

Action Sheet

March 2020

As missionary disciples, we are called to urgently respond to the needs of migrants and refugees. Today, a staggering 70 million people are currently displaced, many as a result of conflict and violence. Families are forced to flee in search of safety. Children suffer especially from this experience and may have long-term emotional, physical and cognitive setbacks.

ACTION

In order to invite more people to join the newly formed chapter and the new campaign to lead the way on the issue of forced migration through promoting legislation on Early Childhood Development, our action this month will be to write, and then speak to, 2-3 friends inviting them to join you at the April CRS Chapter National Conference Call meeting. You can invite them to either the April 18th* CRS Chapter Monthly Conference Call itself or to the meeting you may have a few days later to listen to a recording of the conference call.

**The April National Conference Call will be on the 3rd Saturday of the month given Easter weekend.*

LASER TALK

Since 1990, U.S. international aid has saved nearly 100 million children. But children need to do more than survive; they need to thrive. Worldwide it's estimated that 31 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than half of the world's estimated 22 million refugees are children. These children could have their development disrupted and grow smaller brains than children who have not experienced the trauma of fleeing violence. Early Childhood Development or ECD is a way to help migrant and refugee children, and all children, thrive despite challenges brought on by forced migration and poverty. Currently, the U.S. government doesn't integrate ECD activities into international programs for children and families. Our Catholic faith compels us to care for life from conception to natural death. That means giving each child a strong foundation from which to reach his or her God-given potential.

Will you join lead sponsors Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) of H.R. 4864 or Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Blunt (R-MO), lead sponsors of S. 2715, in cosponsoring and passing the Global Child Thrive Act directing the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into international child-focused programs, thereby improving the lives of vulnerable children?

BACKGROUND

Children who are refugees or who have been forcibly displaced from their homes are among the world's most vulnerable citizens. With over 75 years of experience working with and supporting refugees overseas, CRS knows that while every family has its own story, there are common threads among people on the move. Family, health, safety, stability and hope are the foundation of a life they left behind and are also the building blocks of a life they yearn for their families to have now. In addition to addressing the root causes of forced displacement and immediate needs of migrants and refugees, over the past eight years, CRS has become a leader in child-focused programming. By integrating Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions into our programming for young children and their families, CRS has been able to multiply positive outcomes for children in adversity—like migrants and refugees, and children living in poverty. Based on new research and our first-hand experience, we are now calling on the U.S. government to follow suit and become a global leader. As the biggest donor of foreign assistance worldwide, the United States has a critical role to play in improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.

How do humanitarian emergencies impact children? Catholic Relief Services' humanitarian staff respond to emergency sites across the globe during times of need. In the context of humanitarian emergencies related to forced displacement, CRS and

our partners provide refugees and displaced people with shelter, food and the clean water and sanitation they need. CRS also seeks to create sustainable solutions for the harder to address issues of trauma and grief that migrants and refugees experience. For young children, this early intervention is incredibly important because their brains are growing rapidly, and the toxic stress caused by poverty and forced migration can negatively impact that growth. In fact, studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life. CRS utilizes ECD interventions in child-friendly spaces to help migrant children mitigate the impact of their trauma and build their resilience. Child-friendly spaces provide room for a child to run or dance, to play and sing, and to make friends with other children. In addition to healthy snacks and age-appropriate games, child-friendly spaces offer education, tutoring and grief counseling to children, who may be unable to verbalize their emotions. Further, because healthy child development also requires a nurturing family environment, CRS supports parents with parent training, job opportunities and psychosocial support.

According to CRS humanitarian staff, *“ECD changes the trajectory of children’s lives. The longer children are out of school, the more likely they will never go back. ECD addresses issues of grief, toxic stress and trauma so that these wounds do not permanently harm the adults they will grow up to become. We use a range of established exercises to help children to heal from loss. We also provide parental support so that they know how to address new behavior of children in response to trauma.”* Studies by Nobel Prize-winning economist, James Heckman, show that ECD has a 13 percent return on investment per year. **Integrating ECD into current U.S. international programs serving young children and their families would expand the positive impact of these already successful programs and provide children the opportunity to achieve their God-given potential.**

TAKE ACTION: Write a Letter to Your Friends

1. Reflect on your time with the CRS Chapter.

- Did you complete any of the following actions and were any of them new to you?: (a) sending a personal letter to a member of Congress, (b) calling your Congressperson’s staff about your letter, (c) writing a letter to the editor, (d) having a letter to the editor published, and/or (e) planning for a meeting with a member of Congress or their aide?
- Do you have any reflections about having a more powerful role in your democracy and your ability to make a difference for your brothers and sisters living in poverty?

2. Which friends would be most interested in learning more about this kind of work and these personal breakthroughs?

- Make a list of 2-3 friends and family members (or more) whom you’d like to invite to your next CRS Chapter meeting.

3. Write 2-3 friends inviting them to attend (a) the Saturday, April 18th CRS Chapter National Conference Call and action planning meeting or (b) the meeting a few days after the national conference call if your chapter listens to the recording instead.

In your letter:

(a) Tell them why you saw them as someone who would be interested in supporting the work of CRS Chapters.

(b) Share about a new action you have taken and any reflections about yourself and your abilities to be a more effective advocate since joining the chapter.

(c) Invite them to join you at either (1) the April 18th CRS Chapter National Conference Call and action planning meeting letting them know the location, to arrive at 12:45pm Eastern/9:45am Pacific and that the meeting ends at 3:00pm Eastern/12 noon Pacific **or** (2) the meeting a few days after the national conference call if your chapter listens to the recording of the call and writes your letters.

(d) Let them know that you will call in a few days to see if they can make it.

4. Mark your calendar to call your friends a few days after you write them to encourage them to come. If they can make it, remind them a few days before the meeting takes place.