

Bouncing back to normalcy

A photo essay from Haiti

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Psychosocial support activities for children

A tent was set up in order to implement activities for children of patients as well as children from nearby refugee camps. Activities included drawing sessions, singing, dancing, sports, and cooperative games as well as the promotion of hygiene. Volunteers were encouraged to articulate their daily programmes around popular activities from local culture and tradition. Particular attention was paid to providing support and protection to isolated children with the support of the tracing unit of the Haitian Red Cross, the ICRC and the Institute of Social Welfare.



Support to patients in the wards

The psychosocial volunteers visited and provided psychosocial support to adult and children patients on a daily basis. Children involved in the activities also gathered and sang for patients. In the absence of a morgue and governmental services, support was provided to grieving families and a tent was set up in the hospital in order to allow families to carry out mourning processes and rituals with deceased loved ones.

Caring for the carers

Haitian Red Cross volunteers were trained to give psychosocial support first aid and then received daily technical guidance. Although volunteers were perceived primarily as helpers, they were affected by the earthquake just as much as the entire population. Their daily work with the population in need was demanding on both a physical and emotional level. Therefore, a support group for volunteers was set up in the very early stages of the deployment. Group and personal supervision is also offered and facilitated by a Haitian psychologist.



Psychosocial support activities for adults

In the waiting tent of the field hospital sensitisation sessions were carried out twice a day in order to raise awareness of possible effects of the earthquake on people's wellbeing, including effects of stress as well as means to coping with it. Simple and clear messages had very positive outcomes: for instance allowed people to realize that fear, withdrawal, sleep and eating disorders, were normal reactions. People also realised that they were not alone and that they could support one another. A referral system, involving a Haitian psychologist and a psychiatrist, was in place for people with special needs.

The school

Psychosocial support programmes aim at supporting the affected population in regaining a sense of security and normality after a crisis. For children, being able to go back to school is a structuring and securing event. In cooperation with UNICEF, that provided the tent and the school kits, the Haitian Red Cross volunteers reopened one of the first schools in Haiti after the earthquake. In class, the focus was on psycho-education more than formal education, thus allowing children to express their feelings and to strengthen peer support. The facilitators that volunteered had a background in education and teaching. Furthermore, they were also trained to identify children with special needs.