Together for children

Transforming the lives of children through effective local networks
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Introduction

Research clearly shows that what happens to children in their early years, and even before birth in the womb, significantly determines their growth and development. This, in turn, determines their cost or contribution to society over the rest of their lives. Therefore it is not only in the best interests of children themselves for us to ensure that they are protected, cared for and empowered, but also in the interests of wider society.

Yet this is no easy task; the needs of children around the world are vast, and can seem overwhelming. In cities across the globe there are compassionate and committed people trying to protect, care for and empower children; however, while they may be doing great work they are often working in an isolated and uncoordinated way. This means that although their efforts are valuable, their impact on wider society is usually small.

Viva was founded to tackle this problem, particularly its prevalence in the Christian part of the faith-based sector. Viva recognised that a paradigm shift was required in order to bring lasting transformation to the situation of children; that catalysing real change would require a response that was bigger, stronger and, fundamentally, more meaningfully connected. The heart of the vision was to develop an overview of the Christian work being done for children at risk in order to relevantly equip and connect geographical sections of it, enabling a strategic, collaborative response.

Over many years of working with faith-based organisations in their communities to help them meet the needs of children in a high-quality and united way, Viva has gradually developed a model for that collaborative response: the city-wide network. This network model has been developed, honed and replicated over 15 years, and Viva has brought into existence more than 150 networks across five continents. We have seen many of these networks grow to a stage where they are not only helping children climb out of difficult situations but actually changing the situations themselves, making whole communities and cities safer places for children.

So, for people who want to make a difference, the paradigm shift that is required is summed up in this question: ‘Do you want to be known for delivering your individual programme well, or for being involved in radically changing the situation of children across an entire area?’

We believe that it is only through working together that we can hope to create cities, and maybe one day even whole countries, where children are given the protection, care and respect that God intends for them to have.

What follows in these pages is a model for working together that we have seen transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of children, and that we fervently believe can bring change to hundreds of thousands more.

Brian Wilkinson
Head of Programme, Viva
Why do we build networks?

Building an effective network that can bring large-scale change for children is not easy – it requires tenacity, wisdom, sacrifice and humility from all involved. However, Viva believes that working together in this way will result in real and lasting transformation in the lives of children at risk.

THE DEFINITION OF A NETWORK

A simple definition of a network is ‘a group of people and organisations working together to realise a shared goal’. Yet it is sturdier and more tightly integrated than something like an alliance or coalition, and it is more than simply meeting to talk and share ideas (although of course good communication is essential).

The structure of a city-wide network allows member organisations to maintain individual autonomy whilst also providing a solid platform for joint action. Collaboration of this kind can leverage the potential for change many times over, bringing transformation to whole communities and cities as a wide spectrum of civil society players are engaged in achieving something that the individual parties alone could not bring about.

THE THREE ‘I’S OF A NETWORK

INTERDEPENDENCE Being part of a local network does not affect the autonomy of member organisations; in fact it often strengthens their individual ability to provide care. However, their understanding of the role of their organisation in the community is shifted, as they are able to see their work as a vital part of something bigger, further-reaching and, ultimately, more effective.

INNOVATION Working with new and less obvious partners, i.e. smaller, grassroots projects, often generates imaginative problem-solving and ‘outside-the-box’ development thinking. It will also produce ideas that genuinely connect with the needs of the local area and capitalise on the abilities and resources of the community.

INFLUENCE When resources, efforts and contacts are combined a wider sphere of influence is automatically achieved, not only enabling greater numbers of children to be helped but better allowing attitudes, behaviour and systems to be transformed.
THE PRINCIPLES OF A NETWORK

Viva’s experience has shown that a network is most likely to be successful and effective in helping children when it is underpinned by certain principles:

A. Strong leadership
- Clear, organised and visionary leadership is vital, so it is important for the network to have a Coordinator and wider Coordination Team
- A Steering Group (somewhat like an informal Board of Trustees) is also important, as strong governance is key. The accountability and guidance they offer the Coordination Team, and the network as a whole, can either underpin or undermine the network’s success

B. Clear direction
- Identifying community needs should come before shaping structure; in fact the former must inform the latter
- Having a clear purpose and well-defined objectives allows network members to stay focused on the ultimate goal
- Shared values are also vital, as network members must not only be in agreement about the end goal but also about the methods used to achieve that goal

C. Commitment to cooperation
- Successful networks are built on relationships of trust, transparency and mutual benefit
- In order to build that trust and equity it is crucial to maintain a high level of participation and ownership by all those involved in the network
- There must be recognition of the diversity of the members and a commitment to making the best use of their complementary strengths to reach the common goal

D. Positive action
- A network has to deliver results, providing a sense of value and worth to attract new members
- Programmes need to enhance the work of members but also progressively lead to joint action on a wider scale

THE BENEFITS OF A NETWORK

In order to properly engage in a network, individuals and organisations need to know how it is going to help them more efficiently and effectively reach children at risk. Each member needs to understand clearly how their own work will be improved (immediate benefit) and that they will be able to achieve more by collaborating with others than they would by themselves (strategic benefit).

Immediate benefits
Networks can:
- Facilitate the exchange of skills and experiences.
  - As expertise and knowledge are shared through meetings, workshops, materials and collaborative programmes, the overall competence and efficiency of network members is increased
- Improve communication and links between different organisations and individuals, not just between network members, but also with others who would otherwise have limited opportunity to interact
- Bring together those with resources and those in need of resources (not just money but also goods, workers and expertise) and facilitate the distribution and strategic use of any resources and materials
- Enable referrals of children with particular needs to specialists with the expertise to help them. This not only benefits the individual child, whose needs are now better able to be met, but also relieves the organisation of caring for a child it does not have the skills or resources to effectively help
- Provide a sense of identity and belonging among a disparate group of people, offering peer support and a sense of accountability; also professional recognition, whereby members encourage one another to achieve higher standards of care
Under the iceberg

80% of the mass of an iceberg is below the waterline, unseen. The same is true of the response to children at risk: we see only the big players, the large international charities and the government-funded organisations. The work of smaller grassroots projects is too often hidden from view, and these groups struggle to access the vital resources they need to grow.

Viva’s focus has been on those small, local Christian projects that are doing heart-felt and sacrificial work for children at risk in their communities. While local projects of churches or civil organisations may not always be the most effective or efficient, they have legitimacy in the community that outsiders can never achieve.

Being part of a network can help to provide them with support, training, funding, visibility and a much bigger sphere of influence than they could ever hope to achieve alone. They can then help their communities to make sense of their responsibilities to the children in their area and enable them to act on those responsibilities, bringing change to whole towns and cities.

Strategic benefits

Networks can:

- **Raise awareness of the needs of children at risk** and mobilise churches, institutions, government bodies and the wider community, so that children’s needs are noticed and prioritised
- **Enable the sharing and coordinating of information**, which leads to less duplication of work and efforts. As a result, progress is achieved faster and the overall impact for children is greater
- **Identify gaps in the provision of care**, meaning that new and relevant programmes can be started in response to currently unmet needs
- **Provide a stronger voice for children at risk at local, national and international levels** by uniting network participants to publicly recommend action and policy change. Networks also have the power to strategically link top policy makers with grassroots organisations
- **Provide a platform for members to engage in collaborative initiatives and joint programmes.** Therefore costs are reduced, limited resources are stewarded wisely and staff time is maximised. Networks can deliver better, more sustainable solutions, including higher-quality programmes and services for children

To fully realise these benefits, members must take seriously their own contribution to the network. Whilst their priority is the children in their direct care, in joining the network there is an acceptance of the principle of ‘better together’. Each network member therefore has the responsibility to try to make that principle a reality and to overcome the obstacles that arise in order to achieve the greater good.
**Viva’s experience suggests** that a network of community organisations and churches, locally focused and united in purpose, is the best possible vehicle for bringing city-wide change for children at risk. The successful building, strengthening and sustaining of such networks is shown in Viva’s model, and there are three main phases of network development involved:

1. **Forming a network with a clear purpose that can deliver quick-win projects**
2. **Developing the network’s capacity to deliver collaborative programmes**
3. **Delivering solution programmes through a sustainable network**

Initially most networks function primarily as peer-support systems, whose focus is to improve the quality and reach of work with children provided by the existing stakeholders. However, the vision for a bigger end goal must be there right from the start: networks that begin with the end in mind will go further, quicker. Seeing and understanding the development journey better enables the network to grow into proactive and innovative collaborations with the potential to bring about large-scale strategic change for children across a city.

This doesn’t happen overnight, but is achieved through a carefully managed long-term process of increasing, deepening and strengthening collaborative action. This is where Viva’s value-add is clearly seen: we combine network development expertise with specialised programmes that accelerate network effectiveness. In the following pages these two interlinking areas of Viva’s work are explained.
THE THREE PHASES OF NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1  FORMING A NETWORK WITH A CLEAR PURPOSE THAT CAN DELIVER QUICK-WIN PROJECTS

Organisations and churches working with children at risk are approached with the concept of a network that can support them in their work, and they are envisioned about the potential of their joint voice and action. If there is sufficient buy-in, the process of forming a network is begun. The initial focus is to establish the needs of children locally, determine the factors that cause them to be at risk and, through Viva Locate, pinpoint the key players who are already working to help children. This basic situational mapping also serves to highlight the possible strategic focus of the network in the future.

Initially the network concentrates on identifying shared needs and opportunities, and providing services to members that centre around information-sharing, emotional support and promotion of best practice. People who can help each other are connected and a network database is developed to assist this process. Working together begins with smaller, short-term projects, such as organising one-off training sessions, prayer events, or staff retreats. These projects have low inputs but clear outcomes, equipping and encouraging participants and generating momentum to further establish the network. They also help participants to get a flavour of what joint action can achieve.

The structure of the network itself can be fairly minimal at this stage: usually there would be two or three individuals who together form a Coordination Team, with one person taking a slightly stronger lead and assuming the role of Network Coordinator. (It is worth noting that although these individuals are likely to begin as volunteers, evidence has shown that the sooner these can become full-time funded positions the faster the network’s effectiveness will grow. Permanent, paid staff allow the network to better plan and implement action that is consistent with the vision to which network members sign up.)

The role of the whole team is to promote the vision and activities of the network, recruit and support members and foster a sense of care and belonging, drawing in local church projects and Christian NGOs. To provide accountability and support for the Coordination Team as they do this a Steering Group may be chosen from and by participating projects. Those chosen must not only guide and monitor the activity of the Coordination Team but must also have a clear vision for network growth into phases two and three.

In addition to the situational mapping, Viva’s input also involves elements of Viva Connect, training the Coordination Team and Steering Group in network-building; and Viva Collaborate, offering guidance and financial support for smaller collaborative activities such as staff retreats, Christmas parties and World Weekend of Prayer events.
PHASE ONE IN ACTION...

The network in Villa Maria, Argentina, was one of the first that Viva was involved in setting up. Quite a few local organisations caught the vision for this kind of partnership and were very involved, but the churches in the area seemed resistant and only one or two had agreed to join the network.

Then the network decided to put on a Viva Christmas Party, inviting 1,000 children from their community. It approached local churches about very specific ways they could get involved with the event: offering the use of their buildings, helping to provide food, paying for some of the gifts, lending volunteers. The churches responded positively, feeling that the requests were relatively simple and the results very tangible. When the day of the party came there were 18 different churches represented, most of which had not been involved with the network previously.

The success of the day, shown in both the children’s enjoyment of the party and also the relationships between the adults present, really opened the eyes of the local pastors to the benefits of working in partnership with one another. Almost all of those churches are now members of the network, actively involved in working with other organisations to plan joint activities for the future.

Nora Zandrino, one of the Network Coordinators, shared with us how pleased they were that their efforts at promoting networking had finally paid off: “This was so much more than just a Christmas party. It was like the last piece of a very long and very difficult puzzle. The churches were finally saying, ‘Yes! So this is what you can achieve when you work together! Partnership can actually accomplish something!’ They just had to see it in action.”

PHASE 2 DEVELOPING THE NETWORK’S CAPACITY TO DELIVER COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMES

Once the network is established, a significant step-change is required to move the network on to larger collaborative action. During this phase, capacity-building through Viva Equip increases and deepens the impact of the network; the Coordination Team expands so that, together with the Steering Group, it can further develop the network identity and attract new members; and network participants not only see individual benefits to their own organisations but also begin to experience how effective partnering can achieve large-scale change for children at risk.

During this stage there is further situational mapping, and through Viva Locate the network focuses on identifying strategic gaps and working to fill them.

Continuous improvement becomes a key value and through Viva Equip members receive mentored training in specific organisational development areas, enabling them to see measurable changes and benefits in their own projects and their care for children. This training is typically run as a network collaboration, so it continues and reinforces earlier network aims such as information-sharing and peer support.

Towards the end of this stage the network will be focusing on two- or three-year externally funded collaborative programmes that address the specific issues affecting children that were identified by the situational analysis. Network members are motivated to participate in these collaborative programmes as they have benefited from the outcomes of previous network activity. Viva works together with the network to
design and develop the programmes, and also provides technical support, shares responsibility for the recruitment of implementation staff and negotiates with and reports back to donors.

The level of ability and vision now required for network growth is likely to mean a change in the composition of those in leadership roles, as it would be unusual for the same people able to initiate the work to be appropriately gifted to further develop and sustain it. The Coordination Team must significantly increase its capacity to set up, deliver, manage and report on collaborative programmes, as well as to raise funds for them. A full-time Network Coordinator must be recruited at this stage, if one is not already in place, and the salaries of the team should be covered predominantly through the externally funded programmes. Depending on the size and number of programmes the network has committed to, there may also be a need to recruit additional staff and volunteers.

As the Coordination Team expands, greater experience is also needed within the Steering Group. Its focus should still be on governance and strategy, but it must also exhibit fundraising competence and provide stronger accountability for communication to both network members and donors. The Steering Group should now include other local professionals, such as lawyers, civil servants or senior church leaders, allowing the group to better handle the increasing scale of network activity.

The network will also now be forming partnerships with key stakeholders in the community, of which churches are particularly significant partners, and Viva Engage plays a crucial part in securing their involvement. The network must also begin to build relationships with other civil society players beyond the church. It needs to demonstrate its unique contribution to work with children in the city, for example, by sharing network activities with relevant government departments where advantageous, or by advising the police how to best interact with a particular community.

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**PHASE TWO IN ACTION…**

"Child sexual exploitation is a growing issue in Nepal, but when we first began to investigate we could only find five churches engaging with this problem. Now there are over 100. Through our network here a group of churches have come together as the Daughter Project and committed themselves to raising awareness of child trafficking issues and training people to stop exploitation in their own communities.

Nepal has a lot of unprotected border areas, prime places for traffickers to take children across into India and put them to work in brothels and bars. So as a network we identified the nine areas of highest risk along the Nepalese-Indian border and began to focus our efforts on engaging the churches there. Now, four years on, those churches have grasped hold of the vision with both hands and we are seeing whole communities made into safer places.

The Daughter Project would not be successful without the network – and the concept of networking – behind it. There are so many weak points across the borders, and so many channels through which children can be bought and sold, that one organisation alone would struggle to make a real impact. But over 5,000 different adults and children working together across 100 churches in nine communities – that’s a different story. And the Daughter Project has not only educated those people, but has given them the tools to begin educating others."

Dhan Raj Ghimire, Network Coordinator in Kathmandu, Nepal
PHASE 3  DELIVERING SOLUTION PROGRAMMES THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE NETWORK

The emphasis at this stage is on increasing the scale and scope of partnership programmes to bring about sustainable city-wide transformation for children. The network must focus on building a stable environment in which Viva Solution programmes can be created and implemented. This stage is characterised by greater and more strategic connections with other civil society players who have a similar goal, and by the network’s influence on government policy and strategy with regard to its elected responsibilities for children.

Network members should experience satisfaction from the current partnership programme outcomes and therefore be keen to be involved in future initiatives. They should be proud to belong to an effective network that has growing influence in the city and is actually starting to bring about large-scale changes for children. By this stage the network should also be capable of equipping organisations, project workers and leaders to work together at a highly skilled level, whilst also maintaining the collaboration-building momentum. Also increasing visibility, credibility and appreciation in local communities is vital.

The capacity and calibre of the Coordination Team must again be raised at this stage as it faces the challenge of brokering key relationships, not only between network members but also between the network and the ever-widening group of civil society stakeholders. Fundraising competencies are also of vital importance, as the team will need to identify, attract and serve a variety of donor types both within country and internationally. The Network Coordinator must be an inspiring leader, a competent bridge between these various players, as well as providing effective monitoring, quality control and adequate reporting to the Steering Group, Viva and other partners. Throughout this development phase there is also likely to be another change in the composition and focus of the Steering Group, reflecting the network’s growth and influence within the city, and its primary concerns should now be with professional delivery, accountability and strategic promotion to gain influence.

Another key development in Phase 3 has to do with the spectrum of civil society involved with the network. Viva’s model starts out by mobilising the Christian response to the needs of children at risk, and this does not...
just involve Christian organisations or churches’ social action projects but requires the participation of local church congregations. This harnesses the potential of one of the largest and most active sections of society, as church members are challenged and motivated to get involved and to share the vision in their own personal spheres of influence. However, the response must then be broadened by strategic engagement with other societal stakeholders (we saw the relational foundations of this laid in Phase 2).

Without this wider engagement the impact will be contained within the Christian sphere, making it harder to impact the city as a whole. Stakeholders such as business leaders, non-faith-based NGOs, government institutions and international agencies can bring additional resources, influence and knowledge to the network, and can open political and economic doors. (In particular, increased access to government funding will aid the network’s long-term sustainability and will lessen the pressure on other forms of fundraising.) Equally, the network can make it possible for groups that might not otherwise communicate to inform and support each other’s work; for example, helping larger players such as government bodies to interact with smaller NGOs and churches. As these relationships develop, external agencies should increasingly seek advice and assistance from the network.

Viva’s relationship with the network now involves a deeper engagement around collaborative initiatives that can begin to form the aforementioned solution programmes - models of intervention that aim to not only address but begin to actually solve particular problems faced by children in the locality. At this juncture the main thematic focus of the network, and the desired areas of change in the situation of children in the city, should have become clear. Ultimately the goal (which might be something like ‘no more street children’, ‘an end to trafficking’, ‘education for all’, or ‘zero tolerance of child abuse’) will inform the development of a solution programme.

Whatever the nature of the desired outcome it will inevitably involve the transformation of a large and probably complex issue. This can only be achieved by taking a series of small, progressive, carefully planned steps, as the programme will be seeking to make changes to both actions and underlying attitudes concerning children in the city. Measuring and demonstrating success is important in every phase of network development, but now it becomes critical: if the network is to prove that a solution

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**PICTURE IT NOW...**

Take approximately 100 local organisations working together, directly reaching at least 10,000 children, making them the largest provider of care for children in the city and giving them the right to be at the table with significant decision-makers. Then add more than 30 church congregations with something like 15,000 motivated and envisioned people, living and working across all areas of the city. Then unite them under the banner of a strong and visionary network, designed to create, communicate and manage collective action. Give them relevant ideas from local people; expertise from development specialists; opportunities with local and national media; money from government sources.

Then what will you have?

Extraordinary potential for changing the situation of the children in that city.
opportunities for strategic partnerships increased: both with other civil society organisations such as the Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity, and also with the government itself through the Parliamentary Forum for Children.

Whilst the network continues to support and help develop the work of its individual member organisations it is also empowering children themselves to shape the city they live in. Through our Child Ambassadors programme children are learning how to speak out for themselves and others, and recently some of these Ambassadors were able to take their concerns in person to the Speaker of the House of Parliament. Viva’s partnership with a music and media company has also given children the opportunity to make documentaries about their everyday lives; produce short films featuring their original songs, dances, dramas and poetry; and even film an advert that was seen by millions of people across Uganda, reminding adults that “children are worth your time!” We’ve had amazing feedback from several communities within the city that the advert has already begun to positively affect local adults’ behaviour towards children.

We believe that as we continue to work together to keep children safe we will one day see a city where people’s homes, churches, organisations and whole communities are safe places for children to grow up.”

Mim Friday, Viva Network Consultant in Kampala, Uganda

PHASE THREE IN ACTION…

“In Kampala, the network’s sound bite is ‘Keeping Children Safe’. This goal is providing a common focus and vision for children’s work across the city, and we are starting to see transformation — not only in official systems and policies but in people’s attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Yet when the network began its focus was mainly on child protection policies, helping member projects to make their organisations safer places for children. However, as the members began to make changes and give children opportunities to speak, it was as if a dam of silence broke and stories of abuse and neglect started flooding the case loads of local social workers.

As the network then tried to engage parents, police officers, head teachers and local politicians, much disinterest, carelessness and corruption was faced. So Viva walked alongside the network as new initiatives were created and tested, all attempting to engage these key players in fresh and creative ways of keeping children safe.

Through the ‘child-friendly church’ aspect of Viva Engage local pastors were able to lead the way, ensuring that their churches were safe, welcoming and empowering environments for children. Slowly adults began to realise the ways in which they were neglecting and even hurting children, and whole communities began strongly and vocally speaking out against child abusers, neglectful caregivers, thoughtless parents and duty bearers who were not fulfilling their responsibilities. As this call to keep children safe in Kampala grew, so the programme is actually providing an ‘answer’ to a felt need in the city then it must be able to offer both statistical and story-based evidence of positive outcomes. This will also help the network itself to be realistic about progress, and build on each success rather than reaching too far too soon.

Achieving real solutions may take many years, as the needs of children and the factors influencing their situations will be continually and rapidly changing. The network needs to be flexible in adapting the methods and focus of its activities to stay fiercely relevant, maximising its chances of bringing meaningful change for children in the city.
A CITY-WIDE NETWORK
TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN
How do we resource networks?

Viva’s core programmes have been carefully developed, piloted and refined over the years into tools that add significant value to healthy and effective network development. Implementation of these programmes enables networks to locate, connect, engage and equip Christian childcare projects resulting in effective collaborations that provide solutions to the problems that children face.

NETWORK CONSULTANCY

In order to help networks plan for, fund and implement these programmes Viva provides consultancy and technical expertise. Each network has its own designated Network Consultant, whose continuing instruction and mentoring via telephone calls, emails and visits is vital for growth and lasting success.

Each Network Consultant provides:

- Ongoing mentoring and capacity-building of the Coordination Team, Steering Group and network members
- Clearly defined methodologies and programmes that have been tried and tested in other network settings
- Training and experience in the step-by-step change necessary to grow the network, and in overcoming obstacles
- Links to case studies, conference outputs, applied thinking and other more experienced networks
- Specially developed tools to help the network plan, implement, monitor and evaluate its work
- Access to Viva’s network monitoring and self-assessment tool, the Network Health Check, which helps networks assess their progress in eight areas (identity, situation, programme, leadership, systems, sustainability, relationships and results) and identify priorities for growth and improvement
VIVA LOCATE AND VIVA CONNECT

It’s hard to help people work together without knowing who and where they are. **Viva Locate** uses situational mapping to discover exactly who is working with children at risk in a given area, what they are doing and how. This process takes the researchers anywhere between two weeks and two months, and can be as simple as searching the internet, visiting churches or other community bases and talking to local contacts.

As the list of organisations and projects grows the **Viva Connect** element comes into play; researchers will start to get in touch with people, explaining the purpose of the process and introducing them to the network concept. If they are interested, the researchers visit them in person to talk about what their project is doing, including detailed information about what needs they are targeting and which children they are reaching.

One of the first uses for the research is as a simple directory, providing a valuable source of information for the local community. However, as a network grows and situational mapping becomes more detailed, it will also shed light on the bigger picture of the city, helping to highlight problem areas or needs that are not being addressed.

VIVA ENGAGE

While it is often necessary to rescue children from difficult situations, it is also vital for Christians to be engaged in transforming the communities in which children live. Local churches are uniquely positioned to help bring change in the minds and hearts of communities. They also potentially have a wider reach than organisations, as many local congregations include key societal influencers such as government officials, teachers and doctors.

**Viva Engage** focuses on involving churches in the network through the strategic use of a number of tools. These include helping churches participate in the World Weekend of Prayer; training children to be involved in the leadership of church services and prayer events; teaching pastors about the biblical basis for helping children at risk; and encouraging integral mission using the Child-Friendly Church pack.
Viva Equip is designed to see well-resourced and properly equipped people and projects serving children at risk, working to good practice guidelines and running sustainable and credible organisations.

Viva Equip People, which incorporates Viva's capacity-building tool the Quality Improvement System, provides an opportunity for whole organisations to build strong foundations and set clear goals for the future. It also helps ensure that organisational structures and systems meet globally recognised standards, ensuring a high level of accountability and sustainability. Through interactive workshops and at-work mentoring, people are helped to reflect on their work, identify problem areas and introduce improvements. Working together with their peers from other projects, they are carefully guided by both international and local trainers to develop new ways of working that are professional, effective and relevant to their local context. Topics differ slightly across the two programmes and range from child wellbeing and Child Protection to staff care, governance and financial accountability. At the end of every course each person is not only better equipped to provide quality care for children, but is also committed to working together with others in their area.

Viva Collaborate provides examples and shared learning from the joint action programmes run in other networks, and offers the crucial training and guidance needed for these programmes to have a lasting impact. This includes growing competencies in project design, consortium building, brokering and campaigning. It helps the network use its collaborative programmes to build the momentum of the network; increase the level of ownership by the members; and draw new participants into the process. It also offers valuable guidance and expertise through the planning, development and delivery of the joint activities.

Although member organisations continue to run autonomously, and the network aims to support and develop them as they do that, a key function of the network is to enable collaborative activities. These can range from organising city-wide events and conferences, or holding joint training sessions, to lobbying governments and devising innovative new programmes.

Viva Equip People, which incorporates the Celebrating Children course, grows the practical skills and experience of individual project staff, and helps them to offer children care that is both loving and professional. Viva Equip Projects, which incorporates Viva's capacity-building tool the Quality Improvement System, provides an opportunity for whole organisations to build strong foundations and set clear goals for the future. It also helps ensure that organisational structures and systems meet globally recognised standards, ensuring a high level of accountability and sustainability. Through interactive workshops and at-work mentoring, people are helped to reflect on their work, identify problem areas and introduce improvements. Working together with their peers from other projects, they are carefully guided by both international and local trainers to develop new ways of working that are professional, effective and relevant to their local context. Topics differ slightly across the two programmes and range from child wellbeing and Child Protection to staff care, governance and financial accountability. At the end of every course each person is not only better equipped to provide quality care for children, but is also committed to working together with others in their area.

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Viva Equip People, which incorporates the Celebrating Children course, grows the practical skills and experience of individual project staff, and helps them to offer children care that is both loving and professional. Viva Equip Projects, which incorporates Viva's capacity-building tool the Quality Improvement System, provides an opportunity for whole organisations to build strong foundations and set clear goals for the future. It also helps ensure that organisational structures and systems meet globally recognised standards, ensuring a high level of accountability and sustainability. Through interactive workshops and at-work mentoring, people are helped to reflect on their work, identify problem areas and introduce improvements. Working together with their peers from other projects, they are carefully guided by both international and local trainers to develop new ways of working that are professional, effective and relevant to their local context. Topics differ slightly across the two programmes and range from child wellbeing and Child Protection to staff care, governance and financial accountability. At the end of every course each person is not only better equipped to provide quality care for children, but is also committed to working together with others in their area.
LIMA, PERU
Local children attend an Early Encounter day care programme which gives them lunch and basic schooling, providing an alternative to working with their parents on the streets.

In 2010, Early Encounter reached 22,000 children with prevention work, and found alternative care for more than 700 who are now no longer living on the streets.

VIVA SOLUTIONS

A Viva Solution is model of intervention, based on a partnership between a network and Viva, intended to transform a situation of risk faced by children and make a measurable, significant difference in their lives.

A VIVA SOLUTION IN ACTION: EARLY ENCOUNTER

Current estimates suggest that as many as 800,000 children are currently living on the streets of Bolivia’s cities. Extreme poverty and broken family situations are the two most common contributing factors to children developing a street lifestyle, and once they are in that situation they are much more difficult to reach. They have often learned how to ‘work’ the system, circulating different projects that provide food and clothing. This is essential to their survival, but creates a situation where the projects are actually enabling the children to continue living on the streets rather than educating them to realise their potential and empowering them to move away from a street lifestyle.

Early Encounter is a Viva Solution programme that focuses on engaging with children and their families to prevent them developing a street lifestyle. Representatives from local organisations in the network come together to form street teams, building relationships in the community that allow them to better understand the needs of at-risk children and their families and gain the trust necessary to provide relevant help. Using the services and resources of their various projects, Early Encounter teams then seek to support families with things like housing, school fees, or counselling, aiming to alleviate the pressures that often push children towards living on the street.

This city-wide strategy means that collaboration between different societal players (project workers, street educators, local government, community members, church volunteers) is key to the programme’s success, making the local network a perfect platform for its delivery. Early Encounter is being rolled out through six different networks across Latin America, and in 2010 alone the programme enabled local projects to intervene in the lives of 22,000 children with prevention work, and find alternative care for more than 700 children who are now no longer living on the streets.
The UN convention on the rights of the child states that children should be respected, protected, listened to and loved. UNICEF’s ‘Building Child-Friendly Cities’ concept paints a picture of how governments can begin to make those things a reality for the children of their countries.

However, the UN also recognises that “Building Child-Friendly Cities cannot be achieved by government alone. There must be partnerships with children themselves, with families and with all those who affect children’s lives.”† This is an exciting and worthwhile dream, yet also a daunting task.

In this short booklet Viva shows the powerful effects of local projects and churches working together for children in strategic and focused city-wide networks, demonstrating a bottom-up approach that could potentially turn that aspiration into a reality.

Viva’s tried-and-tested system for building these networks, proven to help bring large-scale change for children, is clearly set out. A simple but comprehensive explanation of the key principles and benefits of collaboration, and a breakdown of the various phases of network development, sit alongside numerous case studies showing the success of the network model as a structure for effective child-centred partnership.

Viva asserts that “it is only through working together that we can hope to create cities, and maybe one day even whole countries, where children are given the protection, care and respect that God intends for them to have.”