

## Little Ripples Model

Over the last five years, Little Ripples has expanded into four refugee camps in eastern Chad, reaching 3,000 Darfuri refugee children and training 97 refugee teachers. Little Ripples has also been adapted and implemented with Central African refugees in Cameroon and Burundian refugees in Tanzania – training 92 teachers and reaching more than 7,000 children. There are three key components of Little Ripples that differentiate the model:

1) **Teacher Training:** LR teacher training catalyzes a transformative process in which ECCD teachers incorporate skills of empathy, leadership, teamwork, and creative problem-solving with their students, school, and their community. From training, LR teachers move beyond providing traditional humanitarian “safe spaces” to creating an environment that fosters inner and outer peace, imagination, and connection to culture for refugee children. Little Ripples training prepares teachers to focus on the “whole-child”—addressing the long-term development and success of a child in the 21st century—and not solely on academic milestones.

2) **Curriculum:** The LR curriculum is intentionally designed for use in challenging and resource-poor contexts with children, aged 3 to 5, affected by trauma, displacement and other complex issues. It guides individuals – at any level of education and experience – to deliver play-based learning activities that foster social-emotional development, while using positive behavior management techniques. It is designed to be integrated with any existing academic or pre-primary curricula and adapted to any context and culture.

3) **Leadership:** Refugee teachers and caregivers are empowered to lead and expand the LR program in their community. The impact of the program does not occur in silos. Teachers in the same community have weekly meetings, complete a peer-taught leadership curriculum, and visit each other’s classrooms, learning from each other and continually improving the program. Little Ripples teachers also travel to other refugee camps within their region to expand the program through refugee-to-refugee teacher training. iACT does not leave international staff on-the-ground, rather iACT directly employs refugees to lead the program and/or partners with established organizations in order to avoid duplication of effort and leverage the resources and capacities of each community and organization.

4) **Trauma-informed:** Little Ripples is trauma-informed, integrating compassionate listening, mindfulness and choice, and restoring relationships and community. Broadly defined, trauma is anything that overwhelms our ability to cope or respond, leaving us feeling hopeless and out of control. Refugees and people on the move often experience the compounded effects of trauma. Living in an uncertain state of displacement challenges a person’s dignity and resilience as both an individual and a community member. While one cannot assume that people on the move live in a prolonged state of trauma, humanitarians and organizations serving them can and should ground programs in trauma-informed approaches that serve to empower each of us to live our fullest potential.

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What we have learned from our work and what we can teach others is that there is no blueprint approach that works with every community. This is why the Little Ripples model begins with listening to the community. Listening to, and actually hearing, a person is the foundation for rebuilding the dignity and choice that is often taken-away through the journey of displacement and prolonged state of limbo. True listening involves creating purposeful spaces where individuals can share, be seen and heard.

Furthermore, what we've learned and what we can teach others is that by integrating tools like mindfulness into humanitarian programs like LR, choice can be reclaimed by an individual and the community. The conventional humanitarian system does not leave much space for choice. People are mostly being labeled as "beneficiaries" that receive a set of services yet rarely asked what they need or desire. Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally being in the present moment, aware of self and environment, and, perhaps most importantly, experiencing that moment without judgment and ensuring we don't don't come to the table with our own agendas or solutions in mind.

Lastly, central to restoring a person's well-being is rebuilding relationships and community. Offering opportunities for communities affected by trauma to gather, learn, work, and grow together is essential for recovery. In adapting and implementing LR, the program offers these points of gathering and opportunities to build capacity for community members to support one another, and to rebuild trust. Building or rebuilding understanding and connection between people through meaningful, equitably created dialogue and trainings can break down barriers and humanize new groups. By integrating restorative practices into community-based work, there can be a stronger foundation for a more peaceful future.