



Early learning and nurturing care for children displaced by conflict and persecution

MACARTHUR *100&CHANGE* SEMI-FINALIST

- The Sesame Workshop and IRC partnership is one of eight semi-finalists for the MacArthur Foundation's *100&Change* grant (selected out of 1900+ applications)
- The grant will award \$100 million to a single proposal promising “real and measurable progress” toward solving one critical problem of our time
- Winners will be announced in December 2017
- Our partnership will deliver transformative early learning and social-emotional support to millions of children in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon affected by war and displacement

For more information visit:
macfound.org/programs/100change/

Bringing invaluable early learning, laughter, and hope to millions of refugee children.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are embarking on a life-changing, multi-year intervention to bring vital early learning and nurturing care to children and families affected by the ongoing civil war in Syria. The six-year-long conflict has caused massive displacement, exposing children to violence and preventing early learning opportunities that are critical to their well-being. Harnessing the power of Sesame Street, the most trusted preschool educator in the world, and



the IRC, a provider of life-saving assistance to people in crisis contexts for over 80 years, we will create multimedia programming for children affected by the conflict, develop a pliant platform to reach young children and their caregivers wherever they are, and measure how we have impacted their lives.

THE NEED

Today, we are facing the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time. The scale of the refugee crisis is staggering—right now, 65 million people are displaced worldwide, half of whom are children and 12 million of whom are under eight.¹ These children suffer the daily effects of violence and neglect, and are at high risk for experiencing toxic stress, a disruption of neurological and biological processes due to severe, prolonged stress and the absence of nurturing care.² Children who experience toxic stress during critical stages of brain development are at severe risk for impairments that will follow them throughout

their lives: poor physical and mental health, cognitive deficits, and reduced economic earnings. In short, early adversity affects children immediately, has long-term effects on children's lives, and ultimately impacts society at large.

Despite the robust evidence pointing to the need for early childhood development in crisis contexts, the humanitarian system maintains a narrow focus on survival, providing basic needs like food and shelter, while neglecting the critical developmental needs of young children. The lack of attention to early childhood development in the humanitarian response is reflected in funding—

less than 2% of funding goes to education, and just a small fraction of that is dedicated to early childhood interventions.³

Programs with longer-term outcomes, like early childhood development, are vital—refugees today are displaced for an average of 17 years, and for those internally displaced, an average of 23 years. Research shows that nurturing care, including a focus on early learning, is critical to help mitigate the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences.⁴ Children are remarkably resilient—the damage they've suffered can be reversed, if we reach them early.



To meet this challenge, we need a bold new approach to early childhood development, one that is operationally feasible within existing systems, and is long-term and durable. We need a solution that will reach an entire generation.

REFERENCES

¹ "Facts and Figures about Refugees." UNHCR. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>

² Save the Children UK (2017). Invisible Wounds. Retrieved from <https://i.stci.uk/sites/default/files/Invisible%20Wounds%20March%202017.pdf>

³ UNESCO. (2015). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Humanitarian Aid for Education- Why it Matters and Why More is Needed. Paris, UNESCO. (Policy Paper 21). <http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/EFA_GMR_-_Humanitarian_Aid_for_Education__Policy_Paper__June_2015.pdf>

⁴ Britto, et al. (2016). Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development. The Lancet, 389, 91-102. [http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31390-3.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(16)31390-3.pdf)



THE PARTNERSHIP

For almost 50 years, across 150 countries and generations of children, Sesame Workshop has worked locally to create research-based educational content tailored to children's specific needs. Sesame's engaging Muppets have the unique power to impart both simple and difficult lessons, always from a child's perspective.

The IRC responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, working across 40 countries. The IRC has deep roots and relationships in communities and to date, its programs have made a difference in the lives of 23 million people across the globe.

There is no better partnership to take on this challenge.

THE PROJECT

Sesame Workshop and the IRC will deliver a life-changing experience for millions of Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi, and Lebanese children (ages 0-8) that will transform their language, early reading, math, and social-emotional skills. This partnership brings together the power of Sesame's proven educational content and the IRC's expertise in working with children and families in conflict settings.

Our solution addresses the needs of children affected by adversity through a suite of programming and multimedia content:

- New **educational content** with inspiring Muppet role models, tailored to reflect the unique experiences of refugee children
- **Materials** that support mutual respect and understanding within displaced communities, and between displaced and host communities
- **Strategies** that support parents and caregivers in promoting nurturing care, healthy development, and deepening learning experiences
- **Training guides** for formal and informal educators and other service providers working with young children and their caregivers

We will deliver an early childhood intervention that is intense enough to be life-changing, but cost-effective enough to be scalable.

DISTRIBUTION

An evergreen library of global content will be deployed through the IRC's existing partner networks, including schools, community centers, social protection programs, and health centers. We will disseminate content widely via mobile, broadcast, and print media, and also leverage the wider network of service providers supporting refugee communities in the Syrian response region. We will reach families where they are, with content that addresses children's immediate needs and builds a strong foundation for their future well-being.

**If we can reach
these children,
we can teach
these children.
An investment in
their education is
an investment in
a more peaceful,
stable world
for us all.**



RESEARCH AND LEARNING

We have secured funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Open Society Foundations to conduct formative research and initial testing of existing Arabic language Sesame content, together with the IRC team in Jordan. This pilot phase will allow us to create an educational framework that focuses on the needs of young children and caregivers affected by displacement and will also help to inform a broader regional initiative as we move forward.

Beyond the pilot phase, our approach and the research we generate as part of the larger initiative will inform and reshape services being offered in the wider humanitarian system. Research topics will include, for example, how young children and families respond to and engage with the content and

materials, which delivery platforms are most effective, and how behavior change and learning outcomes are impacted by multimedia materials in these settings. We will also invest heavily in an impact evaluation by integrating a randomized control trial in the implementation phase. This trial will assess the intervention's impact on physical development, literacy and numeracy knowledge, and socioemotional skills.

The research we gather will help inform a blueprint for working in future humanitarian crises—creating a framework that can be replicated in other contexts, for generations to come. But this is only the beginning. Additional funding is needed to bring this project to scale and reach refugee children when they need it most.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE, PLEASE CONTACT:

Nada Elattar
Director, Educational Programs
International Social Impact
Sesame Workshop
nada.elattar@sesame.org
+ 1 212 875 6347

Katie Maeve Murphy
Senior Technical Advisor,
Early Childhood Development
International Rescue Committee
katie.murphy@rescue.org
+1 212 551 3000

ABOUT SESAME WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit media and educational organization behind *Sesame Street*, the pioneering television show that has been reaching and teaching children since 1969. Today, Sesame Workshop is an innovative force for change, with a mission to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. We're active in more than 150 countries, serving vulnerable children through a wide range of media, formal education, and philanthropically-funded social impact programs, each grounded in rigorous research and tailored to the needs and cultures of the communities we serve. For more information, please visit sesameworkshop.org.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 40 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities. Learn more at Rescue.org and follow the IRC on Twitter & Facebook.

