

**This newsletter**

**includes:**

- Stories from volunteers working with children.
- Facts and thoughts around working with children.
- Our position on volunteering in orphanages and on corporal punishment.
- News from the Federation.



**ICYE**

# Newsletter

## The Care to Engage Issue

*60th Newsletter*



# Care to Engage

## Dear friends all over the world,

This edition of the ICYE Newsletter is dedicated to one of our most important responsibilities as society and as an organisation - ensuring the safety, dignity and well-being of children.

Children are at the heart of around half of our host projects. Therefore it is important for us to make sure that our volunteers and staff are well-prepared. Educating kids is filled with emotions, norms and cultural biases, which differs based on the national contexts.

Thus we have recently added the *Care to Engage* policy to our internal framework - and it is exactly what the issue of the newsletter you're about to read is all about. Amongst other things, we elaborate on our approach regarding volunteering in orphanages and opposition towards corporal violence.

Working with kids can be challenging, but it also teaches us a lot about ourselves as human beings. You can read what some of our volunteers who worked with kids learned from their exchange and Sapna from ICDE India tells about how they host volunteers who desire to work with children in India.

Finally, in the news section you can read about the QUEST network we have recently joined, updates from the latest workshops our members participated in, as well as an update from Live-Ex.

Enjoy reading! And don't forget to give the small humans in your life an extra high-five today.



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# Care to Engage

## What is the Care to Engage policy?

Every year, an estimated one billion children experience some form of violence, and shockingly, a child dies from violence every five minutes. These numbers reflect a harsh reality: no society is free from violence against children whether it is bullying in schools or abuse at home or in institutions.

Among the most vulnerable are children from marginalized backgrounds—ethnic minorities, LGBTIQA+\* youth, children living with disabilities, and those without stable homes. These children are often excluded, stigmatised, and silenced. Their experiences highlight the urgency of creating protective environments where every child can thrive, be heard and be safe.

While ICYE is not a child protection organisation by definition, around 50% of ICYE's volunteers work in projects involving children—whether in schools, care centers, or family homes - and with this comes a big responsibility for us as an organisation.

Therefore, ICYE has developed the *Care to Engage* policy, a framework designed to prevent harm and to promote child well-being in all our host projects and -families. Based on the principles of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the policy outlines responsibilities, preventative measures, and response mechanisms needed to address any potential risks or incidents involving children. The policy sets out minimum standards, case management procedures, and sanctions in response to violations—with the best interests of the child being in the center.

Through awareness-building, education, and structural safeguarding, ICYE aims to contribute to a world where all children—regardless of background or identity—can live free from fear and grow up with dignity. The *Care to Engage* policy reflects this ethical stance: one that views children not only as someone who should be protected by adults, but as individuals with rights to safety as well as the right to be able to speak up for themselves.

## Care to Engage

ICYE's Policy on Safeguarding Children

\*LGBTIQ+ stands for: Lesbians, Gays, Bi-sexual, Trans, Queer and others

### Melanie - Germany

Olá, I'm Melanie Crescêncio Houana, a little but big black girl from a very beautiful country in Southern Africa called Mozambique. I had the opportunity to go on an adventure in 2023 in Germany which was wonderful and changed my life completely. This adventure took one year, that was enough to learn, enjoy, discover, grow and do so much more.

I worked in the city of Mönchengladbach, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, in a school called FASAN - Freie Aktive Schule Am Niederrhein (Free Active School in 'Am Niederrhein'). There I had the honor to meet sweet kids and kind teachers that helped me a lot during the time I was there.

This was a free school, which is a type of alternative or progressive school model that emphasizes freedom and self determination, active learning, democratic participation, no traditional grades or exams and mixed-age groups.

In the beginning, working there was a challenge mainly because the concept of the school is totally different from where I had been before, but volunteer work is about facing challenges and overcoming them, and with a great support system it becomes so much easier.

After some months the challenges were no longer challenges and life became much easier and joyful there. I got so passionate about my job and I decided to share one of the things I love and appreciate the most, MY CULTURE. I organized an international educational week and almost all the kids signed up to be part of it which made me so happy. At first I was nervous and didn't know if it would work, but thank God it did. The kids loved it and I still remember a message from my boss saying: "Das Mosambik-Angebot ist so cool!!" And this means: "The Mozambique offer is so cool!!" These words made my day.



**"Volunteering is the most genuine expression of solidarity and commitment to social transformation. And impacts highly on personal growth." - Melanie**



### Felix - Mexico

Mi día a día en "Pro Niños" es muy variado. De lunes a jueves trabajo en un equipo trabajando con niños y niñas de calle. Los viernes estoy en una casa para adolescentes. En mi trabajo en la calle buscamos a niñas y niños y hacemos todo tipo de actividades con ellas y ellos. Jugamos muchos juegos (por ejemplo, Uno o Jenga), pero a veces simplemente tenemos conversaciones sencillas para que puedan generar confianza en nosotros. El objetivo es llevarles a la guardería. Para esto viajamos por toda la ciudad así que tomamos muchos pasos ;-). Juego fútbol, baloncesto, etc. con las y los adolescentes. Pero a veces simplemente nos relajamos y ayudo donde me necesitan. Por la mañana y a la hora de comer comemos juntos :)

### Luise - India

In my project, Sri Venkateshwara International School in Sundarapalya, Kolar, me and my co-volunteer Emilie found various ways to engage with the children. We assisted the teachers in their classes and apart from this - since we both love doing all kinds of creative activities - we found ways to include our talents in the project. I often crafted with children which was also a great opportunity of interacting with even small children where the language barrier was a difficulty. One big project that Emilie and I implemented was the painting of the kindergarten classrooms. We were able to choose the design, and it was fun to paint but even better to witness the children's appreciation for it afterwards! Bringing a guitar and letting the children try it out was another activity that worked well and taught me a lot about the children and their abilities.

### Stephan - Costa Rica

Hi and Servus, my name is Stephan, I am from Austria, and I volunteered in San José, Costa Rica from August 2022 to May 2023.

I worked at the Oratorio Don Bosco de Sor María Romero, a day care centre for children aged six to twelve who came from financially and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Some of the children spent the entire day at the Oratorio, while others only came in the mornings or afternoons. Usually, up to four volunteers supported the local staff, with each person helping out in different age groups.

I mainly worked with the older children, around ten to twelve years old.

Most of my time was spent playing with the kids indoors or, when it did not rain (which was often the case during the rainy season in Costa Rica) and another teacher was available to join, outside as well. We played football, tag, or hide and seek.

Every afternoon between 2 p.m. and around 4 p.m., there was a homework session, where I helped the kids as much as I could. At first, I struggled a bit, since my Spanish was still quite basic because explaining maths or English in Spanish turned out to be surprisingly difficult. But over time, that got easier. Learning a language with and from kids was definitely intense, but it was also a powerful and very effective way to improve.

Once I felt more confident speaking Spanish, I managed to organise an English class for the older children with the support of the headmistress. I really enjoyed supporting the kids with their English skills, and I had the feeling that some of them truly appreciated the extra effort and tried their best to improve.

Since many of the children came from challenging family situations, there were also emotionally intense moments. These situations mostly related to issues at home, but there was always a teacher or the on-site psychologist ready to support us volunteers, as well as the children.

It was absolutely normal, as a volunteer, to end up in situations where I felt out of my depth – whether due to language barriers or because I simply lacked the experience. This was especially true when I faced conflicts or situations that affected a child's wellbeing. Luckily, the team at my project was always focused on constructive solutions, which helped me to approach those moments as chances to grow.



All in all, my time at the Oratorio Don Bosco was incredibly enriching. I learned so much. Not only about education and communication, but also about empathy, patience, and intercultural understanding. And I believe that the children learned something from me as well.

On top of all that, Costa Rica was a wonderful place to be. I made sure to explore the rich culture and wonderful nature as much as possible and truly enjoyed every moment of being on the other side of the world.

### **Victor - Germany**



Hi, my name is Victor. I work as a volunteer at a German primary school in Berlin, where I spend my days accompanying 3rd-grade students in the after-school program. However, my workday consists of many other tasks as well, including supporting children with challenges in class or participating in team meetings and other conceptual work.

Working with children can vary a lot depending on where in the world you are, but I can honestly say that the vast majority of children at my school live safe and secure childhoods. That's very important to me, as I didn't want to end up as an unskilled volunteer

worker in an environment with dysfunctional or traumatized children, where I'd feel compelled to take on more responsibility than I'm equipped for—something that could ultimately have negative consequences for the children.

That's why, in the after-school program, I mostly spend time playing with the kids or organizing activities like football training or reading sessions they can join. In this way, I contribute to their overall upbringing by helping to develop their social, academic and motoric skills through play, fun and a little bit of homework.

As a volunteer, it's inevitable that you sometimes end up in situations where you feel overwhelmed. I've experienced that too, especially when trying to resolve conflicts. But at the school, it's kept at a constructive level, and I just see it as a learning opportunity. That's why I rarely come home from work feeling totally drained, which is essential because a big part of volunteering abroad is also about exploring the city and culture you're in.

# Care to Engage

## Why We Don't Place Volunteers in Orphanages:

While many volunteers are motivated by a deep desire to help vulnerable children, research shows that volunteering in orphanages can do more harm than good. The majority of children in orphanages are in fact not orphans — they have families who, with the right support, could care for them. Poverty, disability, and discrimination often force families to turn to institutional care. Unfortunately, placing unqualified volunteers in these settings can unintentionally reinforce the orphanage system, expose children to harm, and cause long-term emotional distress. In line with global child protection standards, ICYE is moving away from orphanage volunteering to support truly sustainable, community-based alternatives.

**Here are the most important reasons why:**

### **1. It fuels a harmful global industry**

The demand for volunteering in orphanages has become a business. Rather than supporting families to care for their children (80% of children in orphanages still have living relatives), some institutions actively recruit children to meet volunteer expectations, reinforcing family separation.

### **2. It poses serious child protection risks**

Many orphanages lack proper oversight and fail to meet child protection standards. This makes children more vulnerable to neglect, violence, and exploitation—including, tragically, cases of sexual abuse linked to volunteer access.

### **3. It causes emotional harm**

Short-term volunteer placements can contribute to attachment disorders in children. As volunteers come and go, children—many already traumatised—experience repeated cycles of connection and abandonment, undermining their ability to form stable, trusting relationships.

The UN Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children strongly discourage placing children in institutional care and highlight the need for family- and community-based alternatives. Moreover, research shows that residential care is four times more expensive than supporting families directly.

For these reasons, ICYE and many youth organisations now advise against volunteering in orphanages. It is better to support ethical, community-based projects that empower families and uphold children's rights.

# Care to Engage

## **Corporal Punishment:**

'Corporal' or 'physical' punishment remains the most widespread form of violence towards children all over the world and in many different contexts; in the family, in schools, in alternative care and penal institutions, as well as in situations of e.g. child labour - often under the guise of discipline. Corporal punishment "includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light, as well as non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading." (<https://endcorporalpunishment.org/>)

Corporal punishment violates children's rights despite being normalized in many societies. Research consistently links it to negative outcomes including poor mental health, reduced academic performance, increased aggression, and long-term harm to family relationships. It also reinforces gender inequality and perpetuates cycles of violence, contributing to societal issues that extend far beyond the home. In 2024, only 68 countries worldwide prohibited corporal punishment completely.

As we within ICYE have a high amount of projects working with children, we naturally care about the environment they are raised in as well as protecting them from violence, whether physical or psychological. Based on these concerns we support the global movement to end corporal punishment and promote positive parenting - an approach grounded in empathy, respect, and open communication. Positive parenting doesn't rely on fear or force. Instead, it nurtures healthy relationships and helps children grow into responsible, resilient individuals. Methods like Save the Children's "Parenting without Violence" and the Positive Discipline model provide parents and educators with tools to guide children with kindness, structure, and understanding.

Ending corporal punishment requires more than laws - it calls for a transformation in beliefs and practices. By raising awareness, empowering caregivers, and challenging harmful social norms, we can create environments where all children feel safe, valued, and heard.

**Check out more information on Positive Parenting here:**  
<https://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/positive-discipline-resources/>

# Care to Engage

## How ICDE India bridges gaps through volunteering -Sapna Gnanakan

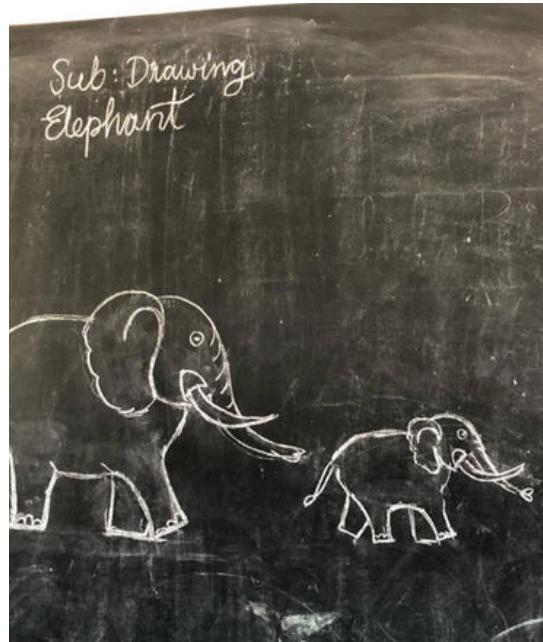
Bangalore is a cosmopolitan city with a high rate of urbanization, yet there are still many underprivileged areas in and around the city that can benefit from volunteers who are willing to do their part for the society.

Many college students actively look for opportunities to volunteer with underprivileged children during their vacation and in their free time. This increasing trend not only improves the skills of students but also develops social responsibility, creating a positive impact on disadvantaged communities.

There are several NGOs working with underprivileged children, at-risk youth or slum communities. Corporates have also adopted projects in these underprivileged areas as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, offering education or health services, with their employees volunteering in these projects during their time off.

At ICDE's Multi Activity Project (MAP) in Kolar, which is about 60 kilometres away from Bangalore, we have partnered with a school that caters to about 300 students from around the Punyakoti area. Our programme offers volunteers to engage in educational support which includes teaching them English, assisting with other subjects, basic computer skills and sports. As well as tutoring the weak students.

At the MAP, volunteers also get a chance to work at the farm, where seasonal crops and flowers are grown.



ICDE has also been receiving interns from a prestigious university who study Social Work.

Not only does ICDE partner with this school but we also partner with another school 20 kilometres away from the MAP. Along with educational support to the students our volunteers take on the role of beautifying the classrooms through their artwork.

# Care to Engage



Apart from these two schools in Kolar, we also work with other projects in Dindigul, Bangalore and Mysore where volunteers work with differently abled children, distressed women etc.

Working with children in general is a huge responsibility and therefore requires background checks, child protection training, and a long-term commitment, if possible, as short-term collaborations can cause a disturbance in children's lives. Especially in orphanages, children are vulnerable and highly prone to getting emotionally attached to these volunteers. Having to deal with the emotional stress after the volunteer leaves can be difficult for both the child and the home. Apart from the emotional trauma, there are also quite a few legalities that need to be considered before bringing in volunteers given there are several instances of exploitation of children. Orphanages give room to extended families neglecting their responsibilities.

Another drawback with short term volunteers (4-6 weeks) is that the impact is much lower than for volunteers who stay over a period of one year and more.

I believe that volunteers can achieve much more when they work with community projects that support care giving, after school support to the children of lower income families, support foster care programmes and be advocates in creating and driving policies that can help protect children.

To conclude, volunteering with children in Bangalore can be transformative—both for the volunteers and the beneficiaries as sustainable change comes from empowering communities, not temporary interventions.

Whether you're a student seeking meaningful experiences, a professional looking to give back, or simply someone who wants to make a difference, your time and skills can transform lives. At ICDE India, we welcome dedicated volunteers and interns to join our efforts in education, empowerment, and social impact across Bangalore, Kolar, and beyond. Creating a lasting transformation in the lives of children, lies in our hands.

# Care to Engage

## ICYE NEWS

### Introducing the Quest Network

We are very happy to announce that ICYE recently became a member of the QUEST Network. QUEST (Quality Education in Europe for Social Transformation) is a Brussels-based network, which connects schools and organisations, with the goal of promoting democratic, inclusive, and sustainable education. QUEST do this through research conduction, conferences, trainings etc.

#### Becoming a member of QUEST means:

- We have privileged access to all their trainings and events, which we can also influence and contribute to.
- We will be invited to attend their annual Member Forums to learn and exchange on specific educational topics with other members.
- We will work together on Erasmus+ projects.
- They are our partner on the Deco 2 project!



### New Trends in IVS workshop - Budapest

From the 3rd-7th of February, Courtney from the IO participated in a reflection workshop in Budapest, Hungary, on *Anticipating the Future of Volunteering*. The workshop was organised in collaboration between CCIVS, Alliance, SCI, NVDA and ICYE. It included participants from all over the world, and was based on the concerns regarding decreasing numbers of volunteers in all of our IVS networks. The 30 young participants had a great time and came up with a lot of innovative ideas.



### Empowering Youth Engagement Workshop - Aarhus:

From 21st to 27th March, the ICYE Youth Engagement Committee attended a five-day workshop in Aarhus, Denmark, focused on empowering young voices in decision-making. Joined by youth from the ICYE Federation and CCIVS, participants strengthened their communication skills and explored themes like democratic values, diversity, and decolonisation.

Together, they revisited the YEC Action Plan, working on goals around inclusive youth engagement and the narrative of volunteering. Highlights included a visit to Aarhus' Old Town museum and a monitoring visit from the Council of Europe.



The next in-person YEC Meeting will take place in Brussels from the 14th - 18th of July as part of the *Decolonise Together - Advocating for Youth Engagement* workshop. We are still looking for young participants from Council of Europe countries, so please sign up and join us if you fit into that category [here :\)](#)



### Greener Together training - Vienna

In the first week of May (5th-9th), our member Grenzenlos in Austria, is hosting a workshop in Vienna on developing educational material on climate justice for our volunteers. The aim is to create a coherent learning journey with an associated training package to engage long-term volunteers in a strategic way throughout the volunteer cycle.

# Care to Engage

## LIVE EX update

In 2024, ICYE, CCIVS and eight partners in Sub Saharan Africa launched the LIVE-Ex (Exchange and Cooperation for a Living Earth) project.



**LIVE**  
Living Earth Exchanges

This initiative aims at empowering youth across Sub-Saharan Africa through digital education, advocacy, and intercultural exchange. Funded by the Erasmus+ programme, LIVE-Ex brings together a dynamic consortium of organisations from Mozambique, Togo, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

With a decolonial and afrocentric approach, LIVE-Ex addresses urgent challenges tied to the triple planetary crisis—climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—by equipping young people with the tools to become Earth Advocates and changemakers in their communities.

Since its launch in 2024, LIVE-Ex has successfully delivered blended mentorship training, developed toolkits for both mentors and mentees, and initiated structured virtual exchange activities among young people across the region.

## Highlights in 2025 So Far

In January 2025, LIVE-Ex officially kicked off the first round of four LIVE-Ex cohorts, with mentors and participants expressing great enthusiasm for the months ahead. As part of our outreach efforts and quality delivery of the virtual exchanges, a Good Practices Map showcasing impactful initiatives and good practices was shared.



As part of our Earth Advocacy component, LIVE-Ex launched a series of online dialogues aimed at facilitating critical discussion and awareness around climate justice. The first one in March on Climate Colonialism and in April one on exploring the relationship between Climate Change and Culture, and another on International Earth Day discussing the intersection of environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality. Check out the project website for more information.