaker ACCSN.

“Without an adequate power supply, we would not be able to accommodate children for the outpatient / early learning section. Having enough power enables them to study for instance do drawings and interact with each other well.” Damalie Community Rehabilitator.

Through the grant, we were able to set up a hand washing facility for all entrants into the building to further strengthen our hygiene and COVID-19 prevention measures.



Immediate results

- No of children with special needs who have received therapy- 71
- No of parents who are consistently providing home based therapies to their children- 24
- No of households reached to provide trainings- 70
- No of therapists and counselors participating in the program- 6
- Functional power and water supply system

“Every child matters.”



Therapists conducting sessions with the children.

Challenges and opportunities.

We had limited resources in terms of assistive devices and personnel as well as transportation to reach the target households i.e. we met 70 and not 120 as we had planned. This also affected the duration of our sessions with children and caregivers because we wanted to reach as many as we could. We were not able to purchase the type of assistive devices we sought. Therefore, with more resources, we believe that we will make greater impact.

The multiple gender roles of women in their homes and workplaces affect their ability to effectively provide therapy for their children. In this, we see an opportunity of intentionally engaging siblings and significant others to support mothers or grandmothers or aunts to support the children hence relieving the primary caregivers.

It is evident that little attention is given to the nutritional needs of these children due to limited knowledge of caregivers and/or limited availability of food varieties. It is also true that food which serves the nutritional needs of these children is quite expensive. The financial constraints faced by caregivers in this current COVID-19 situation limit their ability to purchase these nutritional foods hence causing the children to have digestive issues. Providing knowledge as well as supporting some caregivers with income-generating activities to meet the needs of their children would be worth it.

Many homes that were supported have limited access to water within their vicinity. This compromises the hygiene for the children with special needs as they may not be bathed regularly, wash their hands, or change clothes as need arises. This situation is worse for girls who have their menstruation. Supporting these homes with simple household water systems such as rain water harvesting tanks will go a long way to reduce the workload of the caregivers and enable them to meet the hygiene needs of their children.

Since we are a learning organization, we also seek to further improve our staff capacity in providing the different therapies to serve the children better. We also seek to improve our documentation and monitoring to track changes and share our work in a more effective way to wider audiences.

“Every child matters.”



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