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Narrative Description of Activities for Foster Organization

Overview

The mission of the International Institute for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. is to provide help to children and families in difficult life situations, including orphans, foster families, and teenagers having problems with law or various psychological problems, and to develop mediation services.

Although people understand that troubled children and dysfunctional families are a problem all over the world, they sometimes find it hard to believe that this problem is prevalent in the United States, a world superpower and home to the largest world economy.

The United States faces various challenges affecting lives of children including separation from their parents and placement in foster families; high juvenile arrest rates and violent culture prevalent in public schools including gun shootings; persisting racial discrimination limiting adoption chances of boys and girls of color; and violation of human rights of migrant children, including separation from their families.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets basic rights of all children which include: the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest potential; the right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation, and the right to participate in family, cultural and social life.

In the U.S., 442,000 children are in foster care. Every day in this country, 1,900 children become victims of abuse or suffer neglect of parental responsibilities. In 2012, approximately 686,000 children were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect. Nationally, four-fifths (78%) of victims were neglected, 18% were physically abused, 9% were sexually abused, and 8% were psychologically maltreated.

In 2013, 641,000 were served in the child welfare system. In 2012, 61% received services in

their own homes with their families and 38% were temporarily removed from their homes. In

2013, an estimated 255,000 children were removed from their parents as a result of a child abuse investigation and assessment and entered out of home care.

Of all those served in 2013, 402,000 were in out-of-home care for a portion of the year. In 2012, more than a quarter of youth placed in out-of-home care were living with relatives in kinship care (28%), nearly half (47%) were in temporary foster family homes, a small portion were living in small group homes (9%) or placed in residential treatment centers or institutions for intensive therapeutic support (8%). Young people constitute a major segment of the foster care population. In 2013, 28% of children in foster care were 14 years of age or older.

Most graduates of the foster system do not have living skills and are not psychologically ready for an independent life; they do not know how to create and maintain their own family; they lack motivation for active work**. (* Based on materials from the Kidsave International, <https://www.kidsave.org/> **Based on materials from the Child Protection Working Group of the US-Russia Social Expertise Exchange (SEE), Eurasia Foundation, 2015, ISBN: 978-1-943678-00-6.) Although the above statistics is from the U.S., many countries in the world have at least a similar or even a much worse situation with deteriorating family structure, child abuse and neglect, and conflicts resulting in problem behavior in teenagers and youth. These are universal problems.

Therefore, we believe it is our duty to help children exercise their right to be free from abuse, neglect and exploitation, to be a part of a functional family and to participate in the cultural and social life through addressing several of the above issues, specifically in the areas of conflict resolution, foster care support, and dealing with troubled children and teenagers, and educating parents.

We address these issues through 3 strategic programs: (1) helping orphans and foster families, (2) developing school mediation services, and (3) building loving communities.

Helping Orphans and Foster Families **(40% of our time and resources are allocated to this program)**

Being part of a family is a basic human need and essential to well-being, especially for teenagers and young adults who are developing rapidly and transitioning to independence. The new data reflect a growing consensus among practitioners and policymakers that young people in the child welfare system should live in families. When a group placement is required to address specific issues such as mental health needs, the child should stay only as long as is needed to address those needs. Group placements should be designed to help children return to a family as soon as possible.

The Family First Prevention Services Act, signed into law in 2018, seeks to accelerate movement toward this vision, emphasizing prevention services, prioritizing family placement and incentivizing high-quality, residential help. The law follows a long tradition of federal legislation designed to ensure children and teens grow up in a family. It recognizes that too many children

are unnecessarily separated from parents who could provide safe and loving care if given access to needed mental health services, substance abuse treatment or guidance for improving their parenting skills. (Source: Keeping kids in families. Trends in U.S. Foster Care Placement.)

Within this strategic program, our experts provide necessary training to foster care specialists on further work with families on improving their parenting skills through the knowledge of children's psychology, applying self-control methods and upbringing techniques based on motivation as opposed to punishment. The emphasis in this program is on social and psychological support and help in overcoming difficult life situations, harmonizing relationships between children and parents, improving children's academic success and developing other types of social and creative activity. To address these objectives, International Institute for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. engages in 4 types of activities.

First, it organizes training programs on harmonization of parent-children relationships; it also trains teenagers and their foster parents in overcoming stress, achieving overall psychological well-being and becoming more socially active.

Second, we organize mentorship programs, where we (1) recruit and train mentors, (2) form mentor-mentee pairs and supervise them, and (3) recruit and train other types of volunteers, who help support orphans in the program.

Third, we have a program for prevention of social orphanacy, where we help biological families who have an imminent risk of child removal to overcome the social crisis they found themselves in and to aid them in social and psychological rehabilitation, with the desired result of retaining or returning the child into the biological family. As part of this program, we assist in finding a job and overcoming alcohol or drug abuse, as well as other kinds of addictions.

Fourth, we partner with other organizations that help orphans and foster families.

Our activities are carried out by our organization's staff and outsourced staff, as well as trained volunteers and specialists and staff from partner organizations, and take place in schools, partner organizations' venues, local communities and homes of foster families. As one of our key programs, the Orphan and Foster Families activities require 40% of our financial resources and time.

Family X can serve as an example of how our program can affect the destiny of those who we touch directly and those who get touched by the ripple effect. When we first met Max, he was a troubled kid, bouncing from foster home to foster home. We got his foster parents involved in a 9-week training program where we worked on stress management and relationship skills. But the most important piece was finding a mentor for Max: one of the graduates of our program, TJ, who was a college student, got to be Max's mentor. Max readily identified with TJ, who had been in the foster system as a child and was later adopted. A year-long mentor-mentee

relationship helped Max to deal with his internal issues. 2 years later he became a mentor himself.

From the financial standpoint, the fact that we rely on volunteers makes operations very cost-efficient. The majority of the expenses come into play when we hire certified mental health and professionals and counselors that conduct group and individual training sessions and supervise the children, the parents and the mentors, plus, where applicable, rent, printing and advertising expenses. A cost of a 9-week program with ongoing support is \$1,000 to \$4,000 per location.

Developing School Mediation Services (50% of our time and resources are allocated to this program)

In public schools, there are children from various social groups, nationalities and religions. This creates a potential conflict environment in which students spend a significant part of their time. Features of the psycho-emotional development of children and adolescents that are characteristic of their age such as the need for communication, self-affirmation among peers, and striving to belong to a particular group, also contribute to conflict situations. Conflicts may arise among students, and with teachers and the school administration. As a rule, the result of a reaction to a conflict involving a student may result in administrative punishment or a threat of punishment. Moreover, as a rule, there is no real resolution of the conflict. As a result, students do not master constructive ways of resolving conflict situations, which can lead to feeling helpless or, on the other hand, their use of force.

The best conflict resolution is to satisfy the interests of all participants by getting every conflict party involved in the development of a common solution. Having accepted responsibility for resolving the situation, the parties to the conflict are likely to no longer be in a similar situation. To achieve a mutually acceptable solution, a mediation approach involving a neutral mediator is required. The mediator helps all participants to reduce emotional tension, find the best way out of the conflict and to discuss how to avoid a similar occurrence in the future.

School mediation service helps conflict participants find a way out of a problem situation that will satisfy everyone. Mediators can work with situations of bullying, fighting, theft, property damage, inter-group conflicts and ethnic conflicts. At the same time, the main feature of school mediation services is that teenagers can act as mediators under the guidance of adults.

To help prevent conflicts and unlawful behavior among children and teenagers, we recruit and train children and adults who would later become volunteers in school mediation services in the methods of conflict prevention and conflict resolution, with student-to-student, student-to-teacher, teacher-to-parent, and parent-to-administration vectors. School students can serve as mediators only in resolving conflicts among peers, with supervision from an adult; other types of conflicts are analyzed and solved only by adults.

This program supports creation of mediation services in local communities, which in turn can work with teenagers who have breached the law or committed a crime. These mediation services require a more rigorous training program, with invited specialists, who will work with courts and plaintiffs. The goal of the program is to reconcile the parties and to prevent the child from entering the penitentiary system.

Masey is a great example of how our school mediation services work. Masey's family was not very well-off, and she felt very out of place at school, having internalized the low self-esteem connected to lack of finances and access her family had. She would pick up fights with boys and girls, and she would disrupt discipline in class; she would fight with her parents at home as well. Her entire day seemed to be one huge conflict. When one of the teachers, who happened to be our volunteer, started developing mediation services at her school, it was off to a challenging start at first, but soon several teenagers received training and could resolve conflicts among peers with adults' supervision. Masey's conflicts subsided. Eventually, she became a mediator herself. The cost of training for mediation services is from \$900 to \$3,000 per a period of 3 months, and it can serve up to 5 locations.

We believe school mediation services are very important; that is why we spend 50% of all our efforts, time, volunteer and staff focus on this program. While we use the help of our in-house staff and volunteers, we train numerous student, teacher, and parent mediation volunteers. Experts who can work with legal matters, courts and the penitentiary system, are an invaluable asset to this program as well.

Building Loving Communities

(10% of our time and resources are allocated to this program)

We have seen a great need in the multidisciplinary prevention strategies at the community level that support the development of children in healthy social environments. Community services typically include supported housing with full or partial supervision (including halfway houses), psychiatric wards of general hospitals (including partial hospitalization), local primary care medical services, day centers or clubhouses, community mental health centers, and self-help groups for mental health. While we do not run these services, we complement them through our programs.

The World Health Organization states that community mental health services are more accessible and effective, lessen social exclusion, and are likely to have fewer possibilities for the neglect and violations of human rights that are often encountered in mental hospitals. New legal powers developed in the United States supervise and ensure compliance with treatment of individuals living in the community to national standards. However, it is important to engage alternative health care providers and NGOs to equip such communities with prevention techniques, which help to improve health on the peer-to-peer basis.

Within this strategic program, we are working closely with the communities at large by training community leaders, including children and youth, on various techniques of improving psychological well-being and conflict prevention and resolution. We also organize joint parents-and-children events for families in difficult life situations and encourage their activity in social life.

International Institute for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. invites the local communities to participate by recruiting volunteer mentors for orphans and conducting events in partnership with the communities to find the orphan-mentor pairs. We also organize mentorship programs by pairing teenagers from the risk category with veterans of combat operations to lower teen crimes rates.

Parents from a medium-size Midwestern town brought Brandon, a 15-year old troubled teenager into our program. They had adopted Brandon 5 years earlier, but since then he had experience with drugs and shop-lifting, and the parents were concerned for him. We enrolled him in our mentorship program, where Brandon got paired with Kurt, a 41 year old Afghan veteran, who we vetted, trained and supervised. Brandon, who had had a traumatic experience with his abusive biological father and consequently was rebelling against authority, nevertheless immediately found a father figure in Kurt. The transformation couldn't have been greater: Brandon acquired a sense of responsibility, became more in control of his emotions and started getting more socially involved. The healing was reciprocal: Kurt, who, having been to military combats, had had a mild PTSD and currently had problems in his marriage, found an outlet where he could show care and love. His marriage was eventually restored. It was great to see the healing effect on both, and we know that these two lives already touched multiple others, making the community a better and safer place.

The cost of this program is normally around \$1,500 per month; it includes training sessions and the ongoing support of a qualified mental health professional and clinical psychologist. Duration of these programs can be different: from 10 days to a year. We allocate about 10% of our total resources and work hours to Building Loving Communities.

Distribution to Other Organizations and Individuals

We do not fundraise for any specific organization, and International Institute for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. is not organized solely to contribute or fundraise for any specific entity. However, at the discretion of the board of directors we may at times choose to contribute to other organizations who share a similar mission and only if the contributions further our exempt status, with the objective to help harmonize relationships between children themselves, between children and their parents, and between children and the school, typically through the paradigm of mediation.

The International Institute for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. may distribute funds to 501(c)(3) organizations only on the condition that International Institute

for Social, Educational and Mediation Services CONSENSUS Inc. retains control over the use of the funds and maintaining records showing that the funds are used for exclusively charitable purposes in accordance to our mission.

Programs for Volunteers

At times, per the discretion of the board of directors, we may provide internships or volunteer opportunities which will provide opportunities for involvement in outreach activities and programs in order to have a greater impact for change. One of the activities that volunteers may be involved in is basic education on topics such as conflict resolution and conflict prevention, mediation, building stronger communities, and outreaches to orphans and foster families. Such activities shall always be free of charge to participants and will not include compensation to the volunteers.

Multimedia

It is our goal to bring awareness from every medium possible and this does not exclude documentaries and photos of our activities, projects, programs and expeditions. By documenting and reporting our efforts we intend to broaden our outreach. These multimedia features will be recorded by our volunteers during the aforementioned activities and will be available to the public.

Foreign Activities

In general, our foreign activities can be summed up into two categories: training programs, and contributions.

- Foreign training programs will include our efforts to provide educational based lectures, slideshows, and in-field training and instruction in any of the three general program subsets: Helping Orphans and Foster Families, Developing School Mediation Services, and Building Loving Communities.
- Foreign contributions will include assistance given to individuals or organizations outside of the United States which have been selected by the board of directors after conducting due diligence and a thorough investigation. The process of selection is in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations concerning our exempt status such as collecting information (i.e. physical address, phone number, mailing address, website, relationships with other organizations, financial standing which includes past and present, and governance).