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Helping Developing Countries Implement the Young Athletes Program

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Introduction

The Center for Social Development and Education is implementing Young Athletes (YA), a motor play program, in five developing countries:

Kenya, Romania, Malawi, Venezuela, and Tanzania.

Young Athletes is a theoretically-based program designed to improve the motor development of children with disabilities (ages 3-7) through various motor activities. Clinical trials conducted by CSDE (Favazza et al., 2013) indicate that the Young Athletes program significantly improves the motor skills of children with disabilities. The program is now being introduced internationally to address the needs of children in developing countries.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of this project are two fold:

1. Document the adaptations made to the Young Athletes program within each culture.
2. Document the impact of the Young Athletes program at the child, family, and community levels in developing countries.



Children from Young Athletes Tanzania participating in a group dance

Methods

The CSDE is partnering with universities and the Special Olympics programs in each of the five countries to launch the Young Athletes program. Each country is implementing and adapting Young Athletes to their particular culture.

The impact of Young Athletes is being assessed in the following ways:

- Child: Children's motor skills are tested before and immediately after the 8-week program.
- Family: Surveys are administered to parents of Young Athletes about the benefits of the Young Athletes program.
- Community: Surveys and interviews are conducted with community leaders; information is also obtained through site visits by the research team.

Context



Kibera, Kenya



Left: School where Young Athletes takes place in Kibera, Kenya
Right: Parents participating in Young Athletes with their children at the school in Kibera

Need and Impact

From site visits to Kenya and Tanzania, it is clear that there is a need for the Young Athletes program:

- Young Athletes gives each child a sense of belonging, which is important in the communal cultures of East Africa.
- Young Athletes offers families an opportunity to connect with other families of children with disabilities.
- Young Athletes transforms the way parents view their child and fosters a parent-child relationship that may not have existed previously.
- Young Athletes provides opportunities for children with disabilities to leave their houses, use public transportation, and make a friend. Prior to YA, these seemingly common experiences may not have taken place for most children with disabilities from these cultures.
- Young Athletes provides a foothold into early education for children with disabilities who are often denied a place at schools in these countries.



Children from Young Athletes Kenya (left) and Young Athletes Tanzania (right) taking part in Young Athletes activities