



Training Series 2

Six Core Strengths for Healthy Child Development

Overview



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This series is designed as supplemental material for The ChildTrauma Academy's video/DVD series *Understanding Traumatized and Maltreated Children: The Core Concepts*. These materials have been developed by the ChildTrauma Academy to assist parents, caregivers, teachers and various professionals working with maltreated and traumatized children. Continuing Education credits can be given for reviewing these materials. Please refer to the Introduction chapter for more information about additional supplemental resources and CEU credits.

TRAIN-THE-TRAINER SERIES

Edited by B. D. Perry

Series Introduction

The origins of this series, *Six Core Strengths for Healthy Child Development*, came from the work of the ChildTrauma Academy in the area of violence in childhood. School shootings, youth on youth violence, seemingly senseless murders, the increase of disturbed and aggressive behaviors in young children and the continuous bath of violent imagery in the media all pushed us to this work. Our group has seen the impact of violence in many ways; children and families gutted by violence – dozens of children, for example, who witnessed their parents being killed. We have work with, and tried to understand and help children who commit violence including murder; we have worked with hundreds of children altered by witnessing domestic violence and hundreds more who have witnessed community violence – gang shootings, random crime, war, genocide. Much of what we learn from these children and their families is outlined in our first training series, *Understanding Maltreated and Traumatized Children*. And much of what we have learned about how to protect, nurture and educate children is outlined in this series.

The focus of this Series, however, is not violence; the focus is health. We believe that health promotion is violence prevention. If a child develops the capacity to be humane, his likelihood for committing violence decreases and his likelihood to be resilient following exposure to violence increases. This series is about the development of six of core strengths that can help promote health and decrease risk for a host of emotional, social, behavioral and cognitive problems.

The result of our efforts to address violence from a health promotion perspective is that we found that this perspective was useful to parents, caregivers and educators working to promote healthy development. This training series, then, has become focused on ways to facilitate healthy development that is relevant for all children, not just high-risk children impacted by violence, abuse or other forms of adverse life experience. Certainly this information is helpful for understanding and helping high risk children but that is not the singular focus of these materials.

We have structured this Series to present materials and concepts for three main target groups: teachers and clinicians working with children, parents and caregivers and children. Each of the following topic chapters will be divided into sections that have a somewhat unique perspective, sometimes for caregivers and parents, sometimes for educators and some for children and youth. Dividing and using these materials for teaching and training can use any combination of these sections depending upon your specific needs and interests.

Six Core Strengths for Healthy Development

Violence is like a virus. In its many forms--on the news, in movies, on television, and in print--it can insidiously infect our children. Mysteriously, though, this germ can be virulent in some and barely noticeable in others. Why do some children re-enact the violence they see on television and others do not? Why do some chronically-teased children develop a sense of self-loathing, while others plot to shoot their taunting peers? Why do some children who make these murderous plans actually act on them?

It's almost impossible to answer these questions. We can't always pinpoint what makes a child violent. But we do know that by cultivating a series of core strengths in our students we can prevent them from becoming violent and offer them an antidote to the inescapable violence to which they're exposed.

Each of the core strengths--attachment, self-regulation, affiliation, awareness, tolerance, and respect--is a building block in a child's development. Together, they provide a strong foundation for his or her future health, happiness, and productivity. Following is a brief description of each strength and how to look for signs of struggle.

ATTACHMENT: Making relationships

What it is: The capacity to form and maintain healthy emotional bonds with another person. It is first acquired in infancy, as a child interacts with a loving, responsive and attentive caregiver.

Why it's important: This core strength is the cornerstone of all the others. An infant's interactions with the primary caregiver create his or her first relationship. Healthy attachments allow a child to love, to become a good friend, and to have a positive model for future relationships. As a child grows, other consistent and nurturing adults such as teachers, family friends, and relatives will shape his or her ability for attachment. The attached child will be a better friend, student, and classmate, which promotes all kinds of learning.

Signs of struggle: A child who has difficulty with this strength has a hard time making friends and trusting adults. She may show little empathy for others and may act in what seems to be remorseless ways. With few friends and disconnected from his peers, he is

also at greater risk when exposed to violence. Children unable to attach lack the emotional anchors needed to buffer the violence they see. They may self-isolate, act out, reject a peer's friendly overture because they distrust it, or socially withdraw.

SELF-REGULATION: Containing impulses

What it is: The ability to notice and control primary urges such as hunger and sleep, as well as feelings such as frustration, anger, and fear. Developing and maintaining this strength is a lifelong process. Its roots begin with external regulation from a caring parent, and its healthy growth depends on a child's experience and the maturation of the brain.

Why it's important: Putting a moment between an impulse and an action is an essential skill. Acquiring this strength helps a child physiologically and emotionally. But it's a strength that must be learned--we are not born with it.

Signs of struggle: When a child doesn't develop the capacity to self-regulate, she will have problems sustaining friendships, and in learning and controlling her behavior. He may blurt out a thoughtless and hurtful remark, express hurt or anger with a shove or by knocking down another child's work. Just seeing a violent act may set her off or deeply upset her. Children who struggle with self-regulation are more reactive, immature, impressionable, and more easily overwhelmed by threats and violence.

AFFILIATION: Being part of a group

What it is: The capacity to join others and contribute to a group. This strength springs from our ability to form attachments. Affiliation is the glue for healthy human functioning: it allows us to form and maintain relationships with others to create something stronger, more adaptive, and more creative than the individual.

Why it's important: Human beings are social creatures. We are biologically designed to live, play, grow, and work in groups. A family is a child's first and most important group, glued together by the strong emotional bonds of attachment. In other groups, such as those in school, children will have thousands of brief emotional, social, and cognitive experiences that can help shape their development. It is in these groups that children make their first friendships. Affiliation helps children feel included, connected and valued.

Signs of struggle: A child who is afraid or otherwise unable to affiliate may suffer a self-fulfilling prophecy: she is likelier to be excluded and may feel socially isolated. Healthy development of the core strengths of attachment and self-regulation make affiliation much easier. But a distant, disengaged, or impulsive child--one who is also weak in these other core strengths--won't be easily welcomed in a group. And in fact, if he is part of a group, he may act in ways that lead others to tease or actively avoid him.

The excluded, marginalized child can take this pain and turn it on herself, becoming sad or self-loathing. Or she can direct the pain outward, becoming aggressive and even violent. Later in life, without intervention, these children are more likely to seek out other marginalized children and affiliate with them. Unfortunately, the glue that holds these groups together can be beliefs and values that are self-destructive or hateful to those who have excluded them.

ATTUNEMENT: Being aware of others

What it is: Recognizing the needs, interests, strengths, and values of others. Infants begin life self-absorbed, and slowly develop awareness--the ability to see beyond themselves, and to sense and categorize the other people in their world. At first this process is simplistic: "I am a boy and she is a girl. Her skin is brown and mine is white." As a child grows, his awareness of differences and similarities becomes more complex.

Why it's important: The ability to be attuned, to read and respond to the needs of others, is an essential element of human communication. An aware child learns about the needs and complexities of others by watching, listening, and forming relationships with a variety of children. She becomes part of a group (which the core strength of affiliation allows her to do), and sees ways in which we are all alike and different. With experience, a child can learn to reject "labels" used to categorize people such as skin color or language. The aware child will also be much less likely to exclude others from a group, less likely to tease, and less likely to act in a violent way.

Signs of struggle: A child who lacks the ability to be aware of others' needs and values is at risk for developing prejudicial attitudes. Having formed ideas about others without knowing them, she may continue to make categorical, often destructive and stereotypical judgments: "She speaks English with an accent, so she must be stupid," or "He's fat, so he must be lazy." This immature kind of thinking feeds the hateful beliefs underlying many forms of verbal and physical violence.

TOLERANCE: Accept Differences

What it is: The capacity to understand and accept how others are different from you. This core strength builds upon another, awareness: once aware, how do you respond to the differences you observe?

Why it's important: It's natural and human to be afraid of the new and the different. To become tolerant, a child must first face the fear of difference. This can be a challenge because children tend to affiliate based on similarities--in age, interests, families, or cultures. But they also learn to reach out and be more sensitive to others by watching how the adults in their lives relate. With active modeling, you can build on your students' tolerance. When a child learns to accept difference in others, he is able to value what makes each of us special and unique.

Signs of struggle: An intolerant child is likelier to lash out at others, tease, bully, and if capable, will act out their intolerance in violent ways. Children who struggle with this strength help create an atmosphere of exclusion and intimidation for those people and groups they fear. This atmosphere promotes and facilitates violence.

RESPECT: Finding value in differences

What it is: Appreciating the worth in yourself and in others. Respect grows from the foundation of the other five strengths. An aware, tolerant child with good affiliation, attachment, and self-regulation strengths acquires respect naturally. The development of respect is a lifelong process, yet its roots are in childhood.

Why it's important: Your students will belong to many groups, meet many kinds of people, and will need to be able to listen, negotiate, compromise, and cooperate. Having respect enables a child to accept others and to see the value in diversity. She can see that every group needs many styles and many strengths to succeed. He will value each person in the group for the talents he or she brings to the group. When children respect--and even celebrate--diversity in others, they find the world to be a more interesting, complex, and safer place. Just as understanding replaces ignorance, respect replaces fear.

Signs of struggle: A child who can't respect others is incapable of self-respect. She will be quick to find fault with others, but can also be her own harshest critic. Too often the trait a child ridicules in others reflects something similar he hates in himself. The core of

all violence is a lack of respect, for oneself and for others. When children feel no respect, they will likely become violent--because they value nothing.

These core strengths provide a child with the framework for a life rich in family, friends, and personal growth. Helping to teach children these core strengths gives them a gift they will use throughout their lifetimes. They will learn to live and prosper together with people of all kinds--all bringing different strengths to create a greater whole.

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Overview: Focus on the Classroom

Attachment: Be a Friend

What it means: The ability to form and maintain healthy emotional bonds with another person. First acquired in infancy through loving responsive caregiving, it develops throughout childhood, shaped at school by attentive teachers and caring peers.

Why it's important: This core strength is the cornerstone of all the others. Healthy attachments allow a child to become a good friend, a caring classmate, and to have positive and useful models for future relationships. In your class, over the course of the year, your consistency and nurturing will enhance your student's attachment skills. Students quipped with this strength are more secure and therefore more open to all kinds of learning-social, emotional, and cognitive.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: Mirror, Mirror. What do we look for in a friend? Do we look for someone just like us? Why or why not? Ask students: What do you see in yourself that makes you a good friend? Make a list of qualities that students value in themselves. Then ask students to break into small groups and ask that they think about the strengths of others. Have them work as a team to compile a list of traits that they see in one another that make their team members able to be good friends. Compare these results with the original list. Ask: What's different and what's the same about these lists?

Try it: Fair Enough! To form authentic attachments, students need some ground rules about what you expect from them, what they expect from one another and what will happen if

these expectations aren't met. Create a classroom "Bill of Rights" by asking students what they think is fair and friendly behavior. What words or actions can be encouraged and rewarded? Which are not acceptable and what consequences might occur? (Beware-your students may come up with harsher punishments than you ever would!) Discuss your feelings about their list, modify it with their help, and post it. For resources to use with students, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

When students struggle with the core strength of attachment, they:

- * have a hard time making and keeping friends
- * may have difficulty with trusting peers and adults
- * may show little empathy for others and may act in apparently remorseless ways
- * may self-isolate and reject a friendly overture because they distrust it
- * may be cruel to the animals and younger children in the school
- * are often easily influenced by aggressive and violent behavior because they lack emotional anchors-such as nurturing friends and teachers-to help them put it into perspective

What You Can Do To Help

- * Model good social language – eye contact, smiling, listening and positive-affirming touch
- * Use gentle humor and lightness in your tone; be aware of your body language so that students see that you are relaxed and accessible
- * Avoid sarcastic humor and be aware that your students are their own harshest critics
- * Record and observe anti-social behavior and share your concerns with parents
- * Encourage pairing and small group work that enables students to get to know each other

Self-Regulation: Think Before You Act

What it means: The capacity to notice and control primary urges such as hunger and sleep, as well as feelings like frustration, anger, and fear. Developing and maintaining this strength is a lifelong process. As they move through school, students continue to rely on your adult help to master this strength.

Why It's Important: Putting a moment between an impulse and an action is a life skill. Acquiring this strength helps a child physiologically and emotionally. But it's a strength that must be learned over time-we are not born with it. It's essential that teachers keep their expectations age-appropriate where self-regulation is concerned. For instance, it's

unreasonable to expect a nine-year-old to be sunny and calm: fourth-graders worry about everything from the possibility of a rained-out class trip to global warming. In social situations and in school, the growing ability to self-regulate may spell a child's success and build self-confidence.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: Truth or Tattle? Ask your students: What is the difference between telling the truth and tattling on a classmate? Elicit examples of truth-telling: when you do something wrong, when your friends ask you how you feel about something, and so on. Then ask: How is tattling different from telling the truth? Elicit examples of tattling. Explore one final idea: Is it always fair or right to tell the truth? to tattle?

Try it: Take a Breather! Worries and complaints are frequent at this age-and these are signs of stress. Try to integrate this "breather" into your weekly (or daily) schedule. Invite students to sit on the rug or other comfortable spot. Lower the lights. Turn on some soft and rhythmic jazz or classical music. Encourage students to close their eyes, breathe deeply and clear their minds. Have them listen as they inhale and exhale, and as you name body parts (face, neck, shoulders, arms, torso, legs, toes) tell them to breathe in and out and relax each one. Listen, breathe, and relax for at least five minutes. Plan a quiet activity to follow this "breather" and notice how focused your students are! For resources to use with students, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

When students struggle with the core strength of self-regulation, they:

- * Have problems with transitions
- * Do poorly in unstructured or free time
- * Often have difficulty with attention, listening and acquiring new skills
- * Have problems in groups and difficulty sustaining friendships
- * often act impulsively and cannot rein themselves in
- * may blurt out a thoughtless remark or lash out at others without warning (moved from tolerance)
- * often express hurt or anger physically, by shoving a classmate or damaging others' work
- * May be very sensitive to criticism and aggression
- * often complain that they are being treated unfairly.

What You Can Do to Help

- * In your words and actions, model self-control
- * Step in quickly and stop any hurtful action or language you hear.

- * Introduce the class to peer mediation and conflict resolution techniques.
- * Praise students' thoughtful actions, remarks, reactions and problem-solving skills.

Affiliation: Join In

What it means: The ability to join others and to contribute to a group. This strength springs from a child's capacity to form attachments. Affiliation is the glue for healthy human functioning: It allows us to form and maintain relationships with others to create something stronger, more adaptive and more creative than the individual.

Why It's Important: Human beings are social creatures. We are biologically designed to live, play, grow, and work in groups. A student's school experience provides many opportunities to affiliate: with a friend, a small group, a class, and the school community. It's in these groups that students will have thousands of brief emotional, social, and cognitive experiences that help shape their personal growth. And in these groups students will also make stronger connections with peers: their first friendships. Affiliation helps students feel included, connected, and valued.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: Tricky Cliques. Ask students: Do you know what a clique is? Explain that it's a group of friends who tend to exclude others. Ask: are there cliques in this class? In this grade? In this school? What's good about being in a clique? What's the down side?

Try it: Create a Class Tradition: Traditions bring people together as groups, with a purpose. Talk with your class about traditions they celebrate: family reunions, holidays, birthdays, and so on. Many of these include four actions: giving, sharing, working together as a team, and celebrating. Brainstorm with your students to think of a project, gathering, or outing as a class that could be the start of a tradition. Record, photograph and write about your tradition so future classes can follow it! For resources to use with students, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

A child who is afraid or unable to affiliate well may:

- * be likelier to be excluded and may feel socially isolated
- * often have a problem with self-regulation or attachment
- * appear distant or disengaged and won't be easily welcomed into a group
- * in a group, act in ways that lead others to tease or avoid him
- * turn the pain of feeling marginalized on herself, becoming sad or self-loathing

* seek out other marginalized children and unite around negative attitudes towards the other groups.

What You Can Do To Help

- * Find quiet time to spend alone with this child, to get to know better his/her interests
- * Actively facilitate this child's participation in class groups
- * Enlist this child's help in an area of interest (for instance, have him read to a younger child, or show a classmate how to do something he is good at).
- * Establish clear guidelines with your class that emphasize and reward acts of kindness and inclusion, and provide consequences for unkindness.
- *Rearrange seating occasionally so that children can get to know and work with others.

Attunement: Think of Others

What it means: Recognizing the needs, interests, strengths and values of others. Infants begin life self-absorbed, and slowly develop awareness-the ability to see beyond themselves-to sense and categorize the others in their world. In young students, this process is simplistic: "I am a boy and she is a girl. Her skin is brown and mine is white." As students move through school, their awareness of differences and similarities becomes increasingly complex, and teachers play a key role in helping this strength develop.

Why It's Important: The ability to be attuned, to read and respond to the needs of others, is an essential element of human communication, not to mention school life. An aware child learns about the needs and complexities of others by watching, listening, and forming friendships with a variety of children. She becomes part of a group (which the core strength of affiliation allows her to do), and sees ways in which we are all alike and different. With positive experiences and guidance from you, a student can learn to reject "labels" used to categorize people such as skin color or the language another child speaks. The aware student will also be less likely to exclude others, tease, or act in violent ways.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: I Wonder Why? Invite your class to seek answers to some big questions. For instance: how do people get their skin color? What language do most people speak in our state, country, and nation? How many different cultures make up our school community? What are students in our grade worried about-and what would they like to do about it? Have students break into small groups to tackle one question, and use library resources, student interviews and polls to collect their data. Then share it!

Try it: Mirror Me! Here's one way to help students be better able to 'read' others: have them mirror each other's movements! Pair students and have them stand, facing each other, about four feet apart (or closer, if it works better). Designate one side as "doers" and the other side as "mirrors." Allow students to try mirroring each other for two minutes, then stop and ask: is this easy or hard? What might make it easier? Continue for 4 more minutes, then switch sides so the "doers" are now the "mirrors." When you're done, ask students: which did you like more-being a doer or a mirror? For resources to use with students, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

When children struggle with the core strength of awareness, they may:

- * make insensitive comments about other children's weaknesses without recognizing the impact
- * will tend to see things as absolute
- * form (often negative) ideas about others based on stereotypes
- * feel socially out of tune with others, so judgments of others may be harsh
- * be more likely to put down others to lift themselves up; ie, bullying or teasing

What You Can Do to Help

- * When you can, point out how a person or event in the news demonstrates complexity and goes against stereotypes (i.e., the US Olympic gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling who does not look "athletic.")
- * Talk about "stereotypes." What are they? Are they fair? Why or why not?
- * Each week, notice and reward one "random act of kindness" you see in class.
- * Make sure that classroom materials are multicultural and reflect the world

Tolerance: Accept Differences

What it means: The capacity to understand and accept how others are different from you. This core strength builds upon the previous one, awareness: once aware, what do you do with the differences you notice?

Why It's Important: When your student first enters your classroom, everything is new and different...and probably a little scary. It's natural and human to be afraid of difference. To become tolerant, a student must first face that fear. This can be a challenge because students-and most adults, too-tend to affiliate based on similarities: in age, interests, families or cultures. But in this very multicultural world, with the help of your modeling,

students can learn to reach out and be responsive to others. A tolerant student is more flexible and adaptive in many ways, and more receptive to all kinds of learning. Most important, when a student learns to accept difference in others, he becomes able to what makes each of us valuable and unique.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: Bitter Behavior or Better Behavior? Ask your students to define prejudice. What causes people to hate each other, in their view? Explain that prejudice easily leads to violence. Can they see why? Talk about the choices people have in the way they treat one another: remind them that they have these same choices to make, every day. What can people do differently to wipe out prejudice? What can they do at school?

Try it: Face Facts. Pair students and give them plenty of markers and paper. Ask partners to face each other, seated. Encourage students to study the faces of their partners, and then to draw their portraits. These drawings can be realistic or symbolic, but they are meant to show the artist's partner how he or she is seen and known in the class. When one set of artists is done, switch roles. Be sure to have each artist share and explicate their portrait. For resources to use with students, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

An intolerant child is more likely to:

- * very judgemental of others
- * verbally tease and berate others
- * introduce negative or destructive views into a group (e.g., "we don't allow those kinds of people in our group.")
- * physically intimidate or bully peers
- * claim to dislike groups and individuals, but in fact, fear them

What You Can Do to Help

- * Model in your actions and your words tolerance of ideas and people
- * Establish a zero tolerance for verbal and physical hurting in your class
- * Give students 'second chances' to make better behavior choices by roleplaying
- * Intervene immediately when you hear or see intolerant behavior
- * Create opportunities for students to share information about their families or backgrounds, including inviting special friends or relatives to visit
- * Talk about right and wrong, and encourage students' growing sense of morality

Respect: Respect Yourself and Others

What it means: Appreciating the value in yourself and others. Respect, the sixth core strength, springs from the foundation of the other five strengths. An aware, tolerant student with good affiliation, attachment and self-regulation strengths acquires respect naturally. The development of respect is a lifelong process, as students learn each of these core strengths and integrate them into their behaviors and world view.

Why It's Important: In school and in the larger world, students will belong to many groups, meet many kinds of people, and will need to be able to listen, negotiate, compromise and cooperate. Having respect allows a student to see the value in diversity. She can see that every group needs many strengths and styles to succeed. He will value each person in the group for the talents he or she brings to the group. When students respect-and even celebrate-diversity, they find the world to be a more interesting, complex and safer place. Understanding replaces ignorance, and respect replaces fear.

Classroom Activities

Talk About It: Both Sides Now. How do you learn respect? Sometimes it helps to listen-to both sides of a story. Think of a recent incident in class, or create a fictionalized one, in which two students argued or disagreed. Remind your students: Both children felt that they were right and the other was wrong; both were hurt. Using puppets or with your voice alone, retell one child's "side," and then the other's. Ask your students: What are some better ways this pair could have solved their problem? How can they show respect for each other even if they disagree?

Try it: Lunch and Learn. Create a bi- monthly class lunch and invite a family member or special friend of each of your students to join you . Ask your visitor to share a memory of growing up or to demonstrate a favorite hobby to the students. Divide students into small groups for questions-and-answers. Snap photos during the visit and have the class compile a scrapbook of these visits with reflections about what they learned. For more resources you can use with your class, visit Scholastic.com/teachers.

Red Flags

A child who struggles with the core strength of respect may:

- * be disrespectful to classmates and adults
- * be quick to find fault with others
- * be her own harshest critic and have difficulty finding value in her own strengths
- * ridicule traits in others that reflect something he does not like about himself

- * be more likely to act in malicious and cruel ways as they have fewer social and moral anchors
- * be more likely to dehumanize and degrade others

What You Can Do to Help

- * In your actions and your words model respect for ideas and the children in your classroom
- * When opportunities arise, talk about examples of respect and breakdown of respect from the news or the events of the classroom
- * Invite a colleague, school director or school psychologist to observe the class
- * Record your own observations in an anecdotal form

About the Author

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Dr. Perry is the Senior Fellow of the ChildTrauma Academy. Dr. Perry served as the Thomas S. Trammell Research Professor of Child Psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine and Chief of Psychiatry at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, Texas from 1992 to 2001. In addition he has served as the Director of Provincial Programs in Children's Mental Health for Alberta, Canada, and is the author of more than 200 scientific articles and chapters. He is the recipient of dozens of awards and honors and is an internationally recognized authority in the area of child maltreatment and the impact of trauma and neglect on the developing brain.

The ChildTrauma Academy

The ChildTrauma Academy, a not-for-profit organization based in Houston, TX, is a unique collaborative of individuals and organizations working to improve the lives of high-risk children through direct service, research and education. These efforts are in partnership with the public and private systems that are mandated to protect, heal and educate children. The work of the Academy has been supported, in part, by grants from Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, the Children's Justice Act, the Court Improvement Act and through innovative partnerships with academic and corporate partners such as Powered, Inc., Scholastic, Inc. and Digital Consulting and Software Services.

The mission of the ChildTrauma Academy is to foster the creation of innovations in practice, programs and policy related to traumatized and maltreated children. To support this mission, the Academy has two main activities; 1) Program development and consultation and 2) Specialized education and training services.

For more information or to direct donations:

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