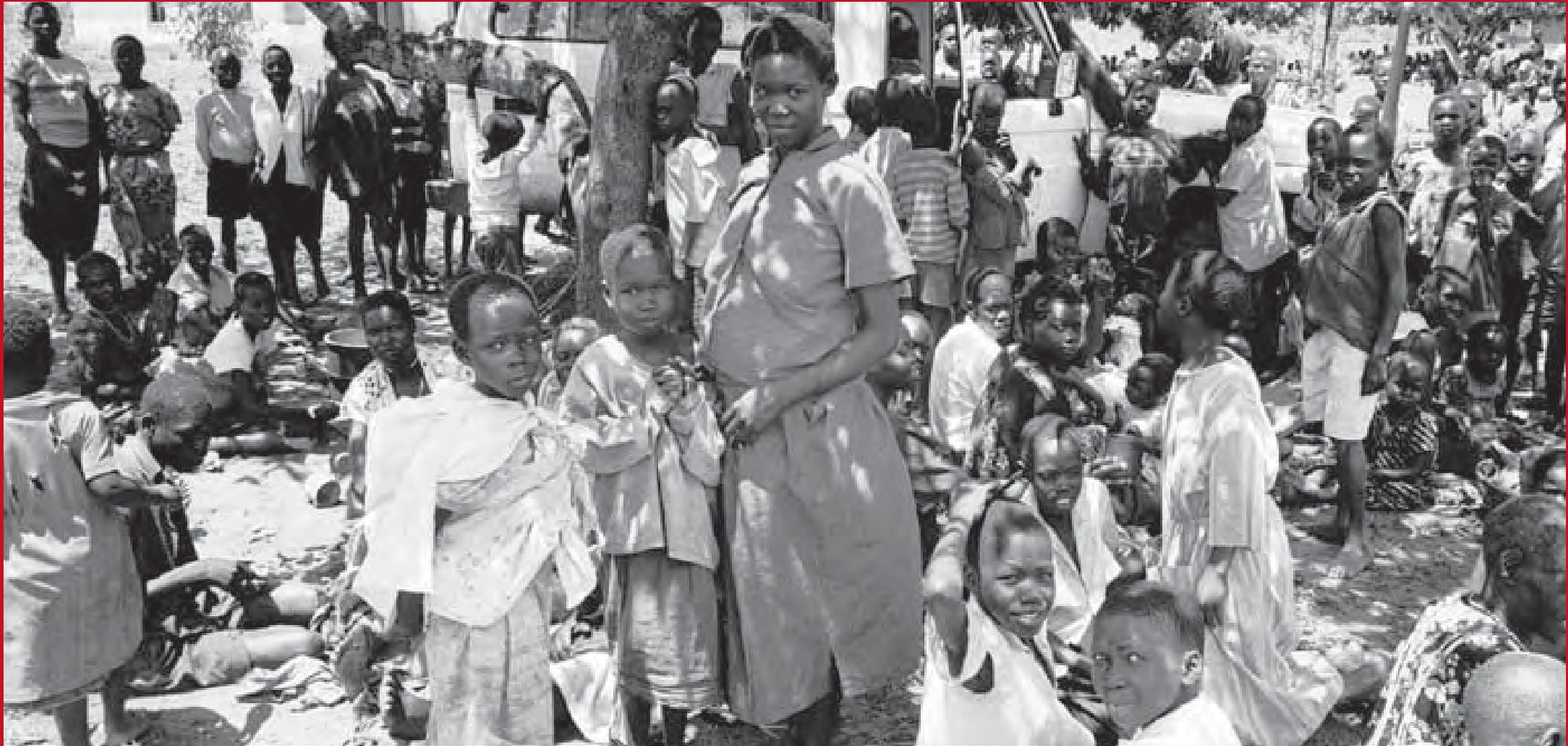


# THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAM OF AVSI IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY



1994 - 2005



This publication is dedicated to the people of northern Uganda who have suffered through a 19- year-old war, yet their resilience has remained strong and is admired by all who meet them.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# A CASE STUDY OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAM OF AVSI IN UGANDA 1994 - 2005

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Psychosocial program of AVSI in Uganda, October 2005



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## ACRONYMS

AIDS	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AVSI	-	Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale
CBO	-	Community Based Organization
CCT	-	Center Coordinating Tutors
CDA	-	Community Development Assistant
CDO	-	Community Development Officer
COWA	-	Companionship of Worker's Association
CPA	-	Concerned Parents' Association
CRD	-	Community Resilience and Dialogue
CVC	-	Community Volunteer Counselors
ECHO	-	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
FOCA	-	Friends of Children's Association
GUSCO	-	Gulu Support for Children Organization
HIV	-	Human Immune Virus
IDP	-	Internally Displaced Persons
IGA	-	Income Generating Activities
INEE	-	Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies
IRC	-	International Rescue Committee
KICWA	-	Kitgum Concerned Women's Association
LRA	-	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organization
NUPSNA	-	Northern Uganda Psycho-social Needs Assessment
ORACLE	-	Opportunities for Reducing Adolescence and Child Labor through Education
OVC	-	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PSSP	-	Psychosocial Support Program
PTC	-	Primary Teacher's College
PMTCT	-	Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV/AIDS Transmission
PWG	-	Psychosocial Working Group
RDC	-	Resident District Commissioner
TPO	-	Trans-cultural Psycho-social Organization
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development

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## INTRODUCTION

Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI) has been present in northern Uganda since 1984, initially as health, agriculture and emergency specialists. However, AVSI's approach has always included education and psychosocial aspects. Following AVSI's response to people traumatized by the genocide in Rwanda (1994), AVSI psychosocial staff came to Uganda in 1997, specifically to address the community's psychosocial needs by identifying and building on the resources available among the people of Acholiland. It is in this region of northern Uganda where the population has been suffering from nearly 20 years of conflict and violence between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda. Over 30,000 children have been abducted by the LRA to form their fighting force, and nearly two million people have been displaced from their homes due to insecurity.

From the early beginnings in Rwanda to the present program in northern Uganda, AVSI has learned many lessons while responding to and working with local communities to develop an effective psychosocial program. This case study is an attempt to summarize AVSI's experience thus far, to reflect on how the program has developed, to consolidate the lessons learned over the years, and to raise questions about future psychosocial responses to people in conflict areas.

AVSI's approach is working *with* people, not *for* people. Emphasis is on the development of relationships with partners and beneficiaries through education. A regular process of reflection on our work leads us to continually assess needs, identify resources, plan responses, and collaborate with the community. This approach and process have led to the ever-evolving psychosocial program in northern Uganda, which has been the work of many contributors over the years: professional staff and field workers; community participants and leaders; children and adults.

This is the story of significant events and milestones in the history of AVSI's psychosocial program in northern Uganda from 1996 to 2005. Along with the commentary about the evolution of the program are the lessons learned, AVSI's involvement in the international psychosocial arena, and critical issues to consider as we move ahead in this field. This booklet is also complemented with a CD containing AVSI publications and unpublished materials (such as training reports and papers presented at conferences) for those who want to explore the history in more depth or to make use of AVSI's training materials.

AVSI is grateful for the opportunity to be involved in a program that is constantly growing and changing to meet the needs and build on the resources of the people as the situation in our world changes. We welcome the opportunity to share what we have been learning and to continue to dialogue with others who work in the area of psychosocial programming. The understanding of psychosocial needs and responses is a work in progress. What follows are the lessons AVSI has learned thus far.

## 1994: THE BEGINNING IN RWANDA

Due to many conflicts around the globe in the 1990's, there was a world-wide response to war-affected children. The primary focus of this response was to address the psychological as well as the social needs of the child, resulting in a holistic approach. This psychosocial approach views the person in the context of his or her community, and takes into account the person's psychological needs (such as thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values and behavior) and social needs (which refers to external relations with one's environment). The "psycho" (internal) and the "social" (external) interact and influence each other.

Defining the term "psychosocial" has been a challenge ever since it was first used. On one hand it is an approach, a lens through which to view the whole person with all of his/her needs and resources in the context of the community. Thus, it can be used with any intervention that seeks to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of people in order to strengthen their resilience in the face of adversity. On the other hand psychosocial can define a specific program that directly addresses people's psychological, spiritual, emotional, and social needs. AVSI has used psychosocial to refer to both a specific program developed over the past eight years and an approach that informs its many activities (including health, agriculture, water and sanitation, education, and emergency aid).

The psychosocial program in northern Uganda was born from an approach used in Rwanda after the genocide there in 1994. It was AVSI staff in neighboring Uganda, including some Rwandans, who were called to begin psychosocial work in Rwanda with children who had experienced trauma. AVSI partnered with UNICEF, beginning a long collaboration to develop psychosocial work with war-affected children. This initial team included Dr. Lucia Castelli, a pediatrician, Dr. Giovanni Galli, a neuropsychiatrist, Annette Devreux, a social worker, and Doreen Muzirankoni, a teacher. Together they developed a practical approach in the context in which they found themselves - an approach and methods that grew out of their experience in working with traumatized children. As a result of what they were learning in Rwanda, this team wrote AVSI's first psychosocial publication, *"Approach to war traumatized children in Rwanda."* (See document No. 1 on attached CD)

“Psychosocial interventions were born out of the perception that the kind of conflicts that were devastating Africa, with the increasing victimizing of civilians, required that something more be done since the damage to the people was unique.”

Dr. Filippo Ciantia



### Global links

*"Approach to war traumatized children in Rwanda"* was published in English, French and Italian to share what AVSI was learning with a wider audience and to contribute to the international dialogue concerning an effective psychosocial approach.

## 1996: FIRST EFFORTS IN NORTHERN UGANDA

In July 1996, Lord's Resistance Army rebels attacked Sudanese refugees at Acholpii camp in northern Uganda, killing 106 men, women and children. AVSI had already been in the region for twelve years providing health service, agricultural development and emergency relief. This organization had set up Acholpii camp in November 1993 in response to an influx of Sudanese refugees fleeing the conflict in southern Sudan. In fact at the time of the LRA attack on Acholpii, AVSI was one of the few international agencies present in the north of Uganda, so district officials called AVSI in August to make an assessment and identify the needs of the refugees. Two of the AVSI staff from the Rwandan trauma counseling program joined AVSI Uganda to complete this assessment and begin a psychosocial program. Dr. Adolf Diefenhardt, head of the AVSI Health Team, envisioned psychosocial interventions as part of treating the whole person, and psychosocial was considered a part of the health program. AVSI staff (Lucia Castelli, Annette Devreux, Giovanni Galli, and Hilary Haworth) trained health workers and camp leaders at Acholpii in the psychosocial approach and wrote a *manual for health workers* (See document No. 2 on attached CD) This constituted the first year of AVSI's psychosocial work in northern Uganda.



## 1997: DEVELOPMENT OF A FORMAL PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAM

In January 1997, the LRA massacred 412 men, women and children in Lokung and Palabek in northwest Kitgum district. As a result there was a massive displacement of Ugandans seeking safety in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The district government established a Disaster Management Committee to survey the needs in the IDP camps. After the initial humanitarian response, which provided food and other material resources, this local committee recognized that people had significant additional needs. When the need for psychological support surfaced, once again the district requested AVSI's assistance. Olaa Ambrose, the Community Development Officer (CDO) of Kitgum district, initiated the community approach to psychosocial programs in northern Uganda when he requested material and technical support for the district and took the leadership in advocating for psychosocial services. Subsequently Cherobin W. Ochaya, the Chief Administrative Officer of Kitgum District sent a formal request for technical assistance.

Dr. Lucia Castelli and a representative from UNICEF visited Kitgum district where the local government had already begun psychosocial work. AVSI offered technical assistance, and the first psychosocial course in response to the district's request was led by Olaa Ambrose, Dr. Lucia Castelli and Hilary Haworth, a social worker trained in counseling. AVSI partnered with UNICEF and the district to develop a psychosocial program in conjunction with the district government. Many district leaders from various departments were trained to look at the whole person, with all his/her needs and resources, within the context of the community. The involvement of district authorities presented a powerful opportunity for sustaining psychosocial activities in the area.

A few months later in April 1997, UNICEF funded the development of a database of abducted children in northern Uganda. AVSI offered technical support and joined with World Vision in collaborating with Kitgum district to develop a network for tracking abducted children. Also during this year, AVSI trained many different people in psychosocial awareness: 108 Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs) who were chosen by their communities; 28 primary school teachers; and all of the Community Development Assistants (CDAs) in the district government.

“ For me, I felt that some of the people we trained did take it (the psychosocial approach) on board. But in Kitgum you battle a context in which forces keep the war going. ”

Hilary Haworth

## Lessons learned

- Psychosocial efforts are aimed not simply at meeting people's short-term needs, but also at strengthening the innate resilience of individuals, families and communities.
- If you listen to the community, they will tell you what they need. There are already abundant resources to be channeled among community members. Their investment in pursuing goals that they themselves establish has the best chance of being effective and sustainable.
- The best CVCs are not necessarily the best educated but are those whom the community identifies. What is most significant is that they be people integrated into the life of the community who are already functioning as advisors or leaders.
- Counseling is not enough by itself to address the psychosocial issues present in a conflict area. There is a need to focus on wider psychosocial issues, especially on involving traditional leaders and on addressing community needs beyond the IDP and refugee camps.

As the international emphasis on psychosocial programs in areas of conflict increased and the number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) addressing psychosocial issues in Uganda expanded, it became evident that more coordination and a definition of the approach was needed. Early in 1997, UNICEF in Uganda organized a National Psycho-Social Core Team, which included representatives from AVSI, the Ministry of Gender and Community Development, Red Barnet, Transcultural Psycho-Social Organization (TPO), World Vision, Gulu Support for Children Organization (GUSCO), Hope After Rape, Save the Children (UK) and UNICEF. This Core Team prepared a workshop on *"Psycho-Social Support Programmes in Northern Uganda,"* held in July in Jinja, Uganda. This workshop was attended by 34 participants from government, local and international organizations working in the field of psychosocial support in conflict-affected areas of northern Uganda. The aims of the workshop were to increase knowledge of the stakeholders regarding the activities and programs of all agencies working in that region and to lay the framework for an in-depth assessment of current practices and ongoing psychosocial interventions. It was also an occasion to share experiences and review the immediate needs and priorities in meeting the challenge of the children affected by the conflict in the north of Uganda.

## 1998: INCREASING COLLABORATION, EXPANDING ACTIVITIES

During the first four months of 1998, the Northern Uganda Psycho-Social Needs Assessment (NUPSNA) was conducted by members of the core group, including Dr. Lucia Castelli from AVSI. Pairs of assessors went to eight districts in northern Uganda and identified unmet needs, risks and resources to address the psychosocial problems encountered. This process contributed to increased mutual respect and better collaboration among the various agencies working in this region. Within AVSI this experience broadened the perspective of its projects in the north and opened minds to the whole range of the needs. In addition, NUPSNA organized psychosocial training and sensitization of northern Uganda district officials. The core team developed the curriculum together and produced *a manual for the training* (*See document No. 3 on attached CD*).

### Lesson learned

- Working in collaboration with other agencies to explore the overall range of needs and services in a region provides a wider perspective on one's work. It also opens the way to addressing the gaps in services in an attempt to meet all of the diverse needs.

Meanwhile, psychosocial needs had surfaced in many parts of Uganda, and due to the increased collaboration with other NGOs as a result of the NUPSNA process, Save the Children UK invited AVSI to collaborate with them in conducting a *psychosocial training for CDAs and primary school teachers in Kasese District*.

While they continued their activities in Kitgum district, AVSI expanded their psychosocial trainings to serve various groups throughout Uganda during this year. AVSI social workers had assessed the needs at *Kyangwali* Refugee Camp in Hoima District where Congolese, Rwandan and Sudanese refugees were located. In response, *psychosocial training* (*See document No. 4 on attached CD*) was offered to primary school teachers in the camp through the Community Service Office. There was a workshop in Kampala on "*Counseling and Substance Abuse Intervention Skills for Social Workers*" (*See document No. 5 on attached CD*) who work with disadvantaged children, many of whom live on the streets. This training, organized and facilitated by AVSI and Friends of Children Association (FOCA) staff, was attended by twenty social workers from seven organizations (AVSI, COWA, FOCA, Tiger Club, Uydel, Pacoin, and Budukiro), bringing them together for the first time to work on a shared problem for those they served. AVSI trained a social worker in psychosocial support and assigned her to the Gulu Orthopedic Workshop to assist those patients who were dealing with physical challenges, often as the result of landmines or wounds from the conflict.

### Lesson learned

- The psychosocial approach has many applications in a variety of circumstances.

Psychosocial work, which began in AVSI under the Health Program, was growing into its own program. In June 1998, psychosocial support became a formal program through a Tripartite Agreement between AVSI, the Kitgum district government, and UNICEF. This agreement involved developing and implementing the Kitgum Psycho-Social Support Program (PSSP) over the next two years. The aims of the PSSP were: a) to support and increase the resilience of the war-affected community; and b) to promote the reintegration of formerly abducted children. AVSI staff in Kitgum expanded, and at this time the social worker who had helped develop the psychosocial response in Rwanda joined the team. Trainings were held for Community Development Assistants (CDAs), Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs), primary school teachers, elders and community leaders. Community activities to support the wellbeing of children were implemented. AVSI rehabilitated an office in the dilapidated Kitgum district building to serve as the Psychosocial Office, thereby creating a central gathering place for personnel and clients.



“ It is my observation that AVSI remains true to its focus on the person. AVSI’s ability to critically reflect on its own work in light of this goal of the personal approach is what makes AVSI consistent, faithful and effective in promoting development. ”

Mary Ann Kerins

### Lessons learned

- An effective model for developing a psychosocial support program involves many stakeholders: local governments, local organizations, NGOs, national and international organizations; and national and international governments. Through coordination, all of these groups can collaborate to benefit people.
- It is important to address not only the psychological needs of the population but also the complex social and cultural context which influences people’s lives.

In July 1998, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its Displaced Children and Orphans Fund sent a two-person team to identify the critical unmet needs among war-affected children and adolescents in northern Uganda. AVSI had already begun to identify gaps during its implementation of the PSSP, and this external consultation by John Williamson and Catherine Savino helped prioritize some of the gaps in services. It also led to USAID funding that would begin the following year to fill the most urgent gaps: a) support for community-initiated recreational and cultural activities; b) vocational training for orphans; c) Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for widows and orphans; d) food and household items for destitute families; e) professional training for counselors; f) peace-building activities; and g) training leaders of youth and women's groups. *(Further details can be found in "The Displaced Children and Orphans Fund's Report on Northern Uganda - Children Affected by Violence" - see reference)*

In August the International Rescue Committee (IRC) arrived in Kitgum to begin psychosocial work, initially by supporting Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA) in creating a reception center for children and adults returning from rebel captivity. Some of the money from the USAID grant was channeled through AVSI to IRC for this psychosocial work in Kitgum. This required a close collaboration and clarification of roles and activities. Bi-monthly coordinating meetings were established to review contingency plans.

### **Lesson learned**

- **Maintaining effective communication among the organizations involved in similar activities in the same area is necessary to improve coordination, avoid an overlap of services, and identify unfilled needs**

The Government of Uganda and UNICEF published the *NUPSNA report (see reference)* with the results of the assessment in November 1998. The presentation of the report was a national event that raised attention and awareness of the situation in northern Uganda. The findings have been used to advocate on behalf of children and people whose lives have been devastated by the protracted conflict in that region. The results were also used to identify unmet needs in the Kitgum PSSP, such as the need for trained professional counselors.

AVSI's first psychosocial response had been to train CVCs to address the needs of the majority of the community. After participating in the NUPSNA process and interacting intensively with the Core Team, especially TPO, which had a clinical approach and sought to provide counseling, it became apparent that about five percent of the population were severely affected by the conflict and required professionally trained counselors to treat them. AVSI recognized the need for training professional counselors to whom the CVCs and other community leaders could refer these special cases.

### Lesson learned

- Although CVCs and other trained community leaders can address the psychosocial needs of most people in conflict-affected areas, there is a small group (about 5% of people) who are severely affected and need to be referred to professional counselors.

This very busy year, 1998, drew to a close with the launching of the book *"Where Is My Home?"* (see reference). This book of drawings done by children in war-affected areas was published in Kampala by Acha Graphics (the first of many future collaborations). Funding for this project was provided by UNICEF, and it brought together three NGOs to identify a way of working with war-affected children. Representatives from AVSI, World Vision, and Save the Children met together to share ideas about working with such children. Then each NGO presented programs to children affected by the conflict in northern Uganda. AVSI presented their programs in Acholpii refugee camp and in various IDP camps in Kitgum district. World Vision conducted their programs at their Gulu reception center (for former child soldiers) and Save the Children worked with GUSCO (another reception center in Gulu). The book is the result of the children's drawings in these various programs. It was truly a joint venture that brought together different NGOs to identify a process for helping children in difficult circumstances to express themselves. It highlighted the importance of expression and showed how children are thinking and expressing themselves. "Where Is My Home?" was also translated into Italian and Spanish in order to reach a wider audience and raise awareness of the plight of these children.

“ AVSI tries to share. The most honest thing a person can do is to write down what you do so that others can reply. ”

Filippo Ciantia

### Lesson learned

- Providing a process and new ways for children in conflict areas to express themselves is key to understanding how these children are thinking and how best to assist them.



### Global links

In the continuing effort to raise international awareness about the situation in northern Uganda, Dr. Lucia Castelli and Nicholas Yga, an AVSI social worker, traveled to Milan, Italy to present papers (*See document No. 6 on attached CD*) at the AVSI International meeting, *"Children in the World: Matters for Adults."*

## 1999: EXPANSION OF KITGUM PSSP TO THE BROADER COMMUNITY

In July 1999, the first USAID funds (from the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund) began flowing to AVSI for the Kitgum PSSP. This influx of money and the establishment of the psychosocial program as its own entity resulted in an expanded focus on the community approach.

In response to the NUPSNA process, AVSI improved the specificity of the program's objectives and added some new ones. Some of these objectives were to:

- a) reintegrate formerly abducted children into their families and communities;
- b) build skills at the district level to facilitate psychosocial healing;
- c) introduce IGAs for war affected families;
- d) promote peace initiatives in the district and among districts of northern Uganda; and
- e) promote coordination among all stakeholders.

The program expanded rapidly as did the need to interact more frequently with a variety of stakeholders.

In an attempt to meet the needs of adolescents, one new endeavor of the PSSP was to provide training in Life Skills at 30 post-primary institutions, including secondary schools and vocational institutes. AVSI also provided psychosocial training to youth groups and women's groups.

New personnel were hired to meet these new objectives. AVSI added a technical advisor, a field coordinator, a junior project manager, and fifteen local staff as project officers and support staff. To illustrate the expansion of services offered by AVSI in 1999, 103 teachers were trained in the psychosocial approach, nearly triple the 41 teachers trained in the previous year.

Recognizing the need for locally-based counseling services, AVSI sponsored five people - two AVSI staff and three district staff - to attend the counseling course at Mbarara University. These included: Donato Okumu and Amuge Anne Pauline, who were social workers on AVSI Kitgum staff; Nyeko Wilfred, who was a CDA and later became CDO of the newly created Pader District; Sr. Angwaro Teddy, who counseled AIDS patients through the government hospital; and Sr. Lamunu Tamali, who worked in the District Medical Office. The Mbarara University course involved meeting one week out of each month for eighteen months and prepared counselors to address mental health issues in both individuals and the community.

This addition of counselors to the program revealed the need for a specific place for counseling services. There were 321 CVCs working in 26 sub counties of Kitgum district who functioned as the counselors' primary referral source. Reconstruction of the office block for the PSSP and CDO was completed during the first half of the year. This facility provided operational space for the growing program and a place for effective community discussion.

Another important development during the year was the creation of an advisory committee composed of elders in the Acholi community. This new committee came about at the request of the Kitgum CDO in order to strengthen community involvement in developing traditional cultural activities. AVSI provided technical training to this committee.

### Lesson learned

- A broad response to the psychosocial needs of the whole community and capacity-building throughout the entire community go hand in hand in developing a psychosocial program.

There followed a renewed effort to identify community-based organizations (CBOs) and vulnerable families in the community and to assess the needs of returned children, including tracing and resettlement. In addition AVSI organized drama and dance competitions at the sub-county, county, and district levels.



### Global links

The book "Where Is My Home?" was presented by Dr. Lucia Castelli, along with a statement by AVSI, to the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, in April 1999.

“The concept of psychosocial has made transformations in people personally. We have a strong team with a united team spirit in AVSI. The staff have improved their self-help skills and decision-making skills, and they can look more objectively at community needs. Because of the way we work (with the psychosocial approach), AVSI is made stronger.”

William Nokrach



## 2000: CROSSROADS BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the security situation in northern Uganda remained precarious. LRA activity continued, including an attack on the Padibe IDP camp on March 6<sup>th</sup>, and Karamajong cattle raids recurred in the eastern parts of Kitgum district. Although the number of child abductions increased during this period, large numbers of former abductees returned to their communities. This large-scale return resulted from both the army's efforts to rescue abducted children and the return of large numbers of former abductees by the government of Sudan. The community's capacity to welcome returning abductees was stretched to its limits. Other shocks, such as the Ebola outbreak in Gulu and the death of Resident District Commissioner (RDC) Bosco Ochaya, the founder of the Joint Forum for Peace, further undermined the stability of the community.

In these tumultuous circumstances, PSSP expanded its programs to meet the increasing needs of vulnerable community members. Under the leadership of AVSI counselor Hilary Haworth, PSSP did its best to meet increasing demands for social support, counseling, and income-generating activity creation. In 2000, a full 57 percent of AVSI-Uganda's resources were directed to projects in the North. Because staff mobility was constrained by the insecurity, PSSP took the opportunity to self-reflect. In this process, PSSP looked both backward and forward. Looking back, PSSP hoped to synthesize and draw upon the lessons learned during its first four years of activity in Kitgum. Looking ahead, PSSP hoped to strengthen the local network to ensure the long-term sustainability of the psychosocial approach.

*Looking back.* Limited to working in Kitgum Town, PSSP sought to consolidate the psychosocial approach that had been evolving over the course of four years. In a program review prompted by the official division of Kitgum district into two districts (Kitgum and Pader), PSSP streamlined many of its components and drafted guidelines to clarify the psychosocial approach. (The division of Kitgum district into Kitgum and Pader districts did not actually begin until 2001, and Pader district was not fully operational until 2003). The influx of returning former abductees gave PSSP the opportunity to collaborate with other agencies and in the process to disseminate the psychosocial approach. During this time, the psychosocial approach benefited from a clear articulation.

“ In the process of grieving, I have seen myself as someone thrown into a river with a strong current. You have no way to turn. You allow yourself to be carried by the powerful water, then you begin to look ahead. ”

Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola

Two consultancies further strengthened this process of self-reflection, consolidation, and articulation. Funded by UNICEF, consultant Glen Williams documented the PSSP experience, highlighting the model partnership existing between the district government, AVSI, UNICEF, and the local community. He published his findings in a 2001 book entitled *Resilience in Conflict* (see reference), which wove together the background of the northern Ugandan conflict, the development of PSSP, and community members' testimonies. In addition Dr. Lucia Castelli returned from her work in Italy to *evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of PSSP to date* (See document No. 7 on attached CD). Drawing upon interviews with CVCs and advisory committee members, Dr. Castelli emphasized the importance of strengthening local networks to ensure sustainability.

*Looking forward.* Taking to heart the importance of strengthening local networks, PSSP implemented a number of activities that would transfer psychosocial skills to members of the local population. First, PSSP solidified its training methodology for Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs) via the publication of three illustrated books, the *Handbook for the Community Volunteer Counselor* (published in both English and Luo, the local language (See document No. 8 on attached CD) and the *Training Manual for Community Volunteer Counselors* (See document No. 9 on attached CD), to be used by those who would be performing CVC trainings. The books were created by a team of counselors and others who had spent many years working in Kitgum's psychosocial realm. The participatory training methodology was aimed to highlight community resilience and the availability of local resources to assist with the difficulties of conflict.

In 2000, PSSP trained 369 CVCs. Each parish elected three CVCs, ideally trustworthy and responsible citizens who would serve as the link between village life and formal PSSP activities. In effect, CVCs linked PSSP's central offices to each parish in Kitgum district, sharing the psychosocial approach along the way.



“Creating the CVC training handbook and manual was an opportunity for us to synthesize the effective components of four years' worth of previous trainings. Now that the books exist, they are a good tool for trainings of trainers, a way for others to be able to train and to pass the psychosocial approach along to others.”

Lucia Castelli

In a second move to strengthen local capacity, PSSP initiated monthly trainings for Center Coordinating Tutors (CCTs), lead teachers who would support other teachers in psychosocial issues. Based at the Primary Teachers College, the CCTs provided support to primary school teachers in the field.

A third example of PSSP's attempt to build local capacities in 2000 was the support it provided to the Concerned Parents' Associations (CPAs) in districts throughout northern Uganda.

Having registered as an NGO in 1998, the CPA of Lira had already come to global prominence through the efforts of its chairperson, Angelina Acheng Atyam. PSSP created a project to foster communication between CPAs of various northern districts; this project would not only create a support network for parents of war-affected children but would also help young CPAs to learn lessons about support and advocacy from more experienced groups.

### Lesson learned

- To improve programming, managers of psychosocial programs should look backwards and forwards. In looking to the past, they can catalogue and consolidate lessons learned. In looking to the future, they should seek to strengthen local networks to ensure that the benefits of the psychosocial approach become sustainable.



### Global links

Ms. Angelina Atyam Acheng, chairperson of the CPA of Lira, Rev. Sister Rachele Fassera, deputy headmistress of St. Mary's College, Aboke and Dr. Filippo Ciantia, the AVSI representative in Uganda, travelled to Belgium and Holland to bear witness from the field at the launching of Els de Temmerman's book *The Aboke Girls* (see reference) about the tragedy of children abducted by the LRA. They also advocated in Spain and Italy, using "Where is My Home?" (See reference) as a tool to bring attention to the plight of children in northern Uganda.

## 2001: NEW DIRECTIONS

Although the conflict continued, 2001 was a year of relative calm in Kitgum district. PSSP continued with its proven capacity-building activities, including the training of 700 teachers, leaders, women's groups and CVCs. Counseling activities also continued, and two new people (one from AVSI staff and one from the Probation Welfare Office) began formal counseling training at Mbarara. At the same time, PSSP also took advantage of this window of opportunity to pilot new projects, and several new psychosocial activities were developed and implemented.

The major new development in 2001 was the opening of a counseling unit consisting of two private rooms at Kitgum Government Hospital. By opening this new unit, PSSP reaffirmed its commitment to provide specialized services to those whose mental health was most severely affected as a result of the conflict. In addition the unit supported the inception of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) service by offering qualified counselors for people who chose to test their HIV-status, especially those whose tests indicated that they were HIV-positive.

This year also marked PSSP's first venture into non-formal vocational training support. The administration of Padibe Vocational Resources Center had created a special vocational course for formerly abducted children and adults, and 150 men and youth participated in the first course in 2001. Because the teachers at the vocational center were not prepared to address the psychosocial needs of these returnees, they requested assistance from PSSP, which provided support in the form of group counseling performed by two AVSI staff counselors. Some of the vocational center's teachers also took part in the psychosocial training course. These interventions sparked a shift in PSSP towards more emphasis on support for vocational training centers.



In 2001, PSSP also revisited the use of art therapy for war-affected children, first begun with the 1998 project *Where is My Home?* by inviting the famous Ugandan artist Nwa Nyanzi to Kitgum. This artist worked with a group of children from Kitgum, including ten formerly abducted children and ten children affected by HIV/AIDS, to create a mural. Painting the mural was an exercise in both expressive therapy and advocacy. The preparation of the canvas was accompanied by therapeutic work from PSSP staff. The mural, which showed the difficult circumstances of life for children in northern Uganda, was exhibited in Kampala, bringing the children's expressions to national attention. After the success of the Kitgum mural project, Nwa Nyanzi worked with children in Pader to create a similar mural.

Another project, the creation of the book *Unearthed Grace* (See document No. 10 on attached CD), also wove together community resilience and advocacy. In an effort to create a positive portrait of resilience in the face of adversity, PSSP consultant Gina Bramucci collected stories of hope in Kitgum. These stories were published in *Unearthed Grace*, an illustrated book that served both to celebrate the courage manifested by community members and to raise awareness about the conflict at the national and international level.



### Lessons learned

- Psychosocial programs in conflict areas should take advantage of moments of relative security to branch out into new areas and new activities
- Although most psychosocial projects should focus on the population at large, some projects can target the most affected community members for specialized services.
- Psychosocial projects can weave together therapeutic activities and advocacy.



### Global links

The psychosocial program brought the plight of northern Uganda to the world's attention through several means in 2001. Supported by PSSP, Agnes Ocitti, one of the Aboke girls who had returned from captivity with LRA rebels, presented her story at two international conferences—the first in May in Pompeii, Italy, and the second in June at the UN symposium "Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone's Responsibility" in New York City. AVSI staff also presented their experiences from Sierra Leone, Kosovo, and Uganda at the UN symposium and then participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Preparatory Conference for the World Summit for Children.

The database that PSSP had established with UNICEF to track former child soldiers became part of the *Statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* (see reference) concerning the abduction and reintegration of children in northern Uganda.

In September, AVSI launched a bilingual booklet entitled, *Educate every child, in the family, in the community, in the world* (see reference). This English and Italian publication summarized AVSI's experiences working in northern Uganda. AVSI also published a booklet called *Child in Conflict Situations* (See reference), which was published in three languages to reach a wider audience.

## 2002: ADAPTING TO TURBULENT SURROUNDINGS - NEW VIOLENCE AND NEW RESPONSES

Every person living in northern Uganda at the time remembers the fateful Operation Iron Fist launched by the Ugandan army in March 2002. In the hopes of stomping out (with an “iron fist”) the LRA once and for all, Ugandan soldiers entered southern Sudan and raided the LRA’s headquarters. Rather than bringing the war to an end, however, Operation Iron Fist served to disperse and aggravate LRA rebels, and 2002 was marked by horrific waves of violence against the citizens of northern Uganda.

Before these unfortunate events, PSSP had envisioned a point at which the community and family network would be strong enough to close KICWA, the reception center for returning abductees. With the surge of violence, however, the need for reception centers became more evident than ever, and in 2002, a second reception center, the Concerned Parents Association (CPA), opened in Kitgum. Formerly abducted children remained at KICWA while returning adults made use of the CPA center. During this period of heightened insecurity, in which staff members could not travel to IDP camps due to frequent rebel ambushes on the roads, PSSP witnessed the true value of having trained workers on-site in the IDP camps. CVCs, teachers, and community leaders could carry on important psychosocial work, even if PSSP staff were forced to remain in Kitgum Town. The continuation of this work despite the insecurity was an example of sustainability in action.

With war raging at full force, Dr. Lucia Castelli returned to Uganda after a year away to resume leadership of the AVSI psychosocial program (AVSI-PSP). AVSI-PSP shifted its focus to education, understanding that education could serve as a protective factor for war-affected children in their efforts to cope with the conflict. AVSI-PSP also hoped that education might plant the seeds of peace for the next generation. Although counseling activities continued, the new accent on education was evident in most of the 2002 activities, including two new projects funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO) and USAID.

The ECHO project, which began in June 2002, was entitled “Support to the Reintegration Process of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda,” and sought primarily to assist the reintegration process of formerly abducted children through education initiatives, including formal schooling, vocational training (formal and non-formal), and remedial education. In the course of this one-year project, AVSI-PSP was able to provide assistance to over 1,200 formerly abducted children, and when necessary, educational support was complemented by additional interventions (such as counseling and medical treatment) that were funded by other sources. Through the ECHO project, AVSI-PSP was also able to improve two school structures, renovating both the Kitgum Technical Institute and the Padibe Vocational

Resource Center, where PSSP had begun working in 2001. With these structures renovated, AVSI-PSP was able to lay a solid foundation for a working relationship with



these schools on psychosocial issues; for example, an AVSI staff member provided group counseling with students at the Padibe Resource Center, and a psychosocial training was held for the teachers at Kitgum Technical Institute.

The ECHO project served as a bridge between the past PSSP activities and the psychosocial component of the upcoming Community Resilience and Dialogue (CRD) project, which would be managed primarily by the AVSI-PSP. The holistic nature of the psychosocial approach allowed AVSI-PSP to maintain its focus on the needs and resources of its clients while integrating various projects into the on-going effort.

The five-year CRD project began in October 2002, marking an important turning point in AVSI's relationship to other NGOs working in northern Uganda. USAID granted the CRD project to a consortium of six NGOs, and the tasks were divided among the NGOs by district and by programmatic area. Collaboration and coordination would be crucial to the success of the CRD project, which sought to strengthen communities' capacities in northern Uganda in three areas: peace and reconciliation, HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention, and psychosocial support. Weaving CRD indicators into its current work, AVSI-PSP took responsibility for providing most of the psychosocial support in Kitgum and Pader districts. The CRD program allowed for the continuation of school support to formerly abducted children begun under the ECHO program but also expanded that support to other vulnerable community members, such as child mothers, HIV/AIDS orphans, and war-affected children. The CRD program also prompted the creation of peace clubs in schools around Kitgum and Pader districts. These clubs were designed to provide children with a safe space for expression and recreation, a space where they might find nonviolent means to operate in violent surroundings. The first peace club at Kitgum Public Primary School grew from 20 to over 60 students in its first year.

In addition to CRD, AVSI-PSP was renewing its commitment to education in other ways. Teacher trainings continued in 2002, and by the end of the year, two teachers from nearly every school in Kitgum and Pader districts had been trained in psychosocial support, classroom management, peace education, and children's rights. Moreover, the Distance Support Program (DSP) was greatly expanded. The DSP, which links an individual donor with an individual child to provide school fees, a school uniform, scholastic materials, and occasionally food support, expanded from 2,415 children in 2001 to 3,512 children throughout the country a year later.

Finally, in 2002, AVSI-PSP put in place the systems to monitor and evaluate its programs in a systematic and ongoing way. The first major monitoring and evaluation project occurred in March and April, when Elena Locatelli evaluated the teacher training program by interviewing 70 teachers and 2,500 students in 40 schools (*See document No. 11 on attached CD*). At the time of the evaluation, 20 of the schools had teachers who had received psychosocial training, and the other 20 did not. When the evaluation showed that the psychosocial training had greatly improved school morale, the teacher training program moved full-speed ahead until nearly every school had two teachers who had received training by year's end.

On a larger, more long-term scale, AVSI-PSP created a client database in 2002, having realized that there was a lack of information concerning client follow-up. The ECHO project had requested a strong follow-up component to its program, so to meet this need, AVSI-PSP created a database in which clients' demographic data and psychosocial wellbeing were collected on an ongoing basis. The creation of this database was a monumental task, involving not only information technology but the creation and revision of questionnaire forms that would facilitate both data collection from the client during interviews and data entry in the database afterwards. Eventually, it was hoped, the database would become a tool which the AVSI-PSP staff would be able to use to gauge the effectiveness of their interventions.

In collaboration with IRC, a comprehensive report of all activities implemented from 1999 to 2002 in Kitgum and Pader was produced (*See document no.12 on attached CD*). The report highlights the community based approach to support children and communities in a conflict situation.

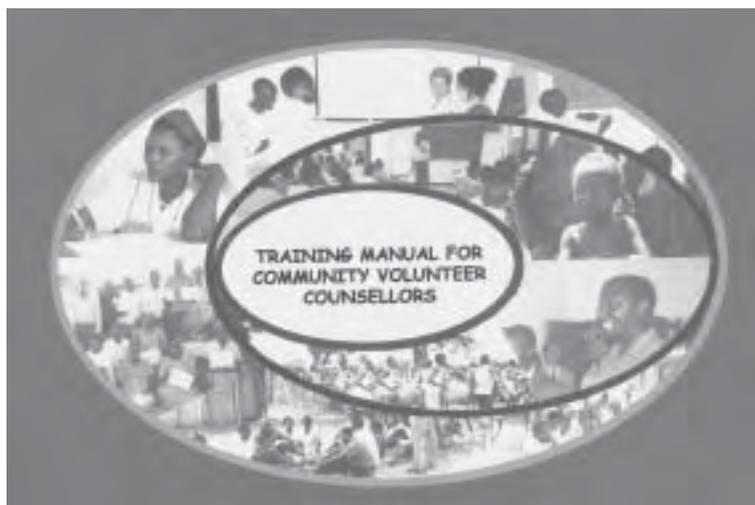
### Lessons learned

- The psychosocial approach provides a team with a holistic framework for programming. Rather than changing programs simply to meet funders' demands, psychosocial programs are able to fold many initiatives into their ongoing activities.
- When staff mobility is limited by insecurity, the benefit of having trained people in smaller, more remote communities becomes especially apparent.
- Coordination, collaboration, and communication among NGO partners are crucial, especially in a conflict setting.
- Systematic data collection is essential for monitoring and evaluating psychosocial programs.



### Global link

In May 2002, Dr. Lucia Castelli joined the Psychosocial Working Group (PWG), a consortium of humanitarian agencies and academic institutions, at a Washington forum. The PWG worked to develop a conceptual framework and a research agenda for psychosocial programming. One month later, AVSI staff member Ezio Castelli highlighted "Improving Educational Quality" in a speech which he presented at the UN symposium "Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone's Responsibility" (see reference). Also in 2002, the *Handbook for the Community Volunteer Counselor* and the *Training Manual for Community Volunteer Counselors* became available to psychosocial practitioners around the world when they were published on the website of the Refugee Studies Center at the University of Oxford (<http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk>).



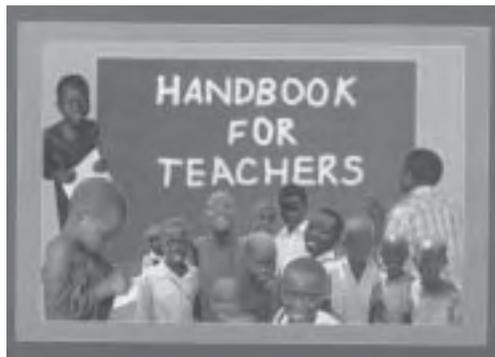
“ AVSI is clearly committed to being in a place with the people for the long term, in good times and in bad, ever open to discovering and responding to new needs and resources that arise within the community. ”

Mary Ann Kerins

## 2003: LOCAL RESPONSES TO INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION

In 2003, northern Uganda came to the world's attention. This attention resulted from many factors, from the World Food Program declaring that 1.4 million people in Uganda were in need of life-saving food aid, to a Human Rights Watch report estimating that 8,500 children were abducted by the LRA between June 2002 and November 2003 alone. The tens of thousands of night commuters who were walking to towns each night to escape abduction by the LRA captured the attention of international journalists. Then, in November, Jan Egeland, the UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, declared the situation in northern Uganda "one of the world's worst humanitarian crises." The world, finally, was watching.

All of this attention precipitated the arrival of many new NGOs in Kitgum and Pader districts, and eventually nearly fifteen NGOs established offices there. In this frenzy of activity, AVSI-PSP continued to do what it had always done, provide psychosocial support to vulnerable community members. As new NGOs flooded into Kitgum and Pader, AVSI-PSP proved to be a focal point, sharing resources and contacts with them and maintaining its commitment to frank and open collaboration. AVSI-PSP consistently and steadily expanded its services and strengthened its network.



In 2003, AVSI-PSP strengthened its commitment to training and capacity-building. In February, the DSP held a conference in Kampala called "Education and Work: The Keys to True Development." At this conference, DSP regrouped its 27 local CBO partners to deepen their commitment to education. By this time, almost 4,000 children had benefited from the Distant Support Program.

Teacher training also continued to figure prominently in AVSI-PSP's action plan. By the end of 2003, almost 1,500 teachers had been trained in the psychosocial approach, and CCTs continued to provide technical support to teachers. The teacher training program benefited in 2003 from the publication of the *Handbook for Teachers* (See document No. 13 on attached CD) and the *Training Manual for Teachers* (See document No. 14 on attached CD), which formalized and bolstered the sustainability of this approach.



Other programs expanded as well. Continued support to schools included the rehabilitation of five schools in Kitgum and Pader districts, and 40 emergency kits were distributed to schools during the year. These emergency kits consisted of teaching and learning materials and were provided to schools that had participated in the 2002 evaluation. The counseling program also expanded with two new community members (an AVSI staff member and a district nurse) beginning the counselor training course at Mbarara University.

In addition to the expansion of old programs, two new initiatives emerged as well. First, the Income Generating Activity (IGA) program grew exponentially in 2003, providing impoverished community members with business skills training and start-up capital to begin a small business enterprise. Under the leadership of Florence Ringe, the IGA program reached 437 people in 2003. Secondly, a new partnership with the US Department of Labor resulted in the ORACLE program, Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor through Education. In essence, the ORACLE program aimed to prevent conscription of adolescents and children into the LRA by providing education, a protective factor for vulnerable children. The ORACLE program allowed AVSI-PSP to greatly expand the formal school support that it had been offering to vulnerable children. In addition to increased school support, ORACLE contained elements of community sensitization, seeking to improve awareness and attitudes to schooling through sensitizations and trainings. In 2003, a baseline survey for ORACLE was administered.

The need to emphasize education became urgent in 2003. The IDP camps scattered throughout the region for years were beginning to consolidate, resulting in one large IDP camp per subcounty. The IDP camps of Pader district were consolidated in 2003 and Kitgum district's camps in 2004. As camps consolidated, schools were displaced and became more concentrated. In the new larger camps, several schools would be clustered together in one space called a "learning center," a collection of schools piled on top of one another with precious few resources and limited classroom space.

Even as the educational situation of Kitgum and Pader districts deteriorated, AVSI-PSP's new emphasis on education began to show results. As the year progressed, the students of Kitgum began to mount nonviolent peace demonstrations to plead for peace, and most of the organizers were affiliated with AVSI-PSP's peace clubs. The peace club program had expanded to ten schools in 2003, and when newspapers splashed photos of Kitgum's demonstrations on their front pages, peace club members were leading the way. Other peace club members worked for their cause in quieter ways. When a village attack left many families displaced, for example, one peace club decided to grow vegetables for the victims.

### Lessons learned

- Long-term experience is invaluable. When new NGOs enter a region, the experienced ones should graciously share their lessons learned for the benefit of the community.



### Global link

The data that AVSI-PSP had collected about the effectiveness of its interventions for the ECHO project proved useful to other agencies working with former child soldiers when Jeannie Annan and Dr. Lucia Castelli presented *their findings* (*See document No. 15 on attached CD*) at a child soldier conference in Florence, Italy, in September 2003. In addition, the recently published *Handbook for Teachers* and the *Training Manual for Teachers* were made available to the world on the website of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (<http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk>).

## 2004: SHORING UP MONITORING AND EVALUATION

For AVSI-PSP, 2004 was a year of transition: the expatriate managers who had guided the project from the beginning worked to build the capacity of local managers to the point that the project would be managed entirely by them. To ensure that this transition happened smoothly, AVSI-PSP managers worked to foster an atmosphere where follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation would play an active role in program improvement. Slowly but surely, the Ugandan managers began to take the entire program into their own hands.

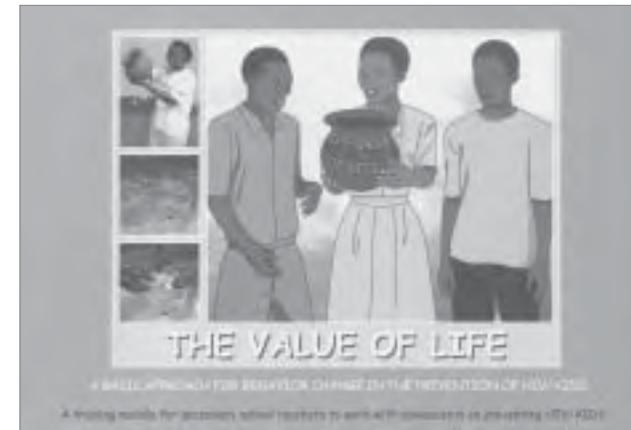
This capacity building took the form of a number of workshops. The assistant manager of the AVSI component of the CRD program participated in a workshop of all the NGOs collaborating in the project to streamline monitoring and evaluation indicators. In another series of workshops, the AVSI-PSP social workers worked to revise the data collection system, including a complete revision of the *assessment and follow-up forms* (*See document No. 16 on attached CD*) that were being used in client interviews. The social workers took note of the fact that their ability to track the impact of their interventions was only as good as the data that they collected at each stage of the process. Having revised the data collection system themselves, the entire AVSI-PSP staff came to appreciate the importance of quality data collection.

To further enhance this understanding of the importance of good data collection, AVSI-PSP staff also worked to integrate the database into their programming activities. Social workers were sensitized to the kinds of information that the database could provide them, including the use of the database to determine which interventions were proving to be the most effective for various clients. Eventually, the information contained in the database would become a working tool for all members of the AVSI-PSP team.

While all of these capacity-building activities were taking place, AVSI-PSP continued its services to community members. By 2004, AVSI-PSP was providing educational support to nearly 2,000 vulnerable community members, support which continued through the CRD and ORACLE programs. Peace club activities continued and expanded. Counseling activities intensified as the conflict wore on, and AVSI-PSP also continued its teacher training programs. In the spirit of capacity-building, the program used Luigi Giussani's text *The Risk of Education* (*see reference*) to broaden the capacity of the CCTs, and this year marked the first time that all of the psychosocial trainings for teachers were conducted by CCTs.

Finally, AVSI-PSP reached out to two new groups in 2004. First, the program developed a library for night commuters who were making St. Joseph Hospital their nightly refuge from the rebels. With the library, AVSI-PSP brought reading and study time into an arena that had previously lacked stimulation and organization.

Second, AVSI-PSP made a formal link with other HIV/AIDS activities. Social workers identified HIV-positive mothers for intervention through the CRD Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) program. Also in the HIV-prevention arena, *The Value of Life* (See document No. 17 on [attached CD](#)) was published, a behavior change module for secondary school teachers hoping to prevent HIV-transmission among their students. The content of *The Value of Life* training manual had been developed in 2003 by Anne Devreux and Dr. Giovanni Galli, two of the members of Kitgum's first psychosocial team in 1996. Ms. Devreux and Dr. Galli had returned to northern Uganda to reconnect with the psychosocial program that they had helped to establish and to bring their skills to bear on the HIV/AIDS pandemic that continued to plague the region.



### Lesson learned

- For true sustainability, projects must ultimately be managed by staff members coming from the communities concerned. Capacity building is a crucial element of the transition from expatriate to local management.



### Global links

The Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) invited Elena Locatelli, AVSI's ORACLE manager, to participate in a project to develop minimum standards for education in emergency, chronic crisis, and early reconstruction settings. Ms. Locatelli participated in a January INEE consultation in Nairobi and presented AVSI-PSP's experiences in improving quality education at a December meeting in Cape Town, where the INEE minimum standards guide was launched. Eventually, AVSI-PSP's *Training Manual for Teachers* and *Handbook for Teachers* were included in INEE's "technical kit," a digital library for teachers in emergency contexts, and were also published on the network's website (<http://www.ineesite.org>)

In Florence, Dr. Lucia Castelli was rewarded for her many years of service. The Toscana region of Italy, which annually recognizes international personalities for human rights accomplishments, presented Dr. Castelli with an honorary award, Gonfalone d'Argento, for her work to protect children's rights in East Africa for over a decade

## 2005: GROWTH IN LEADERSHIP

In 2005 Ugandan staff members assumed responsibility for the management of AVSI-PSP. Dr. Lucia Castelli left Kitgum to take leadership of an Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project that encompassed Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda. Only one expatriate staff, Elena Locatelli, remained at the management level in Kampala to provide backup support in management and budgeting skills. This left two Ugandans leading the AVSI-PSP in Kitgum as the year began. Nokrach William, who had worked with AVSI as a trainer since 1999, became the manager of ORACLE. Ubanjagiwu Sebi Ali, who had been on the AVSI staff since 2000, took over management of CRD within AVSI.

A two-day workshop was held in June in Gulu for counselors and social workers from both AVSI offices - Kitgum and Gulu. Until 2004 each office functioned independently from the other. The 2005 workshop was a follow up to the previous year's initial attempt to combine the two teams in order to share resources among all of the participants and to strengthen their counseling skills. Much progress was evident over the past year. There was a stronger connection between the two offices and a deeper respect for the different types of work conducted at each site. The Gulu social work staff expanded from three to six social workers and was gaining experience, which allowed them to feel more confident in the larger group. As their skills developed and strengthened, the staff members of Gulu and Kitgum were better able to become supports and resources for each other.

In 2005, AVSI-PSP also undertook an evaluation of the CVC network (*See document No.18 on attached CD*). The CVC network had become an integral part of many agencies' work in Kitgum and Pader districts, but the network was beginning to show signs of strain after many years of voluntary work on the part of the CVCs. By talking to the communities, AVSI-PSP was able to better understand the value that the communities placed on CVCs' work and to strengthen the CVC system.

Kitgum staff moved to another level of competence and began sharing their skills and ideas with other offices. In addition to plans for a follow up training for Gulu staff on the basic psychosocial approach, two team members (Oyella Josca and Ringe Florence) traveled to Hoima to assist the establishment of IGA's in that district. The skills and experience gained by Kitgum staff over the years was now being shared beyond the district. The original capacity that had been built among staff in Kitgum was now being used to build capacity in other areas.

This was a year characterized by capacity building of local staff on management skills. By all measures - both quantitative and qualitative - the local staff exceeded expectations and continued the excellent work of the psychosocial and education programs.

## Lesson learned

- When given increasing responsibilities and adequate management training, local staff can effectively assume leadership and management of psychosocial programs.



## Global links

Elena Locatelli, who had been involved in previous INEE consultations, was chosen to be part of an International Working Group of INEE. The goal of this group is to increase awareness of the minimum standards for education in emergency situations worldwide and to monitor and evaluate compliance with these standards

An article compiling AVSI-PSP's lessons learned, "*Psychosocial Support for War-Affected Children in Northern Uganda: Lessons Learned*," (*See document No.19 on attached CD*). was published on the website of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (<http://www.child-soldiers.org>)

## THE WAY FORWARD

From 1996 to 2005, AVSI psychosocial interventions responded to the needs of people affected by a new type of conflict in northern Uganda that targeted civilians. The form of these interventions depended on the discovery of resources available in the community.



As an awareness of the psychological and social impacts on individuals and communities surfaced, AVSI was among the early responders in developing psychosocial interventions to help children affected by conflict. Experiences in the field transformed the psychosocial approach into a program with ever-expanding types of activities and an increasing number of local and international partners.

As the psychosocial field grew, AVSI articulated and shared its particular psychosocial approach by publishing handbooks, training manuals and training modules suitable for use in many contexts. By participating in the National Psychosocial Core Team and internationally in the PWG and INEE, AVSI has been involved in clarifying a conceptual framework for psychosocial intervention in complex emergencies and considerations for planning psychosocial programs.

From initial responses in a specific locality to becoming part of the international conversation to define psychosocial programming, AVSI has never lost sight of the centrality of the person or the importance of local resources. After listening to local concerns, AVSI has placed increasing focus on education as a priority in emergency settings. Throughout its many years of psychosocial support, AVSI has drawn its inspiration from the resilience of the people of northern Uganda, who manifest a hope which will never be extinguished.

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**“ My challenge was to document this experience, to see whether and how psychosocial approach can adapt itself within the general consensus of addressing people in conflict.”**

**Filippo Ciantia**



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