

SESSION 11

SETTING UP A COMMUNITY NETWORK



INTRODUCTION

A community network is set up when members of a community form neighbourhood COS groups to help children and households in need in their own neighbourhoods.

COS groups in schools are able to identify children and households experiencing hardship and offer care and support. However, these school COS groups can't do everything. This is where neighbourhood COS groups have an important role to play.

Neighbourhood COS groups are formed by community members in neighbourhoods. These COS groups can be more in touch with children's needs at a local level and can respond with small and simple actions that make a big difference in the lives of children. In one community there may be a few neighbourhood COS groups that are set up to support local children or one or more households.

As more and more neighbourhood COS groups are set up, community networks will develop and grow. A community network is an important way in which members of a community can work together and act as safety nets for children in need.

This session has been written as a guide for facilitators. It provides an outline of a process that participants, with the help of a facilitator, can work through to do the following:

1. Review the role of COS groups so far (optional for participants who have been active in a COS group)
2. Learn about ways in which communities can help children
3. Understand why neighbourhood COS groups are important
4. Know what steps to take to set up a neighbourhood COS group in the community.

This process has been divided into four steps:

- **Step 1:**
Review what your COS group has done so far (page 97) optional
- **Step 2:**
Learn how communities can do small actions to help children in need (page 98)
- **Step 3:**
Understand why a neighbourhood COS group is important (page 102)
- **Step 4:**
Know how to set up a neighbourhood COS group (page 104)

At different stages in this session you will see a box called **Main teaching points**. The points that are written here are the most important messages that you should be thinking about and discussing with participants in this session.



STEP 1

Review what your COS group has done so far

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors and members of the community

What you need: flipchart

TIME
60
mins

Activity

1. In the whole group, ask participants to briefly describe the COS group they have been involved in. Give each one the chance to tell the story of their COS group:
 - When and how it started
 - Who is involved
 - How often it meets
 - What the COS group does to help children in need
 - What are the challenges facing their COS group.
2. In the whole group, ask participants to brainstorm a list of all the COS group activities that their group was involved in. Write down this list on a flipchart.
3. Read the following description of a COS group aloud to participants. Discuss why the COS group is unsure of its next steps.

In our COS group there are 8 members. Our COS group is made up of 2 neighbourhood agents, 2 school convenors, 2 teachers, the school principal and a parent at the school who is a nurse. We have been working together for six months. We meet every week. This is what we have done so far:

- We have been watching for warning signs that a child is experiencing great hardship
- We have made a list of all the children in need.
- We have discussed the importance of doing household visits and have divided up the number of household visits we need to do amongst the members of the group
- We have kept written records of what we learned during the household visits
- We have started a small school garden for children in need
- We have prioritized 50 children most in need of support
- We have asked the local political leader to help provide school uniforms for 30 children
- We have talked to 50 children about their needs
- We are now unsure of what the next step is for COS.



STEP 2

Learn how communities can do small actions to help children in need

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors and members of the community

What you need: Handout 1 – ***Small actions make a big difference***
Handout 2 – ***What community members can do to help children***

TIME
60
mins

Activity

1. Give each participant a copy of Handout 1 — ***Small actions make a big difference***. Explain that there are many simple things that people can do that don't cost a lot and can make a big difference.
2. Ask participants to give any other suggestions for small actions that can make a difference.

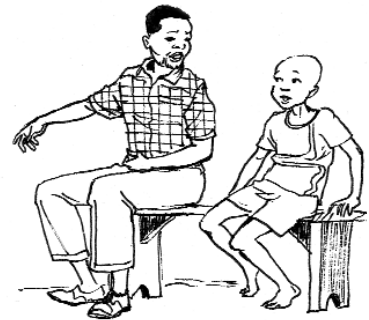
Activity

1. Give each participant a copy of Handout 2 — ***What community members can do to help children***.
2. Ask participants to add any other examples of hardships that children face.
3. Divide participants into small groups. Ask each small group to write down examples of simple things community members can do in the right hand column, to help children experiencing these hardships. There is an example on the handout.
4. Give each group the opportunity to present their examples to the whole group.

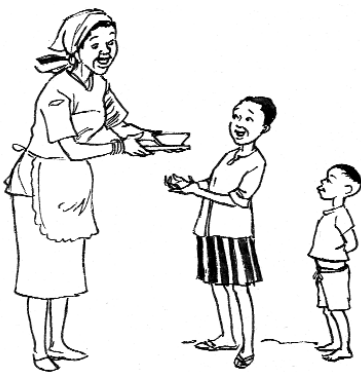
SMALL ACTIONS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE



1. Adults in the neighbourhood can help children with income generating activities.

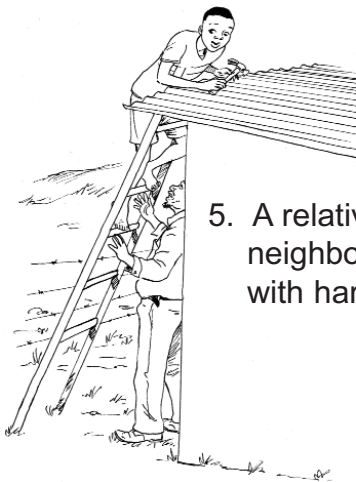


2. Adults in the neighbourhood can be there to listen to children and give them advice and comfort.



3. Adults in the neighbourhood can offer children something to eat when they have no food.

4. Police officers in the neighbourhood can make sure that children can without fear report any abuse.



5. A relative or adult in the neighbourhood can help a child with hard domestic chores.





6. Adults in the neighbourhood can make sure children have safe places to study and relax.



7. Other suggestions:





HANDOUT 2

WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN

Hardship	Example	Small things community members can do
Walking long distances alone to school	 <p><i>Both my parents have died. I have to walk a long way on my own to school every day.</i></p>	A member of the community walks for five minutes with this boy every morning. He does this to find out how the child is doing and if there are any problems. This simple action shows he cares and is available if the child needs him.
Lack of time to study	<p><i>We light a candle and when it runs out we are not able to study. It is dark.</i></p>	
Lack of food	<p><i>I often have nothing to eat. Auntie keeps the food for her children because I do not have a mother.</i></p> 	
School fees	<p><i>I couldn't go to school. My aunt can't pay for me.</i></p>	
Uniform and school materials	<p><i>Every time I need something like food or books, I have to bunk class to look for jobs.</i></p>	
Too much work at home	 <p><i>During the day I am alone and have to make fire and clean all the pots.</i></p>	
Overcrowding	<p><i>In the morning when I wake up, I don't feel so well because I don't sleep comfortably. We are crowded in the room.</i></p> 	

HANDOUT 2

WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN

Hardship	Example	Small things community members can do
Domestic violence	<p><i>The problem is when my father is at home. He fights with my mother. It is bad. Sometimes he chases her away from the house and then we are scared.</i></p> 	
Disruption of family life Looking after sick caregiver or siblings	<p><i>Around Christmas time my mother passed away. It was bad. Now I look after my three brothers.</i></p> 	
Moving home because of death	<p><i>My father died and I went to live with grandmother and I am sad because I am alone and my granny is old.</i></p>	
No one to ask for advice or guidance	 <p><i>Sometimes my problems seem so big and there is no one who can listen.</i></p>	
Neglect	<p><i>I don't go to school all the time. When I do go, the children don't stand next to me. They say I'm dirty.</i></p> 	
Other suggestions		

STEP 3

Understand why a neighbourhood COS group is important

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors and members of the community

What you need: flipchart

Handout 1 – *The role of a neighbourhood COS group*

TIME
60
mins

Activity

1. Hand out a copy of Handout 1 — *The role of a neighbourhood COS group* to each participant and read it out aloud for them.
2. Ask participants how they think a neighbourhood COS group is different from a school COS group. Write up the differences on a flipchart.
3. Divide participants into small groups. Ask them to give five reasons why neighbourhood COS groups are important. Give each group the opportunity to present their reasons to the whole group.

Activity

1. In the whole group, ask participants to think about some of the reasons why community members may not be able or willing to be part of a neighbourhood COS group. Write these reasons up on a flipchart.
2. In pairs, ask participants to choose one of the reasons why community members don't want to get involved in COS. Ask them to role play a short discussion in which one person gives the reason they don't want to get involved and the other person tries to convince the other why they should be part of a neighbourhood COS.

Main teaching points

- Many people may want to help children in need but are unsure how to help.
- Neighbourhood COS groups can be difficult to set up because some neighbours are unwilling to help each other.
- Many people go to work, abuse alcohol or live in poverty and do not have the time or resources to help others.
- Neighbourhood COS groups may be difficult to set up especially in communities where there is no sense of community.
- Despite the difficulties, it is still possible to organise neighbours, relatives and other community members to support children in need.

THE ROLE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD COS GROUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: What is a neighbourhood Circles of Support group?

A: A neighbourhood COS group is a group of five or six adults or older children in the neighbourhood that meet regularly to find ways to care for, support children who live in their area. Together they create a safety net for children.

Q: Who can be part of a neighbourhood COS group?

A:

- A concerned adult
- A relative
- A neighbour
- A parent
- A community representative
- An older child

Q: How does a neighbourhood COS group work?

A: A neighbourhood COS is formed around one child or household, or a group of households in the community. Members of a neighbourhood COS do household visits to find out what is needed. They offer support like help with gardening, household chores, care of siblings or sick caregivers, or playing with children.

Q: Many people in the community are already very busy and do not have the time or resources to help children.

A: This is true but it's the small things that make a big difference to a child's life. There are many people in our communities that can do something simple that can change a child's life.

STEP 4

Know how to set up a neighbourhood COS group

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors and members of the community

What you need: copies of pamphlet – **Setting up a Circles of Support group**

TIME
60
mins

Activity

1. Divide participants into small groups. Ask participants to tell one another about an example of a child, a household or group of households that they know of that is experiencing hardship. Then ask each group to choose only one example from their group of a child, a household or group of households in need.
2. Hand out copies of the pamphlet — **Setting up a Circles of Support group** — to each participant. Read the pamphlet aloud to participants.
3. Ask each group to use their one example and to imagine that they are going to set up a neighbourhood COS group to support this child or household. Suggest that the group uses clear steps to set up the group, for example:

Step 1: Who is involved in the neighbourhood COS group?

Step 2: Who is this neighbourhood COS being formed around (a child / household or households)?

Step 3: What small actions will this neighbourhood COS group do to help this child or children in need to stay in school?

Step 4: How will this neighbourhood COS communicate with the local school COS group?

4. Give each group the opportunity to present what they have discussed.

