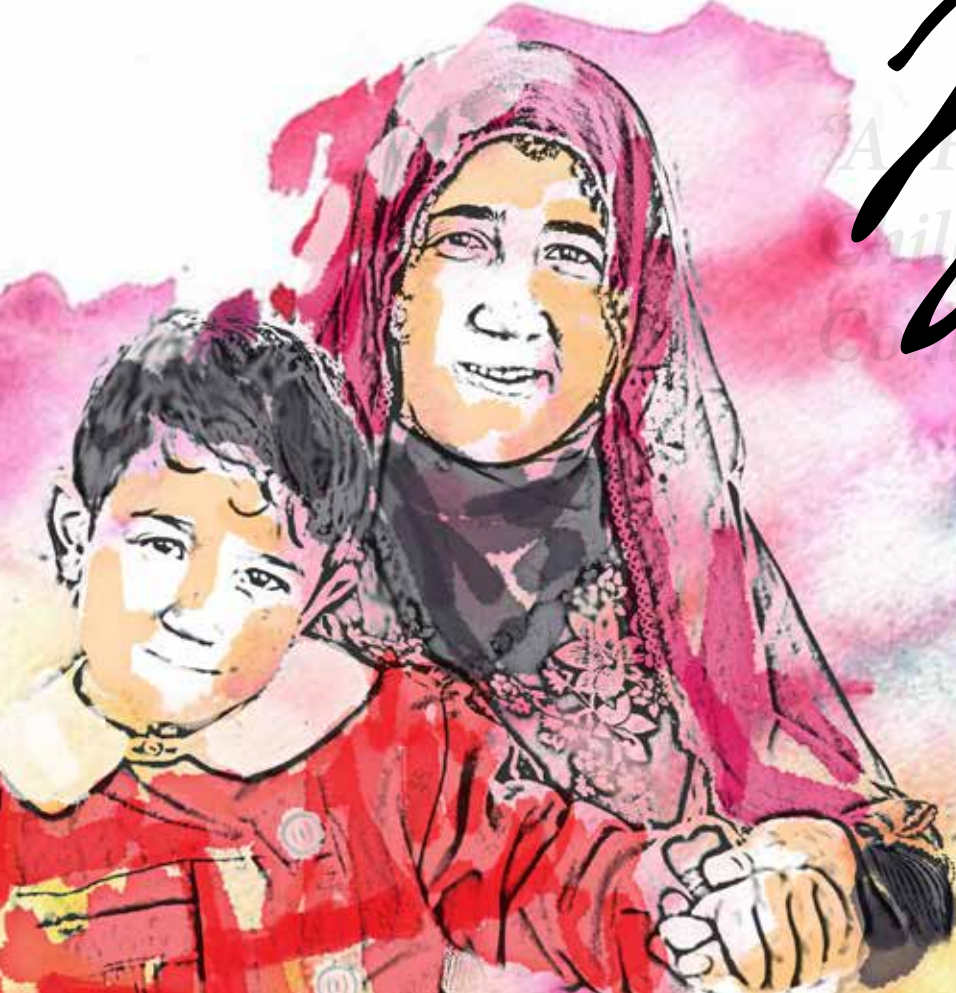


# The Word

*"A Fair Start for Young  
Children in Turkish Rural  
Communities"*



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# The Word

*“A Fair Start for Young  
Children in Turkish Rural  
Communities”*





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*With a preface  
from women who  
previously were  
never given a  
chance to say a  
WORD in their  
lives...*





## Preface

I am 49. I get up at seven every morning. First, I milk my cows; then we prepare our breakfast and eat. Sometimes we leave the table as it is, sometimes we clear it. We immediately hurry to the field. Everyone goes to their own field. I go to my field every day... We collect beans, peppers, and tomatoes in our fields. We go every day and collect rose hips, cherries... We have planted beans, peppers, tomatoes, watermelons, and melons.

I got married at the age of 17. I have three kids and raised all of them in the village. They didn't go to school. My older daughter finished primary school, but there was no secondary school here. Back then we didn't have the resources that we have now. I didn't have proper income; I was poor. I couldn't afford to send my kids to school.

I couldn't even show affection to my kids as much as I wanted. My mother-in-law would get angry at me saying that one should not show affection to kids in front of adults, so I would take them to my room to show my affection, to kiss them, to hug them.

We weren't allowed to call our kids by their names or hold their hands. My older daughter is named İlknur, my son is named Mustafa, and my younger daughter is named Özcan. My son still tells me that I even beat him once when I was really angry, but I don't remember. He shows me his back and says, 'I feel that whenever you are angry with me.'

This is how I met this project and AÇEV: They came here and said they would carry out trainings and I wanted to attend.

They came to fathers and mothers and gave trainings. We heard a lot in the trainings. For example, they asked, 'Can you show your love to your children?' I answered, 'Never around the elders.' They said, 'Show your children your love. Treat your daughters and sons equally.'

It would be very different if I had taken these trainings earlier. At least I wouldn't have let my daughters get married so early. For instance, if I had known the trainers here before, I would have begged them, 'I have a daughter, please let her get into a school and study.'

Our training was very informative. There was a lot that we didn't know before. For example, I used to yell at my husband, 'Where are you going, come here!' They said, 'Don't shout, instead say, 'Would you please come here?'' But we wouldn't do that, we would yell at each other while we talked. Now, we say, 'Would you come here?'

After the trainings, we said that we wanted to have a place where women can get together. We wanted to gather, do handcrafts, sell them, and earn money. Eventually they allocated the former school building to us, but it was really bad. It was in ruins. Our trainer Gülsemin asked us, 'Do you want to rebuild it together?' We said, 'Yes, we do.' We told the women of the village and we worked hard to start as soon as possible. You wouldn't believe it but I even prepared the paint by myself and went to find the plasterer myself. We worked here all winter, painting and cleaning everything. When we were cleaning the windows, the hands of our village administrator's wife got frostbitten.

Doing all this work together helped us start appreciating each other. Now we get along better.

**Necla Çetinpolat**

**N**ecla Çetinpolat is just one of the women in Anatolia who keep their ideas to themselves and who are not allowed a voice in their family or community. Most of them are relegated to living the lives that are considered appropriate by the 'men' and the 'society' within the limits again defined by them. Girls study as long as their fathers let them, they get married when and whom their elders tell them to, and bear as many children as their husbands want...

So, being born as a woman in Anatolia means starting life as a voiceless person from the beginning. An outsider witnessing their lives understands that these women who 'exert themselves', 'don't eat but feed', 'work at home, in the field, and the garden' are not only a stereotyped fictional character of TV series or movies...

Mother & Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) set out from Istanbul to knock on the doors of the women like Necla Çetinpolat who live in the most remote villages of Anatolia in the rural areas of Tokat. AÇEV touched women who were trying to hold on to life despite everything. AÇEV

**AÇEV**

*Gave them the floor, and listened to them,*

*Gave them it's word and kept it's word*

*Took their words, and wrote them.*





The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child starts as, “Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.”

In principle 4, it states that, “The child shall be entitled to grow and develop in health. To this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to the child and to the child’s mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.”

But unfortunately, real life is not as it is planned on paper, or in conventions and agreements.



---

*“Some 6.6 million children under 5 years of age died in 2012, mostly from preventable causes, their fundamental right to survive and develop unrealized.*

*Fifteen percent of the world’s children are condemned to child labor, which compromises their right to protection from economic exploitation and infringes on their right to learn and play.*

*Eleven percent of girls are married before they turn 15, jeopardizing their rights to health, education, and protection.*

*The world’s poorest children are 2.7 times less likely than the richest ones to have a skilled attendant at their birth.”*

*\*Data: Taken from the research of UNICEF Every Child Counts, 2014\**

---





*The Project*

*The Land of  
Unnamed  
Children*



## Who is The Target Group of The Project?

AÇEV is a non-governmental organization that knows very well that every child does not have equal opportunities; therefore, AÇEV developed a project to at least modestly improve the lives of children with unequal opportunities and their mothers.

The project, called **A Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities**, is hopefully just the start. AÇEV knows that improving the lives of children needs to be through their mothers. It would be almost impossible to make any changes to the conditions of children without raising awareness and creating difference in the lives of their mothers, because almost all of them were women who became mothers at early ages and could not take advantage of their own educational rights or who were forced to drop out of school.



**Sündüs Yıldız**  
Keşlik Village

*I get up at 6 every morning. I prepare breakfast for my husband. We have our own vehicle, so he drives customers to the village. After I see him off, I conduct my prayers and then go down to the barn. I come back from the barn at around half past eight. I wake up the children and have them eat their breakfast. I do the housework. I got married at the age of 17. I spoiled my first son when I raised him, but the younger ones grew up really miserably. When I was picking vegetables on the field, I used to put a cushion in a crate, put my children in there and cover them with a blanket while they slept. Both of my daughters grew up in the field.*



**Özlem Kaşıkeman**  
Akin Village

*I am 26. I have two daughters. I got married at the age of 16. I became a mother when I was 20. Long before that, I dropped out of primary school. While I was studying, we were all living with my uncle and he didn't send us to school. Now, I don't even have a diploma.*



**Neşe Delioğlan**  
Akin Village

*I am 34. I got married at the age of 18. I think I was in my right mind when I got married, but now I see it as a mistake. I wish I hadn't got married at such an early age. I really wanted to go to school. I wanted to go to school after I got married, as well. My father-in-law said, 'Your father didn't let you study, why should I?' The teacher of my sister-in-law's daughter wanted the students to write something about studying. I wrote an essay for her. Her teacher liked it very much. I poured out everything in my mind on that paper. If they asked me now whether I would study, I would still say 'Yes'.*



*"The stories I've heard here impacted me a lot: women who haven't called their daughters 'my daughter' for 15 years because they say it is not appropriate to call my daughter by her name, or even to say 'my daughter' in front of their in-laws. There are women who have never even called their husbands by their name during their 20-year marriages. After AÇEV's courses, some women admitted that they said 'my daughter' to their children and that their daughters were so pleased, they asked them to repeat it.*

*With regard to motherhood, when we ask what motherhood is-- the good sides or difficulties of it--even women with five children have to think hard about the answers because they have never had the chance to stop and consider it.*

*Some of them got married as young as 12. One woman said, 'We played the game of shepherding for the first two years of our marriage with my husband; we were taking the sheep to the mountains to grass them'. She was thinking she would go back home after that, for instance. She didn't bear any children for the first three years of her marriage, probably because she hadn't completed puberty. She became a mother when she was 15. When she delivered her first child, she couldn't even understand that the baby was her own child."*



**Dr. Gökçe Baykal**

Research Specialist, Development  
Analytics



These short episodes told by Sündüs Yıldız, Neşe Delioğlu, and Özlem Kaşıkman give us some hints about the lives of women in villages. As they recount their lives, we see how similar their stories are.

Almost all of them were married as soon as they finished primary school, when they were still children. By their early 20s they had several children already.

These women cannot even visit a doctor by themselves. They have neither social rights nor a personal life. They leave their house only to work in the barn or field. Although it varies according to the season, they spend most of their time working in the fields, especially during summer and spring. Probably for this reason, these women do not share anything or develop any kind of friendships with each other outside their immediate relatives.

Almost none of them had received attention from their own parents while growing up. Probably for the same reason, they raise their children without ever caressing them. Most of the children grow up without hearing their own names from their parents. Parents do not call their children "my daughter" or "my son." This is because it is considered inappropriate to love your child or to call him by his name in front of the elders...

Here, as in many parts of Anatolia, not only women, but also children do not have a name...



In fact, we need to look more closely at the lives of these women of Anatolia to have better insight about them. As you see the needs, you understand better why AÇEV chose Tokat to carry out its project A Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities.



## Why Tokat?

The wide and lush road gets more arid and narrow the farther you travel. As you approach the village, you feel as if you are far from the city and modern convenience. Just as the road gets narrower when you arrive in the village, so do the possibilities, the opportunities, and the dreams.

AÇEV chose 20 villages of Tokat which share the same history and future in order to carry out its **A Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities Project**.



**Serap Tüzemen**  
Volunteer Trainer

*Some women become mothers when they are still children themselves. There are women with four kids by the age of 20. It is usual for them. They say that the day they finish primary school, parents of the prospective husbands start to knock on their doors, because there is nothing else to do. There is a higher tendency to send the boys to school rather than the girls but in the mountain villages, they don't send the boys to school, either. Distances are long and they can't afford it*

*"Tokat is a region with one of the highest rural populations. There is a high rate of agriculture and livestock breeding. The higher the population is in the rural area, the more impact you can reach, so the more impact your investments have. Choosing Tokat for implementing this project came down to its pre-schooling rates, rural population, continuation of agriculture, living villages, diverse geography, presence of villages in need, and the existence of various institutions ready to cooperate."*



**Hilal Kuşçul**  
Assistant General Manager  
AÇEV

## Purpose Of The Project

And now, AÇEV has developed a project to reach these children and the parents who raise them: A Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities. The project was launched in 2012.

The starting point for this project was to improve institutional training opportunities with the purpose of supporting the development of preschool children in the villages as well as raising awareness among the families of the importance of supporting children at early ages.

The initial goals of the project were:

- Supporting preschoolers to provide them with effective preschool education,
- Increasing awareness in the importance of early childhood education,
- Improving the physical environment in the preschool classrooms with educational materials and various equipment,
- Empowering mothers through their parenting roles, and
- Developing a community-based working model to improve early childhood education in rural areas







## *Service-Based Model*

## *Service-Based Model*

Implementation models were shaped while determining the goals of the project. AÇEV's Service-Based and Community-Based models were utilized throughout the project. Before the Community-Based Model, the details of which you will see later, the components of the Service-Based Model can be listed as follows:







**Hilal Kuşçul**  
Assistant General Manager  
AÇEV

*“Women and children living in the rural areas of Turkey are seriously influenced by poverty. Meanwhile, the rural population is decreasing. The remaining population has numerous educational, social, and physical needs.*

*Within our project framework, we wanted to develop a project to support children in rural areas through education and benefit young women and young mothers by improving their life and parenting skills.*

*We tried to create a model that satisfies all of these needs. On the one hand, we aimed to make some improvements in the quality of preschool education as an institution. On the other hand, we tried to reach families through the mothers. We performed training activities with the mothers through Rural Education Women's Support Program to help them take a step towards improving their knowledge and skills. We tried to reach the men, as well at coffee house meetings that we held with the husbands, fathers, and brothers. We explained what we were trying to do with this project, the importance of early childhood education, and what families could do during this period.*

*This project was in fact the first step taken towards the improvement of children aged 0-6 and their environment. Our long-term goal is to develop a model for early childhood development that can be scaled up in rural areas... In other words, we didn't want our work to be exclusively limited to Tokat, if successful, but to be able to expand to cover various regions as a model. We had everything except financial resources, which were eventually provided by the UBS Optimus Foundation.”*

*“The UBS Optimus Foundation provides funds for projects supporting children's development. There are projects in various countries around the world to which they contribute. Thus, they have experience in the field. We exchanged opinions with them at every stage of our project in Tokat. As they also have experience in working with non-governmental organizations like us, this has been an informative and instructive process that has allowed us to exchange ideas, providing the project with a dynamic structure. We reviewed some of our plans depending on the conditions and outcomes during the interim stages of the project and made some additions, implementing the project in a way that was more responsive to needs.”*



**Nalan Yalçın**  
General Manager, AÇEV



**Emine Kuzutürk**  
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

***Well then, why is early childhood education so important? Why has AÇEV targeted the age group of 0-6?***

*“The early childhood period -from the birth of the child until age 6- is very important in terms of development. Our aim with this project is to maximize the potential of the children living in the region at early ages by supporting their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.*

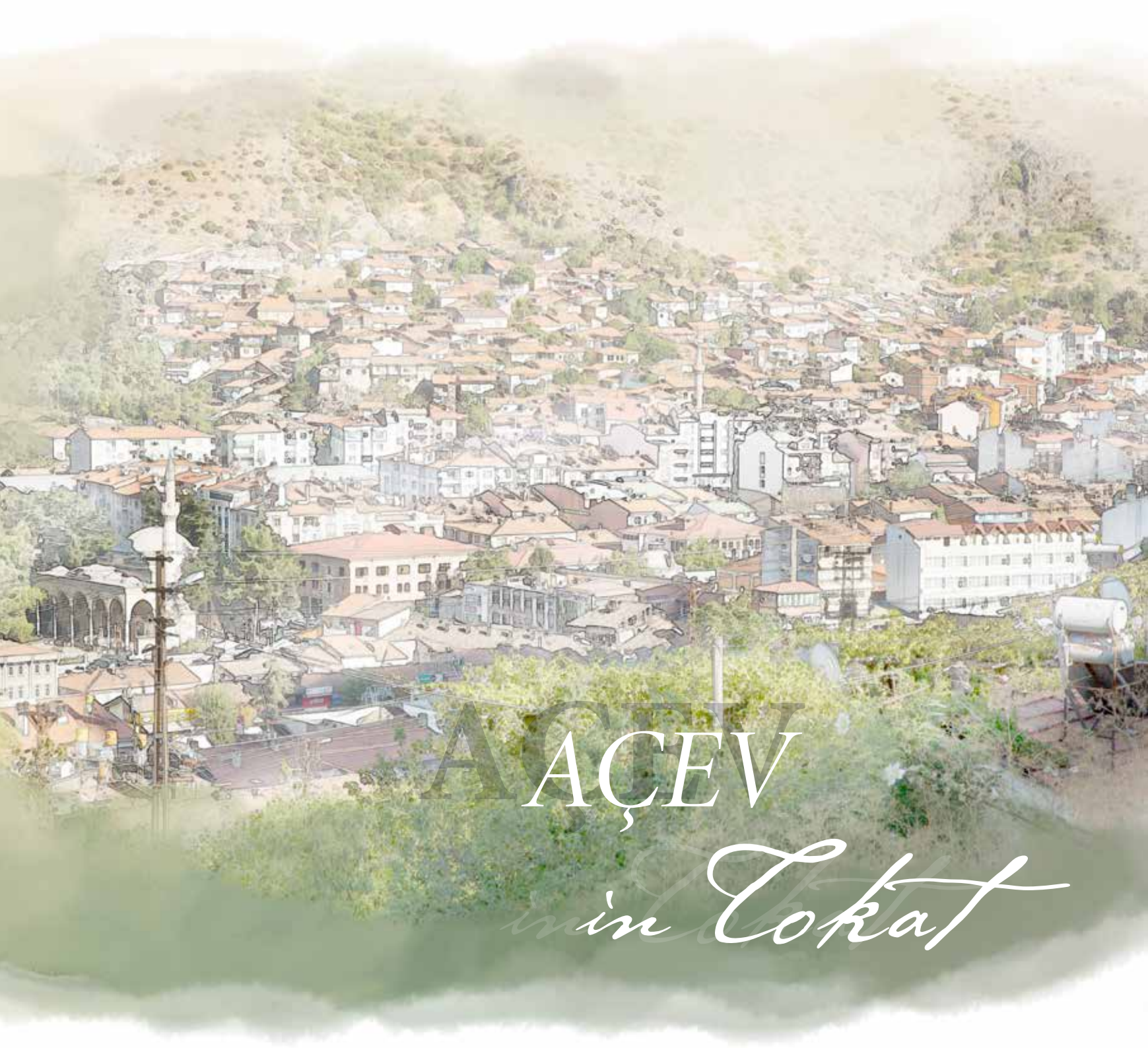
*Support given in early childhood has a significant positive impact on academic outcomes, as well as various other outcomes during different life stages. Research shows that every 1 lira invested in Early Childhood Education services provides return of up to 7 liras.\* Our primary goal here has been to support the development of children and prepare the most healthy and optimal environment for them...”*

*\*Mehmet Kaytaz (2005) Cost-Benefit Analysis of Preschool Education in Turkey, AÇEV*



So, AÇEV trainers and the field team set out from Istanbul to prepare this environment. They had schedules in their hands, and goals in their heads. But nothing would be that easy...





AÇEV

*in Tokat*

## Project Field Applications

Those villages mentioned in fairy tales do not exist anymore. Neither do those in children's songs that begin with 'There is a village far away'. If there is a village far away, not many people go there. But the things that make a village a village are still alive. The soil is fertile, animals live their natural lives, the water is clear, the sky collects rain; the village administrator, the cleric, and the teachers are on duty.

Coffee houses are full of men talking about sports, politics, and prices of products. Yet there is something missing. Women are silent. Women are keeping to themselves. The words of women, who assume the responsibility of the children, the house, and the fields, do not seem to have any impact.

AÇEV began the Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities Project by asking women 'How are you?' We asked questions first to the children, then women, men, teachers of the village, and the village administrator. As they talked, the project started to take its form, and as it took its form, it gained more participation and started to grow.

Everywhere, ranging from renovated wedding halls, coffee houses (to the extent allowed by men), sometimes Quran classrooms, school classrooms... wherever was available became an educational facility for AÇEV.

First of all, we had to find volunteers to give these 11-week trainings to women.

Throughout the project, AÇEV arranged four instructive workshops for the Rural Education Women's Support Program. A total of 54 trainers were trained as group leaders through these workshops. Trainers were mostly selected from preschool teachers and volunteers.

The Provincial Directorate for National Education supported the project by assigning teachers for the workshops and allowing preschool teachers to open Rural Education groups in villages. Therefore, the project already contributed to raising and increasing awareness of volunteerism in Tokat and its rural areas at its start-up phase.

*"We looked for a Non-Governmental Organization we could cooperate with in Tokat for a while because we always become partners with local NGOs when we start to work in a province; they help us get to know the region and guide us in human resources. However, we had difficulty finding an NGO to work with in Tokat. The people of Tokat helped us a lot. We had a highly efficient cooperation with the Provincial Directorate for National Education as well as governmental institutions in Tokat. They are innovative and eager to pave the way for projects and new suggestions..."*



**Hilal Kuşçul**

Assistant General Manager, AÇEV

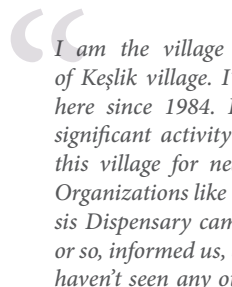


Most of the villages of Tokat were visited by non-governmental organizations for the first time through this project. Villagers met people saying, “There are things we want to tell you, we want to share with you” for the first time. Almost all of the villagers entered a classroom for the first time since their own school days, thanks to AÇEV’s trainings.



**Sevim Yurteri**  
Ormandibi Village

“They announced, ‘AÇEV is coming’. I had never heard of AÇEV before. I didn’t know what it was. I had my doubts. I had questions in my mind. I debated whether I could trust them or not. Then Serdar said, ‘Mom, this is an independent organization’. So I decided to go. Once I did, I couldn’t leave.”



**Şükrü Yıldız**  
Village Administrator, Keşlik Village

“I am the village administrator of Keşlik village. I’ve been living here since 1984. I haven’t seen significant activity happening in this village for nearly 30 years. Organizations like the Tuberculosis Dispensary came for an hour or so, informed us, and then left. I haven’t seen any other long-term social sharing.”



“I am one of the volunteer trainers for the project. It was a total surprise for me to get involved in the project. I live in Niksar, and when they called me to tell me about the project, I said, ‘OK’. They gave us workshops for two weeks. I was surprised when I first entered the classroom. It was a different atmosphere with teachers and child development experts receiving workshops... We met and started. Then we tried to reach the women. When they learned that there was a female trainer, that there were trainings for women at school, the news spread and the number of participants increased.”



**Serap Tüzemen**  
Volunteer Trainer



**Şengül Gül**

Ormandibi Village

*“They announced that trainers were going to come from AÇEV. I went to have a look. I met our trainer; she was a very nice person. We talked and agreed. I started to go there regularly. She told us very nice things. I felt really good. I am not an extroverted person; I wasn't able to talk with anyone that much. As our trainer spoke gently with us, I felt more open.”*

**Gülsüm Delioğlu**

Akın Köyü

*“I had never heard of AÇEV before. They told us that they would give trainings for women. I thought, ‘What can I learn at this age?’, but since they invited us, we went to have a look. I am glad that I went. We learned a great deal.”*

**Mustafa Aksoy**

Principal, Ayvalı Village

*“One day, a woman came. She said, ‘My daughter-in-law doesn't know how to read and write. Teach me how to teach it and I will teach her at home.’ This was the first time I came upon such a thing. ‘This is a very brave and nice of you, but send her here and we can teach her’, I said. That was a 22-year-old woman who came.”*



**Canan Erman**

Trainer, AÇEV

*“At the end of the two-hour trainings, women went back home. When they came the next week, they would tell us everything about what they did, and what they could or couldn't handle, based on the decisions they took the previous week... They talked about the issues as if they are casually chatting. The group leader sometimes appreciates these, and sometimes they discuss the reason of a failure. This way, they discuss a subject every week.”*



## *Rural Education Women's Support Program*

**A**fter winning the trust of women, everything started to progress more smoothly. We chose November-April for the trainings when agricultural activities were less intense. Throughout 11 weeks, meetings were held for women two hours a day each week on various issues such as child health, child development, pregnancy, women's health, rights, gender, environment, etc. It was women themselves who decided the time and place of the meetings. In three years, a total of 1836 women were reached in 24 villages through the Rural Education Women's Support Program.

*"At the end of the two-hour trainings, women went back home. When they came the next week, they would tell us everything about what they did, and what they could or couldn't handle, based on the decisions they took the previous week... They talked about the issues as if they are casually chatting. The group leader sometimes appreciates these, and sometimes they discuss the reason of a failure. This way, they discuss a subject every week."*

**Canan Erman**  
Trainer, AÇEV



And what did women gain from these trainings? What did these women, who had never visited the school in the middle of their village for so many years, as if they were banned from it, deduce from these trainings when they sat at school desks for the first time since primary school?



**Münevver Destebaşı**

Akın Village

*We dealt with the education of our children the most. Later on, we paid more attention to what we used to get angry with, yell at, or underestimate. We paid attention to our children in terms of hygiene, schoolwork, friendship, and everything. Before the training, we used to scold them when they wanted to go out to play and say, 'No, sit down' or 'Mind your own business'. Now they have different hours for playing, studying, and watching TV. It's better when I get along with my child. My children used to get grumpy with me, but now we get along much better.*

*Before, we couldn't go to the school and get involved in the meetings. Our families wouldn't send us to the meetings. Instead they would say, 'What does a daughter-in-law, a girl, have to do at school?' We didn't know the teachers. We knew only what the children told us when they got home. Now, we know and pay attention to what teacher teaches which lesson to our children. We even changed the minds of the elders. Before, my father-in-law wouldn't let me come home if he had seen me talking to you here.*

*When I was 16 I got married to my cousin, who also lived in the same village. We haven't visited the school for 30 years. Now I am attending the parents' meeting of my older son. We would never go to a place where there are men. Men got angry at the beginning, but now our husbands allow us.*

*Before, our fathers-in-law would object and say 'What are you doing in the same place with men?' Now my husband says, 'It is already three o'clock. You are late, aren't you going?' We treat our children better. We followed the Rural Education program; they talked about adolescence and told us to let our children play. I wouldn't let Özge go outside before, but now she is free. She won't go far, but plays with her friends at the door.*



**Gülsüm Delioğlu**

Akın Village

*I saw that my biggest mistake was to leave dangerous stuff around the children and ban them from playing... They couldn't enjoy their childhood. I also learned to appreciate girls. I care for the rights of my daughter. For example, I recognized the importance of being a mother better. A family cannot exist without a mother.*

*I used to keep my love inside in the past because the elders considered it disrespectful to show your love to your kids. For instance, if you see an old man coming, you can't hug your child. Now I hold my children and love them as I wish, and everyone should do the same. It has even helped improve their attention to their school work when I kiss them and show my love for them. When I kissed them, they became more committed to their school work.*

*Also, in the past, we couldn't pass by the coffee house. We see men sitting there on the way to our course, but now we pass them by. We have overcome the obstacles.*



**Neşe Delioğlu**

Akın Village

*I wish they had given the trainings here before we raised our children. We would have raised them differently and improved ourselves. We consider what's best for our children but brought them up in a kind of blindfolded way. If we had known what we know now, everything could have been different. For example, when my child used to come to me while I was working, I wouldn't listen to her and I would say, 'Shut up, go away, come later'. But now, when my child says something, I stop doing what I am doing and look into her eyes and try to understand what she is trying to say.*

*I wasn't comfortable with my husband, either, because of lack of communication. I couldn't express my opinions, but now we can share our opinions directly. We used to shake like a leaf in front of our teachers, or a government official, for instance... But now, we can talk to everyone comfortably.*

*We didn't know about breast exams until a disease happened, but now, we have check-ups in the hospital every six months.*



**Sündüs Yıldız**  
Keşlik Village

**I**t is actually the women themselves who best describe the trainings and the distance covered. What they tell us shows that even a little touch can lead to such big changes.

Women attending the Rural Education Program soon started to express their needs and shaped the content of the lessons, as well. For example, we arranged additional activities on adolescence, communication, anger management, creating environments for children to study, etc. based on their suggestions.



**Necla Karlık**  
Ormandibi Village

*Our trainer Gülsemin took us to the movies. I was 35 but didn't know what cinema was. My husband works for a cleaning firm in Tokat. He asked me, 'Where have you been?' and I said, 'I was at the cinema'. 'I haven't been to the cinema for fifty years. What did you do there?' he said.*

*It was great being in the cinema. I heard about it, but didn't know what it was. When I went there, I felt very different. There were times we got excited. We watched the movie Düğün Dernek which was shot in Sivas. It was so much fun; we liked it a lot. My child said, 'Mom, you went to the cinema, I want to go, too' and I said, 'OK, you can go'. In the past, I would say, 'Watch TV instead'.*

*Our biggest mistake was the way we treated our children. We learned how to talk, at least. I am not yelling any more. I don't slap my child now, but talk instead. We used to snap at them saying, 'It's not your business'. But now we are kinder and say 'my dear, sweetie', for example, and I talk to my child face to face.*

*We had never come together with the women of the village and chatted before. We could never talk to each other. But now, we get together, talk to each other about what business to start, and exchange opinions.*

*"There was a mother in Ormandibi. She had a 5-year-old daughter who kept taking off her clothes. And her mother resorted to violence to dissuade her instead of talking to her.*

*After she learned how to talk to her child during our trainings, she tried speaking to her daughter. 'I didn't think it would be that easy. I talked to my daughter, and she doesn't behave like that any more.' Just think! The only thing this mother had to do was to talk to her child... and she only learned to do this after our sharings."*



**Gülsemin Akay**  
Tokat Field Coordinator, AÇEV





**Semra Delioğlu**  
Akın Village

*We couldn't join society before. Women were left behind. Thanks to our teachers' guidance, now we try to go everywhere.*

*I also learned how to treat my children. We didn't let them speak before. When we wanted to solve something, we tried to solve it through violence, but now that's not the case anymore. We also learned about safety; we learned not to leave detergents around. We learned to place drugs out of the reach of children. We learned how to prepare fertilizers, and where to ask for help when there is family violence.*

*Everything would have been different if we had taken these trainings years ago. I would have led my children to study more, and raised their awareness. How could I raise their awareness when I wasn't aware myself?*

*People around me say, 'You've changed a great deal, you've become more hardworking'. And I say, 'It is thanks to the training of my mother'. For example, I raise my hand for every question asked during class and I give my opinion. I didn't participate that much before, but after my mother started attending the AÇEV course, I have become more confident with her support.*



**Soner Yurteri**  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student, Ormandibi Village





*All for Children...*

## Work with Children and Trainers

### The Biggest Investment for the Future: Well-Equipped Preschool Classrooms

While trying to empower women over their parenting roles through the Rural Education Women's Support Program, now it was also children's turn.



During the project, 20 preschool classrooms in 20 villages were equipped from top to bottom with stationery equipment, box games, puzzles, toy blocks, and art materials to support their developmental areas. Libraries, music centers, drama centers, and art centers were created. Physical environments of the preschool classrooms were completely improved.

The classrooms were turned into more attractive places for children, while also being supported substantially with educational materials. At the beginning of each school year,

new preschool classrooms in new villages were equipped while formerly equipped villages were supplemented with educational and stationery materials.



**Merve Arslan**

Preschool Teacher, Ayvalı Village

*"Before AÇEV started to work in the preschool classroom of this village, it was a very small place. It didn't have proper carpets for children to play on comfortably or even toys to play with. There were almost no educational materials. Today, I am using the materials sent by AÇEV here. A preschool classroom is not useful at all without the materials."*



*In my opinion, attending preschool changes everything in the life of a student. Let me start with myself; I am 24 years old. Preschool was not that common when I was a child, so I didn't go. And only two or three of my twenty classmates had attended preschool. When we started the first grade, we couldn't even paint, but our friends who attended preschool could paint and even draw.*

*For example, in this school, when teachers ask the higher grade students who didn't attend preschool about their dreams, their answers are buying a tractor or buying animals. Now, the preschool students say that they want to become nurses or teachers, most probably because of their love for their teachers. Even this is a significant change for the village. Our first grade teacher said last year it was totally different, but this year it was possible to start working with lines immediately with the children who had attended preschool. The ones who hadn't attended preschool didn't even know how to hold a pencil. It sounds very simple, but it is actually a big challenge. They can't control the pencil or draw a line. Students who attended preschool can count up to 10, while the others cannot. We overcome all of these challenges now in our preschool.*

**Merve Arslan**

Preschool Teacher, Ayvalı Village

It wasn't easy for AÇEV employees and volunteers to improve the physical conditions of the preschool classrooms or to convince children to come here, but it was worth everything to see children enjoying their new classrooms.

*"It was of course very difficult at the beginning as the people living in the villages have quite different priorities in life. I mean, it doesn't mean much to them, when you just go and tell them that early childhood education is critical and they should send their kids to preschool. For this reason, I can say that we carried out activities to convince them and to describe them what we were doing.*

*We told them we were preparing a very nice classroom and said 'it is free, the school will not demand any fee from you, just send your children'. And when they came with their children, both the children and the parents saw the environment, with colorful and fully equipped classrooms. It became very easy for them to decide after they came and saw for themselves.*

*The most important part starts at that point: to convince them that this is critical, because families with more than one child should send their younger children as they grow up, as well. We won't be working in those villages for years so it is important for the families to see the difference in their children so that they send their younger children later.*

*At the end of the year, teachers, children themselves and their families saw the advances they had made. When we talked to the families, even if they could not express the academic outcomes, they could easily observe the tangible differences in their children's behaviors, telling us 'he started to tidy his stuff, make his bed or the tidy the house when he messed it up. Before, he would just stand up and leave the dining table after we had dinner, but now, he takes his plate and brings it to the kitchen.'"*



**Umman İrice**

Training Specialist, AÇEV

*"They just looked around when they came in and sat on the carpet. They did nothing but looked; they didn't dare touch anything. I said, 'now let's play with the toys'. But no, they were petrified and didn't know what to do.*

*Their teachers guided them: 'Look what we've got here. There is a toy, there is a box game.' It was the first time they had seen so many toys together. And they were of course shy; they were afraid we would get angry if they touched anything. They thought it was us who owned everything. We said, 'No, these are yours'. It was a beautiful encounter. They started to play and then came to us, thanked and hugged us. It was impressive for us, as well."*



**Umman İrice**

Training Specialist, AÇEV



*“Our previous preschool classroom had only small, plastic chairs and no other materials. And parents didn’t send their children there. I felt sorry.*

*AÇEV prepared a nice preschool classroom for us. When the parents saw the tidy, clean, spacious classroom, they started to send their children. It was the first time that children saw toys, play dough, and markers. Children who attended preschool already knew the school environment, understood the teacher-student relationship and how to treat their classmates.*

*First grade teachers say that preschool-educated children can hold their pencils more easily, talk better, and join activities more, thanks to their background. We don’t have a literacy problem anymore. In the past, we had children who still didn’t know how to read and write in the 5th grade.”*



**Mustafa Aksoy**  
Principal, Ayvalı Village



**Merve Arslan**  
Preschool Teacher, Ayvalı Village

*“Children attending preschool are more social. Previously, they would accompany their mothers to the fields or in taking care of livestock. They didn’t spend much time with their friends. Now I visit parents together with children, instead of doing it alone. I want them to know who lives where and play with each other when they are outside. This way, they can socialize with each other both outside and in the classroom. This socialization contributes significantly to their development.”*

## *Our Word to Children, The Word from Children: The Child Education Program (ÇEP)*

Preschool teachers have a guide, a road map prepared by AÇEV when they work with children: the Child Education Program (ÇEP). ÇEP is a 24-week prepared education program taking into account developmental characteristics of children of 48 months and older. It consists of activities from simple to complex ,including repetition to reinforce students' knowledge and skills.

ÇEP covers all developmental areas of children from hand-eye coordination to sorting, classification, concepts, general ability, and social-emotional development areas before learning how to read and write and perform arithmetics.

During the project, the Child Education Program reached a total of 1,098 children in the preschools of 24 villages in Tokat. ÇEP activities started in September and continued every day until the schools ended in mid-June. Children were guests in a completely different world for 20 minutes every day and made room for new words and activities in their lives.

## *Support Training for Preschool Teachers and Principals*

AÇEV paid regard to the teachers, as well. Class management and communication training was carried out for all the preschool teachers in the project villages at the start of the school year. Furthermore, face-to-face and online trainings were given to the preschool teachers to apply the ÇEP program.

ÇEP trainings reached 56 preschool teachers. Preschool teachers were informed about equipment installation, class management, and principles of creating corners in the classroom.

In addition to all of these, case studies on communication and encountered challenges were conducted in the workshops with the participation of teachers and principals in Ayvalı, Akın and Kemalpaşa villages.







**Cengiz Polat**  
Principal, Akin Village

*“Not only parent trainings, but also teacher trainings, their programs, pre-school classroom equipment... It was really a demanding process. It became joke among friends and they would ask, ‘Did AÇEV call you today?’... We didn’t have a free moment; it was an intense schedule. And of course, while we carried out our educational activities, we improved ourselves, as well.”*

## *Play-Based Curriculum*

The most enjoyable part of the project was probably the Play-Based Curriculum, which turned out to be the favorite of both mothers and children. As its name suggests, it is an activity encouraging mothers to play games with their children, which both entertain and educate children, and the best part is that it is applicable anywhere. When shopping in the market, folding laundry or cooking...



**Emine Kuzutürk**  
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

*“The Play-Based Curriculum consists of activities to be performed by women at home with their children. They complete eight activities each week. The program both supports the development of children and prepares them for school.”*

*“For example, we can fold clothing with children and say the colors of the clothes and who they belong to. This stimulates children’s cognitive development, as well as physically developing their fine and gross motor development. They practiced these types of activities at home, then the mothers told us what happened. We had some really impressive feedback.*

*There was a couple who were about to get divorced, and they couldn’t spend much time with their children. We had cardboard cut-outs called smiling face, happy face, crying face, etc. We gave these cut-outs to the participants so that they could play with their children at home. For example, we explained the mother how to use these to show how they feel at that moment. Next week, the mother told us that while they were playing, the child used the smiling face to show his mood. When the mother asked, ‘Why did you show me the smiling face?’, he said, ‘You are with me, you are playing with me, so that’s why I’m so happy’. This shows that children appreciate even the slightest attention.*

*Children can join games anywhere. For example, we can say, ‘We are making a cake. Would you like to add the flour?’ and when we do this, the child will gain self-confidence and develop his communication with his mother at the same time. It’s been a favorable change in this sense.*

*Once, a mother with two sons told us that her younger son had better communication with her and helped her when she was cooking, which the older brother mocked, saying, ‘Are you a girl? Why do you spend time with your mother?’ And he said, ‘Why don’t you join? It’s fun.’ It happened a few more times, and eventually the older brother took the spoon and started to help.”*



**Serap Tüzemen**  
Volunteer Trainer



**Şengül Gül**  
Ormandibi Village

*“For instance, our trainer told us, ‘Take your kids to the market, explain to them every fruit you see’. I would take them to the garden if I couldn’t go to the market and explained to them in the garden. I would ask them, ‘what is the color of this, what is the color of that’ and make them explain everything. Our trainer told us to play with our kids, so I created games with bottles. We really enjoyed it.”*







In addition to all of these, the project was supported through activities for children such as reading groups, festivals, etc. Children's Reading Groups was a 6-week activity carried out with children of ages 5-7. During this period, one book was read to children during each of the weekly sessions and children took one book home every week to read.

The best part of the reading groups was that older boys and girls in the village volunteered to help. Simge Yıldız, who attended the first grade of high school, was one of them...



**Simge Yıldız**  
Gönüllü, Keşlik Village

*My mom attended the trainings of AÇEV. I went there as well and met the trainers. Now, I'm reading books for children. The Little Duck, Teddy Bear, etc... They are generally children ages 12-13. We meet in the school yard. They enjoy it a lot, as well.*

*My parents have also changed after these trainings. They started to trust me more. Before, I used to say, 'I'm going to be this, or I want to be that' but they wouldn't support me. Now, they agree with me and say, 'You can become a teacher.'*

*Don't Let the Fathers  
Be the Last Ones to Hear It*



## Work With Men

Fathers, who have an essential role in the development of their children, should be involved when carrying out a project for children. In addition to Rural Education Women's Support Programs, preschool classrooms, Play-Based Curriculum, childhood education programs and supportive programs for teachers, another link of the chain is comprised of fathers.

Coffee House Meetings were held in the coffee houses as two-hour workshops attended by men in which opinions were shared on issues such as child development, the father's role in child development, listening, active self-expression, and gender issues. Coffee House Meetings reached a total of 1,026 men.



**Sündüs Yıldız**

Participant, Keşlik Village

*My older son and husband didn't have very good communication. There was always a distance between them. When my son needed something, he wouldn't ask his father but come to me instead. 'Son, why don't you talk to your father yourself?' 'No, I can't.' One day, there was a meeting. My husband came from that meeting. He approached the children differently; he began to show his love in front of other people. In the past, he was not on intimate terms with children; he would keep a distance, thinking they would get spoiled otherwise. Now he feels and acts in a different manner.*

*"Coffee House Meetings is a really good program for fathers because we helped fathers become aware. We explained to them the difference between a child who grows up with and without the love of a father and that children deserve to be valued. Then we took them a little back in time and increased their awareness through questions like, 'How was your relationship with your father, and how do you wish it had been?'"*



**Gülsemin Akay**

Tokat Field Coordinator, AÇEV





*The Project In Numbers*





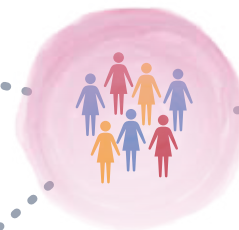
1245

Number of days the project was carried out between April 1st, 2012 - August 31st, 2015



1026

Number of men/fathers who attended the Coffee House Meetings



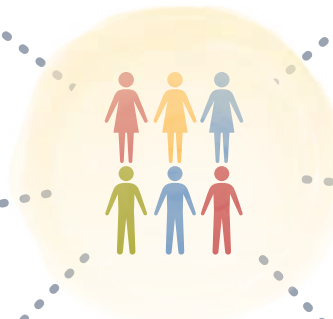
7

Number of women's groups formed in villages provided with community-based activities



24

Number of preschool classrooms provided with stationery and educational materials over 3 years



2732

Number of people reached through meetings in the villages



25

Number of institutions cooperated with during the project



24

Number of villages included



103

Number of preschool teachers and principals reached through trainings of the Child Education Program on classroom management and communication



1371

Number of children between 36-60 months of age who attended the Play-Based Curriculum classes



1836

Number of women who received education via Rural Education Women's Support Program



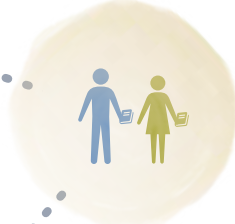
40

Number of active participants of women's groups



600

Number of people who received surveys, participated in the focus groups and were interviewed for the Project Research



54

Number of trainers/group leaders consisting of preschool teachers and volunteers reached through trainers' trainings for the Rural Education Women's Support Program



1098

Number of children who attended the Child Education Program in the preschools of 24 villages



307

Number of children between 5-7 years of age who attended Reading Groups



52687

Kilometers covered in Tokat and its villages during the project



86

Number of teachers taking active part in family participation activities



39

Number of people supporting the project within AÇEV



5

Number of Women and Children Education Centers (women's hubs) opened in the villages



36

Number of experts from eight different institutions giving support to the Early Childhood Education platform



253

Number of children who received surveys, participated in the focus groups and were interviewed for the Project Research





# *Community-Based Model*





Road Map for the Project  
*Road Map for the Project*

## *A New Model for the Civil Society: Community-Based Early Childhood Education*

This project did not only help Sündüs to reduce the distance with her son and husband. It also helped to make up for the distance between Necla and her children, Soner and his daughters, Özlem and her mother-in-law and between all the other women and teachers and the school.

All began to approach each other more tolerantly and establish ‘communication’. The skills they inherently had were revealed with a touch. And this touch was by the AÇEV staff and volunteers through the programs they carried out.



It was not only the villages of Tokat who benefited from the Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities project. This project has become a new achievement for AÇEV, as well. This was because the “Community-Based Model” was put into practice for the first time. AÇEV contributed to civil society practice by creating an opportunity to compare the service-based and community-based models while implementing the project.

Although the title “Community-Based Model” sounds complex at first glance, an insight into the activities makes it clearly understandable. The

simplest definition of the community-based model is that the services and processes are designed in accordance with the community’s social needs and expectations, their social participation, and their social recognition and contribution.

In other words, activities that are developed, planned, executed, and evaluated together with the community can be called community-based work.



*“The key aspect of the community-based model is indeed making a joint attempt with the members of the community and working together. The keyword here is participation, ensuring that the members of the community participate and create something together. This is fundamental. When we look at the community-based ECE Programs, we can see different forms of community participation.*

*One of these is participation through utilizing. Namely, parents who take or send their child to preschools participate through utilizing the services. This means the acceptance of the services provided. This is not an active participation in the implementation and administration of the program.*

*The second one is providing resources. This is participation through construction of buildings, providing places or staff for the program. Correct examples include donation of time, energy, and materials.*

*The third one is participating in the administration. This is about the community members spending their time and energy in the administration of services. People who participate in the administration should be members of that community requiring the services.*

*The fourth one is that the community has a voice in the design, implementation, and assessment of the services. The community has a voice and the right to decide in defining the target, content, and priorities of that work and implementing the program as well as participating in the administration.*

*Therefore, we have two keywords in the ‘community-based’ concept. The first one is being a partner and the second one is participation. However, these two keywords can be actualized in four different ways. Through utilizing, resource provision, participating in administration, and having a voice.*

*It is of course the last model that is demanded the most and contributes to the community development. Participating in the administration, having a voice in the targets, priorities, content, and implementation. The fourth one is the most demanded one and gives the most favorable return for the community.*

*Why favorable? First of all, when the community has a voice in an activity or a program related with it and defines its targets and priorities, it comes up with the most responsive activity in terms of its needs. The community adopts the program better when it is a partner and has a voice in the planning, implementation, and assessment, since it turns into a process in which the community itself is involved. Therefore, we guarantee the sustainability of the work more. It meets its own needs and has a voice...*

*So, the community has a higher chance to sustain an activity that meets its needs and in which it has a voice. This is where ownership starts, and sustainability is dependent on this. There is now ownership, because it is an activity which the community itself prepares, decides, and implements. Therefore, it has more voice, recognizes it more and becomes more eager and more willing to ensure its sustainability.*

*In the community-based model, carrying out actions such as planning, deciding, implementing, and sustaining plays a significant role in the development of the community members. Therefore, the community-based model makes a major contribution to the development of the community, as well.*

*This community becomes more sensitive towards its own rights and needs in this process and becomes less dependent on the imported expertise. Of course, there is always a need for experts but this never turns into dependence, since it takes the form of partnership. The community doesn’t remain dependent on it; it generally achieves the capability, knowledge, and awareness to sustain it even when the expert leaves.*

*Therefore, we care more for ‘partnership and participation in planning and defining the content and needs and implementation’ than ‘participation through utilizing’ or ‘participation through resource provision’ in early childhood education.*

*However, it may not always be possible to achieve participation at the desired level. It may take a long time for the participation of the community to take place on the levels of implementing, having a voice, and making decisions. One of the most important reasons is the fact that communities are not familiar with this kind of approach. In general, someone always tells us what to do and we do it. But it is the opposite in this case. The community should be aware of its own needs and address them via expertise support. Hence, it is essential how the activities are put into practice and how the process is planned and implemented.”*



**Prof. Dr. Sevda Bekman**

Founding Member and  
Academic Adviser, AÇEV

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### *Examples of Community-Based ECE Work in Turkey*

- Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV); Centers for Women and Children
- Home-Based Model of AÇEV; Mother and Child Education Program
- Children Under the Same Roof (ÇAÇA) as an Association and a Center

### *Examples of Community-Based ECE Work Around the World*

- ECE Program implemented in Mozambique by Save The Children with the support of UBS
- Community-Based ECE activities carried out in various countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, India, Vietnam, Palestine, Kenya and South America.

*\*Footnote: Preschool Education, Needs Analysis Report, MEB, UNICEF, 2012*

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*“Community-based models are more commonly applied in Latin American countries. According to the research literature, the more a culture believes in joint planning and meeting its own needs, the better the community-based trainings function.*

*Of course, for this reason, we see that it is more efficient with cultures adopting this kind of an approach and this is what research tells us. And I say again, the most well-developed community-based models exist in Latin American countries and they are well-sustained. We see it in India, as well. But culture plays an important part in ownership and success.”*

**Prof. Dr. Sevda Bekman**

Founding Member and Academic Adviser, AÇEV

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This model, which originates from within the community, is often highly efficient in establishing trust-based communication with the recipients of its services. The active participation of the community members in decision-making processes can have a broader influence in the community. People who get involved in the decision-making processes eventually begin to see themselves as problem-solving, intervening individuals. And this makes them more powerful.

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## Villages In Which The Community-Based Model Was Applied

The most important aspect of community-based work is that it can reach disadvantaged people in the most remote and inaccessible locations who are otherwise off the radar. Therefore, this model is mostly applied in the rural areas and villages that are disadvantaged in many aspects.

In this project, certain criteria were considered when selecting the villages. Special attention was paid to choose villages with a population between 1,000 and 2,000, a young population with a high number of children under the age of 7, an availability of men in the village, village schools and preschools in poor condition, and no access to adult education, e.g. Public Education Centers. In some villages, men have to leave the village as seasonal workers or for other jobs and thus the male population is decreased in these villages. After all, community-based villages came out of service-based villages.

*"I think this model is more likely to be adapted and applied according to the needs in other places. Its greatest advantage is that it is compact and thus more cost-efficient. This is because it is applied in a small region and shaped in accordance with the needs specific to that region."*

*And it is more likely to be sustained, since it is recognized by the locals. However, its sustainability requires that this recognition is not only on a local level but also on an institutional level. One of the biggest risks of these kinds of models is the question of 'What is going to happen when the implementer leaves the field?' Community-based projects are more likely to be sustained."*



**Nalan Yalçın**  
General Manager, AÇEV

An outline of community-based work was defined in the field studies, at the meetings held with the village, by the women, village administrator, school administration, institutions in the town and centers that the village is connected to, and all the related parties.

Although they had similar outlines, project details of the executed work are likely to vary depending on the needs and priorities of each village. This was taken into consideration and details were established based on the needs of the women and mothers in the villages.

*"I believe that the locals of the rural areas need to do something for themselves based on community-based concept, as much as the urban populations do. And I think there is a bigger need here. Awareness, partnership, participation can influence them more, change them more, and lead them to supporting their needs. All of these programs aim at improving, educating, and raising awareness. And the communities in which these programs are most effective are ones that are most in need. Therefore, rural areas need these kinds of programs."*



**Prof. Dr. Sevda Bekman**  
, Founding Member and Academic Adviser, AÇEV

Following all of these activities, the AÇEV Community-Based Working Model was created with a focus on the communication among women, school, village and local administrative institutions. Three basic components were identified. These three components have actually become the key outcomes proving the sustainability of this project as well.





### *A Breath Of Fresh Air For The Village: Women's Groups*

Women's groups are the women in the villages themselves... Women's groups consist of women representing the whole village, families, related parties, and districts in the village. Groups both represent the village women as well as carry out work based on the needs and expectations expressed by all the women in the village. They define their own actions based on their priorities and expectations. Women's groups work within a flexible framework. The number of participants varies depending on activity. These groups are open to all women in the village who want to be involved.

Women's groups are responsible for administering women's hubs and activities to be arranged in these hubs for women and children, as well. Women are always in close contact with the school administration, preschool teachers, town administrator, members, and related governmental agencies. Yet AÇEV may step in at the point they need it. AÇEV occasionally provides support to women's groups in terms of process management, guidance, and capacity development.

## Let's Have A Roof: Women's Hubs

One of the most significant outcomes of this project and the community-based model has been women's hubs.

Before this project, it seemed like the only place where village women could get together was the school. However, teachers and principals working in the schools generally do not live in the villages. They live in the nearest city/town centers and are transported with shuttle services. Therefore, school is closed at the last bell that rings. Women cannot enter the school then even if they wanted to.

Consequently, it seemed like a major requirement for the women to have a place to get together in the village. Women asked for a venue where they could get together, exchange opinions, and where trainings could be given supporting their children's development. A computer room, library, and areas for conversation were also included.

In five of the eight villages where community-based activities were carried out, women found their own solution for the needs they had expressed themselves. They joined forces and created their own hubs. These hubs have become the most important factor in bringing women's groups into action.

Most steps were taken by women themselves, which included identifying the locations. For instance, upon the insistence of women, the renovation of the former school building was prioritized by the Provincial Directorate for National Education. The creation of these hubs played an important role in the sustainability of women's groups by giving a venue for both women and children in the village. AÇEV's role has been to support and guide them in this process.



**Münevver Destebaşı**  
AkinVillage

*As women, we didn't have a proper place to meet and gather. Thanks to AÇEV, we have it now. Before, the only place for women was in their houses, in their fields, or in the barn. Now we take this opportunity to go out and spend some time away from our homes.*

*"In the villages where we carried out community-based activities, we held numerous meetings to discuss what women needed, and what they could do to meet those needs with the goal of empowering themselves.*

*In the end, in five of these eight villages, women's groups started gradually to form. Women's groups were created to consider the problems and needs of women in the village. And then those groups came up with the idea of creating women's hubs.*

*I give a lot of importance to women's groups and the idea of women's hubs. Today in the rural areas, we don't have an attitude of 'Let's do everything together' or a social structure like the collective work of the '70s or '80s anymore. Therefore, it's very precious when they gather, think over a problem, find a solution, and put it into practice together."*



**Hilal Kuşçul**  
Assistant General Manager, AÇEV



## *Collective Work In Education: School And Family Collaboration*

For AÇEV staff members who went to the rural areas of Tokat for our field studies of the Fair Start for Children Living Rural Areas project, the first thing that caught their attention was the lack of collaboration and communication between the school and families. An improvement in the communication and solidarity between families and the school seemed like it would make a major contribution to the success of the project.



Almost none of the women had visited the school again after they completed primary school (none of them continued their education after that). They did not come to parent-teacher meetings or meet their children's teacher, afraid that the other village people would consider it improper.

School had always been located in the remotest part of the village, where they never passed. However, a school has been added within the borders of the village and the invisible barrier in between has been broken through the Rural Education Women's Support trainings and Coffee House Meetings within the project.

With regard to family participation, a two-day workshop was held with teachers and school administrators to enable families to participate in the whole education process of their

children. Families who had not entered the school previously started visiting the school, attending parent-teacher meetings, and becoming familiar with the classroom environment of their children.

Teachers tried to arrange the meetings taking into account the working hours of parents in the fields and farmyard in order to share more information and reach all families. This change has reflected positively on the lives of children from their school achievement to their behavior.



**Münevver Destebaşı**  
Akın Village

*I am 43. I have five kids. I never returned to school after I finished primary school, even to visit. My children went to school but I've never been there to see them. During these trainings, I came back to school for the first time. Before I attended the trainings we used to say, 'She's a girl. What difference would it make if she goes to school or not?'. Then we changed our minds. Children are good at school. Now we plan to let them go to school.*

Educational venues were brought into the lives of women in the village when preschool teachers took part in the trainings of women as trainers and the school building was used for group activities. Finally, women began to come to school and the communication between the school and parents began to improve, which was effective in encouraging preschool age children to be registered in preschool and attend regularly.

The success and sustainability of the project improved when the parents and the village began learning about the importance of early childhood education from teachers during their visits to school. Planning activities together with the families and involving families actively in the implementation process showed everyone how important family and school collaboration is in supporting children's development.

The creation of women's groups was also a step towards enhancing school-family collaboration, because once all the parents in the village began to understand the importance of this issue, they were able to express their own expectations and comprehend the needs of the school better. As a result, they have become more active and conscious in providing support.

*"We saw in the field how important it is to improve the collaboration between the school and families. In Turkey, teachers are frequently assigned to different schools, so their places of duty keep changing. If parents know how to support their children, teachers, and the school, they can contribute to the increase in the quality of education and enhance the collaboration between the two most important environments in the lives of children: home and school. This is the primary objective of family participation.*

*However, school staff members sometimes state that parents don't give enough support.*

*Communication between the school and families has been established after the Rural Education Women's Support program started being implemented in the schools, which led to the ECE Platform."*



**Emine Kuzutürk**  
Project Coordinator,  
AÇEV

## *Everyone Is Responsible For The Education Of A Child: The Early Childhood Education Platform*

Another objective of the AÇEV staff throughout the project was to ensure the project's SUSTAINABILITY. In addition to the fond memories, kind words, the change in women, and the development in children, AÇEV wanted everything to be sustained even after we left following the completion of the project. "Will all these investments be limited to three years or will the village people, children, and trainers assume ownership and continue the project?" was the question in everyone's minds. We did not have to wait long for the answer.

*"It is not possible for a non-governmental organization to reach out and meet all needs. However, it is possible to become a uniting element between the needs of the place and its community. For example, together with the school administration in a village we decided to establish a container preschool classroom within the project. The existing preschool classroom in the village was too small and insufficient. It was turned into a pleasant classroom suited to the standards of preschool education. The village people and the community came together for the opening ceremony of the container preschool classroom and while together, they discussed community issues. There were several problems concerning the needs of disabled people in the village; that discussion led to steps the community decided to take to resolve it. A synergy was created among the village community. They became able to express their needs better. This was repeated in numerous villages.*

*With AÇEV acting as a bridge for village people to express their needs and demands to the authorized bodies, another need became apparent: a platform was required to execute communication after AÇEV left the region. A meeting was held with the Provincial Directorate for National Education, who were ready to cooperate. Activities started soon after, and the ECE Platform was born..."*

The ECE Platform was formed through voluntary participation by the relevant people and institutions of the city, town, and the village. The purpose of the platform is to define the needs to support the development and education of preschool children in Tokat, especially in its villages, and establishing the necessary support structures.

The platform has two key features. One of the key features is defining the needs on the urban level as well as the local level, including representatives from town and village and then meeting those needs with the local resources.

The other feature is involving public institutions, universities, and local civil actors in addition to the authorities of the Provincial Directorate for National Education and local institutions. By doing so, the platform managed to draw the attention of various institutions, attracting the interest of both public and other civil partners under the responsibility of the Directorate for National Education.



**Hilal Kuşçul**  
Assistant General Manager, AÇEV



*"Tokat Early Childhood Education Platform was not planned at the beginning of the project, but it turned out to be one of the most valuable outcomes of the project. Different public bodies have different duties in terms of children and families. It was important to integrate them into the process. Besides, after the project a structure was essential to own and follow up the sustainability of the early childhood education and work in Tokat in general as well as in the project villages. Therefore, the platform probably wouldn't exist without the determination of the institutions.*

*We were working in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture since the beginning of the project, since we worked in the rural areas. Also, the Directorate for National Education recognized this project since its beginning and supported us in various ways. The Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies made numerous contributions to the work done. There is Gaziosmanpaşa University of Tokat as well, whose child development and early childhood education programs were invited to the platform, as well.*

*It became a multi-membered structure, which facilitated its success and recognition. We believe that this structure in Tokat will carry out effective work in early childhood education long after the project is completed."*



**Nalan Yalçın**  
General Manager, AÇEV





**Fahri Nayman**

Tokat Provincial Directorate for  
National Education, Primary  
Education Department Manager

*The most important feature of the ECE Platform is that it is organized. As institutions, we saw what we had done and what we could do together. We had effective communication and coordination.*

*Our university somehow modeled the work of AÇEV and started to conduct similar work in the villages. According to our research, there are almost all children who received preschool education also went on to finish high school. Of those children who did not finish high school, 100% of them did not attend preschool. As a result, we place special emphasis on this as the ECE platform. The reason for us to demand the creation of this platform is to be able to explain to our parents and children the importance of education.*





Needs have been assessed from bottom to top through the ECE Platform. Preschool activities, budget, issues to be addressed were all identified and cooperation was ensured for both morale and material sustainability of this work. As a result, through the ECE Platform the sustainability of the project was ensured after AÇEV.



Research shows that a child's interaction with his family plays a primary role in his development. When parents are responsive to the needs of a child, provide more resources for learning, and their interaction is improved, the world of the child grows and develops.

AÇEV aims at contributing to the child's development through its educational programs. Meanwhile, it supports the family as well to enhance the development of the child.

It is the result of this goal that mothers, fathers, teachers, and principals received various trainings during this project in addition to the education of children between 0-6. As interventions directed exclusively to the children would be limited and temporary, AÇEV's work considers and supports children not only as individuals but also as a whole with all the influential factors surrounding them.

AÇEV's holistic approach to children's education is reflected in the results of this project.

*"For me, the most important element is raising awareness in the community about early childhood education. Early childhood education is essential. Children should start being educated even before they start school. Through this project AÇEV raised awareness of this issue in various sections of the society, among mothers, fathers, uncles, etc.*

*Meanwhile, the ECE Platform helped raise awareness in certain influential governmental agencies such as District Governorships, the District Directorate of National Education. Primary School Principals also wanted to be involved in decisions made for ECE and thus this platform came about. Teachers were shown what an orderly classroom environment should be like in early childhood education. We hope that teachers will maintain these standards."*



**Prof. Dr. Sevda Bekman**  
Founding Member and Academic Adviser,  
AÇEV



# 5

## *Impact and Results of the Project*

How can you measure  
the happiness of a child?



Farming is a challenging occupation. Sometimes you have to wait for one year to see a seed germinating. You impatiently wait for a tree to yield fruits after years of work.

The moment you quit being patient is the moment you begin to lose. But farmers know that they have to wait for the harvest day to be rewarded for their efforts of one year. They never doubt that their best tool to measure their success is time.

There is a fellowship of patience between non-governmental activities and farming. Non-governmental activities include giving trainings, developing solutions, taking individual and gradual steps and waiting to get the results. However, it is not as easy as farming to measure the results. You need to measure and assess the quantitative and qualitative impact you have made. However, whatever the result is, you know that you have left a seed for a good future.

Starting out with this belief, AÇEV performed its impact assessment using mainly qualitative methods at the end of the activities of its Fair Start for Young Children in Turkish Rural Communities project. Focus group discussions were arranged with the women of identical demographics in the control group villages where project activities did not take place alongside the participating women in the villages where these activities did take place. Moreover, ECE Platform representatives and teachers in these villages were interviewed and the extent of the research was increased as much as possible.

During the entire assessment process, a total of 16 focus group discussions and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted. All data coding and analysis included a comparison between project villages and control group villages. Furthermore, analyses comparing Community-Based, Service-Based, and control group villages were also conducted in order to assess the unique impact of the Community-Based Model.

**The results have been categorized under three topics:**

- 1. Impact of Family Trainings on Children***
- 2. Impact of Preschool Services on Children***
- 3. Impact of Project Activities on Women and Community***



## What is the Impact of Family Trainings on Children?

In order to measure the impact of family trainings on children, mothers were given various scenarios and asked to discuss attitudes towards and causes of physical and emotional violence. The result was surprising: It showed that mothers in the project villages displayed different attitudes about physical and emotional violence towards children compared to the mothers in the control villages. In other words, mothers who participated in the project objected to violence more strongly compared to the mothers in the other villages. Besides, it was observed that mothers in the project villages identified and adopted communicating with, listening to, and understanding children as a parenting skill.

One of the most important results was that mothers who benefited from the AÇEV's trainings spent more time with their children and showed more interest in activities such as reading books and helping with homework, compared to those who didn't attend the trainings.

Above all, perhaps the greatest contribution of these trainings to children was the change observed in them as a reflection of the love and affection from their mothers.

This was because women learned not to conceal their affection, thanks to these trainings. Mothers, who could not smell or kiss their children as they wished, learned to express their love. They started to open not only their arms but also their hearts for their children.



**Neşe Delioğlu**  
Akin Village

*I used to keep my love to myself. I went to the engagement ceremony of my son in Istanbul and hugged him. He said, 'Mom, this is the first time I have ever felt your hug.' It still feels like fire in my heart. I felt so sad. I wish I hadn't hugged anyone but my son.*



## *Did Preschool Services Change the Lives of Children?*

Not only the parent trainings but also the activities for the improvement of the quality of preschool services had a significant impact on children. To name a few, enhancing physical capacities of preschools, supporting educational programs in preschools through ÇEP, and the teachers applying this program had a positive influence on children.

Results show that registration rates of children in preschools and attendance rates have increased significantly compared to the control villages. ÇEP activities, equipment in the classrooms, free preschool materials, and toys given to the students were effective in increasing the number of enrolled students in the project villages.

*Children now enjoy school. I don't know if it is because of the toys that they don't have at home or the activities they perform here, but it is obvious that they love school. Families tell their children they won't send them to school if they misbehave. This is because school is something good for them. For example, we made chicks the other day, and some of them now come to school to take care of them.*

*All the materials in our preschool classroom were brought by AÇEV. We have animals and various toys. Our corner of blocks is quite rich. We have wooden blocks, and also blocks to teach students colors. Best of all, we have wooden tables and chairs to work on that are durable and easy to clean.*



**Merve Arslan**  
Preschool Teacher, Ayvalı Village

**T**hese activities in preschools changed the views of mothers towards school and early childhood education. When mothers were asked to assess the impact of preschool education within the scope of our project

assessment, most of the mothers –both in the project and control villages—stated that preschool education improved socio-emotional and behavioral skills of children. However, unlike the control villages, mothers in the project villages more highly emphasized the cognitive skills, positive attitudes towards school, and the desire to go to school observed in children thanks to preschool education.

These results demonstrate that beneficiaries of the project have a higher awareness of the importance of preschool education.



**Fahri Nayman**

Tokat Provincial Directorate for  
National Education, Primary  
Education Department Manager

*Most importantly, the point of view towards education has changed in the villages. Beginning from preschool, the point of view towards school and education has definitely changed. They now agree that education is a must, after AÇEV's and our trainings. They now bring their children and register them for school almost 'by force' so to speak. In the past, there were times when we requested or even begged them to bring their children to school.*

*For example, our province ranked the second in Turkey in the age group of 3-5 the previous year. We ranked the 25th in the age group of 5. This is totally different from our former rates. Our schooling rate in 2002 was around 10% for the age group of 3-5, while it is 48% today.*

## *By the Power of Women*

**H**ow do you understand the power of a woman? From her eyes, words, reactions, emotions. One can answer this question as 'all of the above' based on self-help books or workshops. But the word of a woman is enough to show her power in the villages of Tokat. Those words sometimes hide thousands of feelings, and sometimes leave the so-called wordmasters speechless.

While the qualitative results of the research reports do not exactly reflect the power of words, people who sit with those women will only stand up with a hump on their backs, by the weight of their words. The only way to get rid of that hump could be to describe in writing how powerful women have become.

Within the scope of the research, beneficiary and non-beneficiary women were asked how powerful women were at the beginning of 2012 when the project started, and in 2015 when the project was finished.

Results were not surprising at all. While the research showed that beneficiary women displayed a meaningful and significant change in terms of power, this difference was not revealed in the assessment of the women in non-beneficiary villages.

Most of the women in the community-based villages referred to AÇEV's activities as the reason for this difference in power. On the other hand, women in the service-based villages assessed this difference generally as a result of change in time. And non-beneficiary women referred to the change observed during this period as "becoming more mature."





*“Women showed a big improvement in terms of self-expression. They have become more social. More self-confident. They got involved in decision-making mechanisms. They now say ‘I am here,’ especially when it comes to decisions about children. They couldn’t visit the doctor alone in the past, but now they say ‘I can do everything’. We clearly saw how women gained power after these trainings.*

*Women in the project villages exert less violence on their children now. They recognized that verbal violence is also a form of violence.*

*Especially when we ask them ‘What would you do in order to solve a problem?’, they say, ‘We communicate.’ We see that they don’t just mean talking but they also internalize the concept of communication.*

*One of the most important outcomes is that the time mothers spent with their children and its quality increased. Preschool children have gone through major mental and physical development. From fine motor skills and holding pencils to asking questions and regulating their emotions and behaviors, they changed and developed in various areas.”*



**Seden Karakurt**  
Research Specialist, AÇEV



## ***Women Decide, Women Speak***

Within this research study, we also attempted to measure the increase in the power of women in decision-making mechanisms. To this end, women were given various scenarios and asked who made the decisions about children, the house and themselves. While women in the project villages stated that they were the ones who made the decisions about children, we found that these decisions were made by fathers in the other villages.

It was observed that house-related decisions were made by beneficiary women and their husbands together, while these decisions were given by husbands in the control villages. It was also observed that the final decision-makers are mostly the husbands when it comes to issues related to women. However, it was found that the rate of women who say ‘I make the decisions on issues about myself’ is much higher in the project villages compared to the control villages.

*“Women gained so much confidence that one of them even applied for candidacy to become a muhtar (village administrator) during the elections. One of them started beekeeping. Another one wanted to become a butcher. Her husband did not let her, but she said, ‘Do you know how important it is to speak out that I want this?’ with tears in her eyes. These kinds of changes are significant. There is potential inside there. And we opened a small path to reveal it.”*

**Hilal Kuşçul**

Assistant General Manager, AÇEV

## How far can a neighbor be?

Another multiplier effect of the project has been the improvement observed in the relationship of beneficiary women with their immediate environment. It was noted that neighborhood relations and solidarity between beneficiary women in community-based villages have increased more than in the service-based villages.



**Şengül Gül**  
Ormandibi Village

*I was quite an introvert. I couldn't talk to anyone, I was too shy. Now I can talk to anyone I wish. For example, if I had to go out, I would finish what I had to do and come back immediately. If I went to the hospital, I couldn't handle it on my own, but now I can. I couldn't talk when I went outside, but now I can talk. For example, I wouldn't be able to sit and talk to you, but now I can.*



*"Not only parents but also other people started to view children differently. The age group of 0-6 was paid almost no attention. It was considered that children of those ages couldn't think or understand, and didn't matter that much. The approach towards them was, 'They are growing any way; we may love them or beat them as we want'. It changed parents, as well, when they realized that major steps were taken at these ages and a major part of the brain development took place during this period. I can say that we raised their awareness on this issue."*



**Gülsemin Akay**  
Tokat Field Coordinator, AÇEV



*"We noticed a decrease in the violence used against children in the project villages in particular. They recognized that violence was a bad thing. At the group meetings with fathers, AÇEV trainers showed them the brain scans of children who had been exposed to violence. That was really effective.*

*Fathers say, 'The moment I am about to hit, I remember those trainings'. Both fathers and mothers say, 'I think to myself before I hit. Why should I hit? Why would my child be stupid compared to others?' However, children who push and shove each other in the control villages say, 'My father does the same to my mother, why wouldn't I do it to my friend?' for example.*



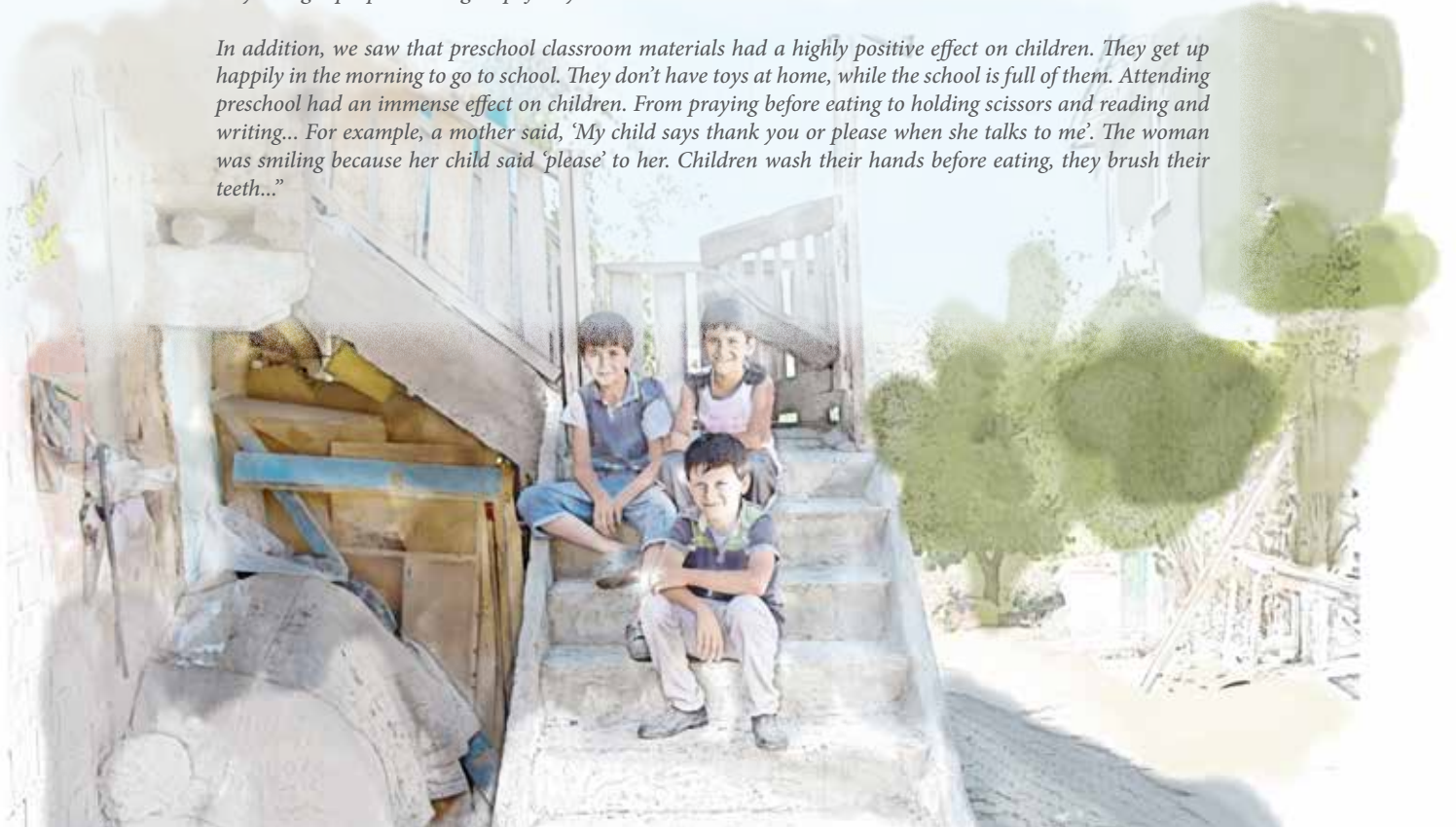
**Dr. Gökçe Baykal**  
Research Specialist,  
Development Analytics

*Before the trainings, most of the women in these villages had religious marriages only. Now, they all have civil marriages as a positive result of the trainings. They learned about the law of inheritance. Moreover, a woman wore a wedding gown at the age of 65 at AÇEV's certificate ceremony because she had not had a civil marriage and also because she had never worn a wedding gown. And she hung that photo on her wall.*

*'I communicate, I don't hit my child, I try to intervene if his father is beating him, I send him to school'... All of these are the positive statements we hear after the 11-week AÇEV trainings. Women who couldn't call their children by their own names or caress their heads can now call their children 'my son, my daughter' after these trainings.*

*For many women, having to pass by the coffee house was a reason not to attend the courses. This was because they thought people would gossip if they did. This was overcome thanks to these courses.*

*In addition, we saw that preschool classroom materials had a highly positive effect on children. They get up happily in the morning to go to school. They don't have toys at home, while the school is full of them. Attending preschool had an immense effect on children. From praying before eating to holding scissors and reading and writing... For example, a mother said, 'My child says thank you or please when she talks to me'. The woman was smiling because her child said 'please' to her. Children wash their hands before eating, they brush their teeth..."*





With this project, AÇEV reached the villages of Tokat that are off the beaten track and normally not visited by institutions. While planting the seeds of change in these villages, many women had different views of life and different attitudes towards their children, husbands, and surroundings by the end of the project. Many fathers revisited their attitudes towards their children.

This touch left a permanent impact on many women. Although they stated during the research interviews that project activities would come to an end when AÇEV leaves, the number of women who think that the project will continue was more in the community-based villages than the service-based villages.

The project touched some women in such a way that their lives suddenly went through a dramatic change.

Sevim Yurteri is 50 years old. She gave birth to her first of five children when she was 17. She is a primary school graduate. She has been dreaming of earning her own money all her life but could not find the opportunity. After the AÇEV trainings, she started beekeeping, and then became a candidate for muhtar (village administrator) of the Ormandibi village, where she lives.

*"We can't produce anything as women, only work in the garden or the barn. This is work that we already do, but we need work that returns some profit. How can we do that? I've always had a desire to keep bees and our region is also suitable for it..."*

*After I participated in AÇEV, we met the District Directorate of Agriculture, thanks to our trainer. We requested to have a training there; they said 'we will open a training in your village', and they really did. So I started beekeeping. I managed to produce around 90 kilos of honey from two bees. I sold it and earned my own money for the first time. It feels really great. I bought three Turkish Republic gold coins. I gave one of them to my husband, he said he would pay the tax for the car.*

*My view of the world has changed. Then I said to myself that I could govern this village. I became a candidate for being the village administrator. Our village used to be a town, but it was demoted to village status decades ago. I sat and cried for hours.*

*They supported me... I became a candidate, I knocked on each door but they said, 'you came too late.' There were only 20 days left for the election. The other candidate was our relative. So I withdrew.*

*My biggest dream is to become a businesswoman... I want to make money. My dream is to earn my own living and spend my own money. It is my greatest goal. It is much better when you spend the money you earn yourself."*



**Sevim Yurteri**  
Ormandibi Village

We do not know if Sevim Yurteri will again become a candidate for the next election, but she is determined to continue with the beekeeping business. Above all, she is self-confident and knows what she wants. Therefore, she will benefit not only her village, Ormandibi, but also the whole country with her future accomplishments.







*What Did We Learn?*

What did we learn?



As is the case with every project, the sole winners are not only the participants or beneficiaries in this project. AÇEV staff members and supporting institutions who took part in the project also have learned a great deal during the implementation of the project.



*I saw that our knowledge about community-based programs was not only theoretical, but could be put into practice in the field through time and effort.*

**Prof. Dr. Sevda Bekman**  
Founding Member and Academic  
Adviser, AÇEV

*Today, many people migrate from the rural areas to the cities but I have learned how important this kind of project support is for people still living in the rural areas and how fast they can change. Transformation in the community can occur really rapidly when facilities and education are provided. Secondly, I realized one more time the importance of institutional cooperation. A number of institutions were in collaboration in Tokat, which led to a serious dialog between the public and institutions. This facilitated our work and gave it sustainability.*

**Nalan Yalçın**  
General Manager, AÇEV







*We start each project with great expectations. We make enormous efforts to achieve the impossible. I sometimes had concerns about our community-based steps in this project, but we managed to achieve a meaningful result. We reached women, families, school, teachers, and school administrators. Above all, we were able to bring to life innovations in early childhood, thanks to our work with all of these people.*

**Hilal Kuşçul**

Assistant General Manager  
AÇEV

*I learned so much every time I went to the village. The women there can handle many things without the facilities we've got here in the city. I saw how much struggle they went through with their children, husbands, and mothers-in-law not to be oppressed and how they still persevered. I realized how eager they are to learn.*

**Canan Erman**

Trainer, AÇEV





*I've been working in the civil society for years and I can say I've learned a great deal from this project. First of all, community-based work requires longer periods of time to ensure social participation and contribution in real terms. Even three years may be insufficient to maintain its sustainability for these projects.*

*If we want to provide a working model for a community-based project, the locals should be involved, starting from the development and planning stages of these projects. The objectives, strategy and activities of the project should be determined in this way. A needs assessment should be performed in advance.*

*These projects should be flexible. They should be responsive to both budgetary and unforeseen needs. It is essential to involve all partners (government agencies, universities, local NGOs) at each stage of the project, get their feedback, and share responsibilities to ensure the sustainability of the project in the future.*

**Emine Kuzutürk**  
Project Coordinator, AÇEV

*I saw the reality of Turkey. Although these were remote and disadvantaged villages, I saw that a lot could change and the life of a child could be dramatically improved with a touch.*

*I've learned that ages 0-3 are very important in terms of child development and it is significant for the children to spend more time and communicate with their mothers. This was a precious gain for me as I just became a mother during the project. Like the women in the villages of Tokat, I leave whatever I'm busy with when my child starts to pull at me and I pay attention to my child first. I finished university, I studied abroad but still, I learned how to establish a proper communication with my child from the AÇEV trainers.*

**Dr. Gökçe Baykal**  
Research Specialist, Development Analytics





*In project implementation, key performance indicators are first specified and this is generally carried out by the fund provider, and the implementing people/institutions and researchers at the beginning of the project. I learned that this should definitely be done together with the beneficiaries especially in the community-based models.*

*For example, we talk about empowering women and the impact of women on children here but I found that it would be very useful for our destination, design, implementation, and final measurement when the meaning and indicators of the said power are defined through the eyes of women in their own environment.*

**Seden Karakurt**  
Research Specialist, AÇEV

*The most important thing I learned is that the more people are involved in these processes, the better it works. We first performed an activity with teachers in the villages where we carried out these community-based activities to find out how to run a participatory process and what benefits it provides us. When the community started doing this, they saw the following:*

*Parents do not come to school, because no real communication exists between them. Teachers say that parents are indifferent, while parents claim that teachers won't even look them in the face. When proper communication and an exchange of information were gradually initiated, parents began to visit the school more often. They started volunteering to help with the work at school.*

*Before their primary needs are met, it's difficult to tell them about early childhood education or the importance of school, child development, etc. Thus, on my behalf, I learned that it is more useful to carry out the process together.*



**Umman Irice**  
Training Specialist, AÇEV



*I first learned how to establish proper communication with my daughter. My child was still an infant during the project and it was also new for me to try communicating with her. We learned about child development in college, but AÇEV is a real expert on this issue and has a great deal of experience. They have been working in the field for so long that I thought there must be a lot for me to learn from them and that is exactly what happened.*

**Gülsemin Akay**  
Tokat Field Coordinator, AÇEV

*I realized this: I wish I had been involved in AÇEV's trainings while I was raising my own child. I was employing some of their techniques without noticing but it would have been far different if I had done them consciously.*

*I also realized how precious my life is: I have a voice, I can express myself, I can travel, I can go to any doctor when I want, I don't discriminate between men and women... I didn't realize this was all about freedom. My view of life totally changed.*

**Serap Tüzemen**  
Volunteer Trainer









## *Word-Glossary*

## *Community-Based ECE Approaches and Experiences of AÇEV in Tokat*

‘The readings provided in The Word section so far has been the description of AÇEV’s Fair Start for Children Living in Rural Areas project implemented in Tokat. The Glossary section will provide descriptions for some terms included in this book as a guide for those who are willing to conduct similar work. By sharing its experiences, AÇEV aims to provide insight for those who wish to conduct the same type of activities.’

### Early Childhood Period

The period in human development that covers ages 0-6.

The period, which begins with the birth of a child and spans the time until she is 7 years old, is essential to her development. During the “early childhood” period, a child develops at a greater rate; her intelligence, perception, personality, social behavior, and mental skills are significantly shaped. A substantial part of brain development is completed in this period. A seven-year-old child has advanced mental skills, behavioral patterns, language skills, emotion regulation, comprehension, and certain physical properties. These developments will have lifelong impact on a child and will vary according to the kind of environment and education a child is exposed to until she is seven years old.

### Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Childhood education between 0-66 months that promotes linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development through planned and systematic educational activities taking into consideration individual differences and requirements.

The purpose of ECE is to support the early development of children. ECE is key to building individuals’

cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychomotor skills and overcoming their developmental disabilities.

### Effects of Early Childhood Education

This term refers to revealing the efficacy, efficiency and sustainability of early childhood education through assessing its effects on different stakeholders.

It has been shown that education received between the ages of 0-6 has a positive impact on school readiness (AÇEV, 1999). Research done internationally and in Turkey underline that the return on investments in ECE is enormous, since the development rate of children in this period is high and related investment costs are relatively low. ECE cost-benefit analyses show that there is a future return of 7 TL for each 1 TL investment (Kaytaz, 2005).

The likelihood of children living in poor conditions starting their academic lives on the same level as their peers, independently of their socio-economic status, is higher if they receive quality ECE. Addressing disadvantaged populations, ECE interventions play a significant role in diminishing social inequalities and especially the carry-over of inequalities between generations. Long-term healthy individuals, longer attendance in the educational system, higher academic suc-

cess, activity, and productivity, are all achievements of well-designed and implemented ECE (Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2009; Bekman, 2002).

## Access to Preschool Education

This refers to the right to access good quality educational services based on the needs of all children within the early childhood period (Guide to the Provision of Community-Based Early Childhood Services, MEB, UNICEF, April 2013).

PISA 2012 (Program for International Student Assessment) results show that the ratio of children who have received preschool education within the sample of 15-year-old students in Turkey is quite low compared to other countries. Among 65 countries included in the assessment, the country with the highest rate of students who had no preschool education is Turkey with a ratio of 70.1%. Turkey is also the country with the lowest rate of students receiving preschool education of more than one year with 8.6%. (Education Follow-up Report, ERG, December 2015)

By the academic year of 2014-2015, the net schooling ratios in preschools are as follows: (Education Follow-up Report, ERG, December 2015)

- Age group of 3-5: % 33,7
- Age group of 4-5: % 41,6
- Age group of 5: % 53,8

When we take a look at the difference between the rural and the urban, the ratio of benefiting from ECE services is around 26% in the rural while it is 41% in the

urban areas. (Early Childhood Education and 4+4+4 Format Report, AÇEV, ERG, April 2013)

Noteworthy here is the distribution of the increase in the number of preschool students between private and governmental organizations. While the number of students in the private preschool educational institutions increased 26% in one year, the same number was only 7% in governmental institutions. (Education Follow-up Report, ERG, December 2015)

## Current Provision of Services in Early Childhood Education

It is stated that preschool education services are provided by different institutions in different formats in our country. (Preschool Education Needs Analysis Report, MEB, UNICEF, 2012)

- I. Institution-based preschool education
- II. Flexible services provided to children by governmental institutions
- III. Services provided through training parents and caregivers
- IV. Early childhood education services provided by non-governmental institutions

Institution-based models have been the most common model for providing preschool education services. In the academic year of 2012-2013, 76% of the children attending preschool received their education in the public preschool classrooms within primary schools.



## Community-Based Early Childhood Services/Models

It is a service provision approach arising from the tangible needs of the society and requires active participation and ownership by the society members.

The report entitled “Community-Based Preschool Education; Review of the Current Situation in Turkey and the Selected Models” prepared within the scope of the Strengthening Preschool Education Project in 2012 defines community-based early childhood models as “models which support the current institution-based model, are flexible enough to be shaped within the framework of different local needs, adopt cost-effective strategies through the use of local financial resources, and are open to multi-sector cooperations.” In other words, “community-based services” means a local establishment sensitive to the needs and features of the local community, incorporating local participation and ownership.

## Why are Community-Based Services Important?

Although facilitated by institutional structures, current practices fail to remove the obstacles preventing access.

Disadvantaged groups in particular have limited access to early childhood services.

Access to preschool education in Turkey varies substantially depending on the region of settlement. This variation is associated with the fact that preschool

educational services are mainly designed over an institution-based model. Engaging different service models, especially for the families living in rural areas, is the most important policy option to consider in order to increase attendance in education in these regions.

## Community-Based ECE Work around the World

Although the features of ECE programs vary based on the concept, their purposes and access options are similar. The most common community-based ECE programs include caregiver training, caregiver support and awareness programs, home visits, playgrounds, child observation, preschool and child-to-child programs. The examples in this field generally include work carried out on children/families/societies at risk, who live under challenging conditions and in disadvantaged and deprived environments.

## What are the Common Features of Community-Based ECE Work around the World?

- This type of work is often conducted with a center-based approach. It is important to create a rich and high quality educational environment especially for children living in rural areas, who normally face poor conditions. These centers also become venues for families to get together.
- NGOs play a facilitating role in these activities. Generally a representative group is selected from among the population and it is this group that decides, follows up, monitors activities, and identifies emerging needs, etc. Facilitating

institutions come into play in cases of resource requirements. (Funds are generally provided by international institutions.)

- Activities cover not only children but everyone who touches each child's life. Families are provided with trainings; fathers participate; teachers receive both program trainings and refresher trainings in addition to the income-generating activities arranged for families.
- Content on health and nutrition has an important place within the programs. Some examples include trainings on the improvement of local production. By this means, nutritional problems are solved in addition to creating income-generating activities
- Program implementers are selected from the volunteers who live within the local community. Some examples include models such as mother-to-mother trainings.

## Current situation in Turkey

In 2010, Strengthening Preschool Education Project was launched in 10 pilot cities with the financial support of the European Union and technical support from UNICEF. The purpose of the project was described as “developing and establishing high quality day care centers and preschool education services for disadvantaged children and their families by developing community-based models, partnerships and the capacity of NGOs, public institutions and municipalities.” The project ended in October 2013. A number of service models of this project under field work were reviewed. It is stated that most of the visited models are

more “institutionalized” versions of community-based services. However, it is emphasized that in Turkey, less institutional community-based service models such as remote, home-based, or internet-based models are implemented, as well (MEB, SGB, 2014).

Some of the programs and implementation examples (projects, etc.) that were visited and assessed under Community-Based ECE activities during the field work of this project are listed below. (Preschool Education Needs Analysis Report, MEB, UNICEF, 2012):

- Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV)
- Centers for Women and Children
- AÇEV, Mother Child Education Program and Preschool Education Program
- Children under the Same Roof (ÇAÇA) as an Association and a Center
- Laundry rooms established by the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality

A series of meetings were held and implementation guidelines about community-based models were developed within the scope of the project.

## What Are the Prominent Features of Community-Based ECE Work in Turkey?

Models that regard the education of families--especially the mothers-- as an integral part of children's education are more likely to achieve success in accessing children coming from disadvantaged communities.

Providing services with an affordable fee or free of charge is an important factor.

It was observed that community-based models are successful only when they are based on the needs of the community and prioritize these needs under all circumstances.

All reviewed samples present different pictures in terms of the participation of families and the community, as well as the level and areas of participation. It was found that a broad participation in models contribute to the sustainability of the program (Preschool Education Needs Analysis Report, MEB, UNICEF, 2012).

Community-based approaches are relatively new in Turkey. For real insight and scalability in community-

based models, the definition of community-based services should go beyond services organized within the framework of cooperation with municipalities. Also, the criteria set forth by international experts working in the field of community-based educational services should be adopted by the relevant parties. These criteria should be based on the views and requests of the locals about education and should include the detailed organization of all subsequent stages (physical location, human resources, financial support, educational content and method, etc.) based on these grounds. If these criteria are organized incompletely when developing community-based services, it will be difficult to achieve the goal of increasing access to preschool education and enabling more students to benefit from it (Early Childhood Education and 4+4+4 Format Report, AÇEV, ERG, April 2013). ERG, April 2013).

## *AÇEV's Community-Based Early Childhood Experiences*

AÇEV started to work in the rural areas of Tokat with the aim of developing educational opportunities and raising awareness among families about the importance of supporting children at early ages, in order to support the development of preschoolers living in villages/rural areas. With the purpose of providing “A Fair Start for Children in Turkish Rural Communities”, the project started in April 2012 and was finalized in August 2015 after 40-months’ work. Within the scope of this extensive work, Service-Based and Community-Based implementation models to strengthen early childhood education in different villages were tried and compared in terms of their impact.

### **Service-Based Model**

It covers the provision of various educational services developed by AÇEV for children, mothers, fathers, teachers, and school administrators in the rural areas.

#### **Components of AÇEV's Service-Based Model:**

##### **I. Women:**

The aim is to strengthen the life skills of women through education and support their children's development via group implementations of Rural Education Women's Support Program.

##### **II. Children:**

The aim is to help support the children's development at both home and school by improving the physical environment of preschool classrooms, Childhood Education Program (CEP) activities in preschools and Play-Based Curriculum activities (including the activities within this program by women in order to contribute to 36-48-month-old and 48-66-month-old children's development and preparation for school at home following the group activities of the Rural Education Program).

### III. Fathers/Men:

The meetings are conducted as 2-hour sessions once or twice in the coffee houses of the village during winter, when there is less agricultural activity. It covers issues like the role and importance of fathers in children's lives and communication with children. In addition to raising awareness among fathers, it has an effect of creating an environment of trust and recognition of the work of AÇEV in the village.

### IV. School Administrators:

Preschool and Primary School Teachers. The aim is to support teachers in areas such as classroom management, communication, school-family participation activities, etc.



## Community-Based Model

This involves services and processes within the following framework:

- Designed in accordance with the expectations and needs of the community,
- Established as a result of the participation of the community (actively and regularly),
- Owned/managed by and contributed to by the community (completely or partially).

In summary, it has been a project developed, planned, conducted, and assessed together with the community.

The definition of Community-Based implies transformation/progress from the level of participation through utilizing services to the level of execution. The level of execution comprises decision-making (setting goals, defining priorities, identifying content), execution, implementation and assessment.

Therefore, this model provided activities similar to those performed in the Service-Based model. However, beyond the content of the activity, the critical and distinguishing point in the community-based approach comprises how these activities are put into practice, how the process is planned and executed.

AÇEV's Community-Based Working Model is designed to include the village women, school, the village itself, and communication between central institutions as its focus. AÇEV defined its role here as process management, facilitation, guidance, and capacity building.

## Components of the Community-Based Model:

This model consists of three key components.

### I. Hubs / Centers for Women-Women's Groups

### II. School-Family Collaboration (Family Participation)

### III. Early Childhood Education (ECE) Platform (at the provincial and town-village level)

### Women's Groups:

Women's Groups are established by women in each participating village, consisting of women representing the whole village, families, related parties and districts in the village. Groups both represent the village women and carry out work based on the needs and expectations expressed by all of the women in the village. They define their own actions based on their priorities and expectations. The group is flexible with number of participants changing according to the activity. It is open to all women in the village who want to get involved. Everyone contributes to the best of their ability on a voluntary basis. It is responsive to the problems of the

village and prioritizes education and preschool education, in particular. Women's groups are responsible for administering women's hubs and activities to be arranged in these hubs for women and children, as well. Women are in close contact with the school administration, preschool teachers, village administrator, members, and related governmental agencies.

#### **Women's Hubs/Centers:**

Women's Hubs/Centers are places where women congregate, where trainings and various other activities for mother and children are conducted, and where mothers spend time with their children. They are designed to be venues that can be used for a number of purposes.

#### **School-Family Collaboration (Family Participation Activities):**

Family participation is a process in which parents and other family members are involved in the education program to contribute to the education and development of children (Morrison, 2003). The primary objective of family participation is enabling the coordination between school and home, and acting together to support the development and education of children.

Within this context, AÇEV considers the collaboration and communication of village women/parents with the school as central. It is essential that the school emphasizes, monitors, and supports early childhood education in collaboration with the village and the parents. This is only possible when family-school participation activities are performed efficiently and in accordance with that purpose. At this point, it is critical that activities are planned together with families, and that families are involved in the process and contribute to it as active executors.

#### **Early Childhood Education Platform (ECE Platform):**

The ECE platform is a platform where relevant institutions and individuals from the province and town/village participate, and ECE activities are conducted.

The purpose of the platform is defining the needs to support the development and education of children in the preschool age in Tokat, especially in its villages, and bringing the necessary support activities into life. The platform consists of two different levels being the province and town/villages and has two key features. It aims to identify the needs locally and also meet those needs with local resources by involving representatives from the town and the villages, as well as the province. Through these, the platform aims to identify the needs from bottom to top, define the community-based needs, activities, budget-contributions preceding the school period, and thereby establish a collaboration for the financial sustainability of these activities. This platform involves public institutions, the local university, and local civil actors, in addition to the authorities of the Provincial Directorate for National Education and local institutions. By making itself visible, it draws the attention and the interest of both public and other civil stakeholders under the Directorate for National Education of various institutions.

#### **Suggestions/Tips/Key Steps for Community-Based Educational Work:**

1. "Local participation" and "working together" are the keywords.



2. Identifying the current situation, and performing needs assessment based on it, constitute the basis for the activities.
3. Local collaboration opportunities should be identified, and current facilities and resources should be assessed.
4. It may be necessary to work on reaching the target group, raising awareness, and disseminating information.
5. Awareness raising and informational activities may be required, considering that individuals/ participants to benefit from the services are not aware of early childhood education facilities or do not have sufficient information about the importance of early childhood education.
6. All activities regarding the work to be prepared should be conducted together with locals and all relevant partners. From the outset, the purpose, content, activities, implementation, follow-up, and assessment of the work should be determined in this fashion.
7. The defined work should be comprehensive, ensuring the participation and equal access of all parties. Participants should represent different sections of the local community.
8. The more the community members participate in the administration and have a voice in identifying the target, priorities, content, and implementation of the work/program, the more they own it. Therefore, both community members and participants should be involved in the project team of administration and decision-making. A functioning execution/counseling mechanism should be established
9. During the projects, activities to build local capacity should be implemented at every stage. It is necessary and essential to establish a volunteer team, lead local NGOs, and institutions to develop ideas and projects, provide them with support, attempt to create relevant mechanisms in governmental agencies, build partnerships, and give trainings to inform and raise awareness of the locals about the areas of focus.
10. Community-based work requires very long periods of time to ensure community participation and contribution in real terms. Everything should be planned taking this investment of time into account.
11. Key performance indicators are specified in projects and this is generally conducted by the funder and the implementing people/institutions and researchers at the beginning of the project. However, specifying these indicators and goals together with the beneficiaries in the community-based models will ensure realistic work. It is important that project/program outcomes are clear, tangible, and measurable.
12. Community-based work should be flexible. It should also be responsive to unexpected or emerging needs during the process



# Epilogue

***Why the rural and why are we doing this project?***

Years ago, there was an avian flu outbreak in Turkey and every day we watched news of children getting sick and even dying of avian flu. One day on TV, I saw some children in Ağrı playing with the heads of dead chicken. The fact that these children could not be protected from this sickness due to lack of facilities, while our children played with nice toys affected me deeply. There was an urgent need for education for women and children in the majority of rural areas in Turkey. The reason we took to the road was to change these circumstances, even if only a little.

***Early childhood education is critical, especially for disadvantaged children living in rural areas.***

Children cannot reach the potential of which they are capable, and are in fact faced with deprived living conditions, where education-- especially early childhood education-- does not exist. This is, in fact, a period of life where children learn and grow very rapidly. We do not only refer to preschool education with the term early childhood education. For us, parents bringing up their children in the correct manner and supporting their children's development also counts as early childhood education. Therefore, family education is also of utmost importance to us. Anywhere in the world, the family is the first teacher of a child. In rural areas, it is generally women who carry the heaviest burden in the bringing up of children. And for these women, their own and their children's education is mostly an issue of struggling with the society.

***Early childhood development is accepted as a component of good quality education in the Sustainable Development Goals.***

Today, good quality education and early childhood development attract the attention of various institutions around the world. This issue was integrated into United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. I believe that early childhood has close connections with peace, war,

terror, and poverty across the globe. This is because correct and good quality educational support during early childhood can change everything.

This is why this issue should absolutely be included in government policies. In my opinion, AÇEV's scientifically based early childhood education program is an effort to change human life. For all the said ideals to come true, preschool education should be spread around the country as a government policy, and all children should be provided with equal opportunity upon their start to education.

***This is why this issue should absolutely be included in government policies. In my opinion,***

AÇEV's scientifically based early childhood education program is an effort to change human life. For all the said ideals to come true, preschool education should be spread around the country as a government policy, and all children should be provided with equal opportunity upon their start to education.

***I believe this project to be a successful synthesis of the experience we gained as a result of our work in rural areas.***

I see that our community-based model carried the local community to a different point of view and encouraged them to participate in the services provided. I think the model created through this project will contribute greatly to work done in the rural. I take huge delight in seeing how participating in activities creates ownership especially in the women of the villages.

I sincerely wish that this project presents an example to similar future projects and thank our chief supporter, the UBS Optimus Foundation, as well as other individuals and institutions who contributed to our project.

**Ayşen Özyeğin**

Chairman of the Executive Board, AÇEV









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