

Supporting Children Affected by Migration and its relevance to all children re-traumatized by Covid-19

Chris Gittins, Director of NCfLB (the University of Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour), outlines the guidance and support being offered to the dedicated leaders in schools across Europe who are struggling to restore the social and emotional wellbeing of children affected by migration.

AfA is leading the dissemination of the ICAM (Including Children Affected by Migration) Programme in partnership with NCfLB and European partners in 4 countries.



The partners are determined to provide help for these very special, vulnerable children, despite the added pressures of the Covid 19 pandemic and the prospect of Brexit. And the approaches and strategies will work with any child or young person traumatized by Covid 19 lockdown,

At a time when we are drawing attention to the importance of children's mental wellbeing, there is a particular population of children who have extra-special needs in this respect.

In European schools there are the approximately 13 million Children Affected by Migration They have suffered, often traumatically, from displacement, separation or loss as a result of their circumstances. Each has their own individual distressing story. They may be asylum seekers, refugees, economic or social migrants. They may have been accompanied by a few of their family or travelled alone. They may be fleeing war, famine, poverty or other disasters, and they may have suffered further difficulties and upsets on their journeys. They may be recently arrived or have been in their new host country for some time. They may feel secure or be uncertain of their future. Included in this population of CAM are the estimated **2.5 million children left behind** when one or both of their parents migrated to seek long-term work in another country.

Against a background of a rise in xenophobia, intolerance and violence towards migrants in many European countries, providing the necessary support for CAM and their families presents a huge challenge. Many exceptionally gifted staff in schools across Europe are working with them to build the relationships essential for learning. We all know that unhappy children cannot learn – they cannot access the education which is their fundamental right – and the prime purpose and duty of schools is to enable learning.

But then not one, but two oncoming trains have entered our tunnel - **Brexit and the Covid 19 pandemic**. Far more critical for the future of society as we know it than the economic considerations, which are the focus of the media and our national leaders, **both these momentous events are causing untold further damage to CAM and their families**. And the damage is potentially long term. Research into the effects of separation and loss on children evacuated during World War 2 shows social and emotional distress lasting for 3 generations.

As a result of Covid lockdowns, CAM have once again suffered broken relationships with their school community and their teachers, spending more time in the confines of a family who may be equally in need of help to overcome the disruption and upset they have suffered together. The task of re-forming relationships for learning as CAM return to school has become even more difficult for their teachers and support staff at a time of enormous stress and upset for them too. Somehow we need to find the wherewithal to allow school leaders the time and capacity to access the support ICAM can provide and to implement the programme in their schools.

Furthermore, the solutions ICAM provides to the pan-European problem of truly including CAM in schools are threatened by the uncertainty Brexit causes our ability to lead the ICAM initiative from the UK and access the funding needed. We have built strong friendships and a common purpose with like-minded and dedicated partners in 3 European countries and with major European child welfare agencies, yet our aim to do the same and disseminate ICAM in further countries is seriously hampered by the social impact of Brexit.

So where is the real light at the end of the tunnel enabling ICAM to provide support for CAM?

Led by AfA and NCfLB, and supported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees together with the leading child welfare agency Eurochild, the Including Children Affected by Migration programme - ICAM – has been developed by AfA and NCfLB in collaboration with a consortium of 5 partners in Spain, Italy, Romania and the UK dedicated to providing for the special needs of CAM by disseminating solutions to the problems schools across Europe are facing in giving them full access to learning.

ICAM helps schools and CAM build Relationships for Learning by:

1. Enhancing the school climate of **convivencia** so that CAM feel included, loved and cared for in their school. “Convivencia” (living together in harmony) is a wonderful Spanish word which has no precise English translation but which truly encompasses the emotion it carries in the Spanish language

2. Providing **additional support** in school and in the family for their Social and Emotional Learning and wellbeing so that CAM have the capacity to form Relationships for Learning.
3. **Raising awareness of the rights of CAM**, and the law protecting them, so that everyone understands that building Relationships for Learning is not an option, it is a fundamental human right.
4. **Working with, and involving, any family or carers in a close**, caring partnership for learning.

ICAM aims to provide some light at the end of the tunnel for CAM, their schools and their families.



It has been a huge boost to the programme to have the injection of leadership and insight from AfA. **The fundamental principles underpinning the passion that all the staff at AfA share for the equal value disadvantaged children need and deserve is inspirational and is contributing further impetus to the mission we share with our European Partners.** In practical terms, AfA achieved a last gasp European Erasmus+ grant which is extending the programme to include practical ways to help European schools increase the resilience and wellbeing of CAM so that they are less vulnerable to the dangers and damage they face when on-line.

And then there are the children themselves. As they grow slowly in confidence and have their self-worth restored, **CAM become a huge asset to the schools that have embraced them.** They return that embrace many times over and in trial schools we have seen numerous examples of CAM releasing their potential and becoming a real influence for the good of their school and community – remember that Mahatma Ghandi, Albert Einstein and, more recently, Barak Obama were all once Children Affected by Migration.

But above all there is one benefit that CAM bring to schools that taking up the ICAM programme soon releases.

The whole school community comes to realise that the support ICAM provides for Children Affected by Migration is precisely what *all* children need and even more so in these unprecedented times.

Chris Gittins

Director of NCFLB (the University of Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour)

Visit AfA International for more information: <https://afaeducation.org/about-us/achievement-for-all-international/achievement-for-all-international/>



ACHIEVEMENT
FOR ALL

Get in touch Donate

About us Coaching Programmes Covid-19 Leadership Support Step-Up Reviews Our Impact News Join us Blog Awards

We want to put Wellbeing at the heart of learning and help school communities across England and Wales to thrive emotionally, socially and academically, ensuring that social mobility is real.

Read our Every Child Included in Education manifesto here

Visit afaeducation.org to learn more about our leadership development and professional training approaches that have reached nearly six thousand education settings over nearly a decade.