



The Bernard van Leer Foundation has been involved in early childhood care and development through the provision of grants to projects around the world. Many of the ideas, methods and approaches have been developed through their “Effectiveness Initiative” which seeks to understand and share “what makes an effective program work”.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation, established in 1949, and based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883–1958. Bernard van Leer was the founder of Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer.

The Foundation aims to enhance opportunities for children aged 0–8 years growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children in this age group because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

- a grant-making program in selected countries aimed at developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development;
- the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.



The work of the **Bernard van Leer** *Foundation*

The Bernard van Leer Foundation supports a range of early intervention projects around the world, particularly in indigenous communities. As with the Stronger Families Fund, the Foundation has a particular interest in what makes an effective early intervention project.

The Foundation currently supports around 150 major projects in over 40 countries worldwide. These are both developing and industrialised countries, the majority being countries in which the Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer was historically active. In addition, the Foundation supports activities in Israel and in a number of countries which are of particular interest for the furthering of its work.

Projects are implemented by project partners which may be public, private or community-based. Although all supported projects focus on young children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, the contexts in which these projects operate vary greatly.

Some are situated in urban slums and shanty towns, others in remote rural areas. They may focus on children belonging to ethnic and cultural minorities; children growing up in multicultural societies; migrant or refugee children; children of single or teenage parents; children in war or conflict stricken areas; or children affected by HIV/AIDS. They may seek to improve the quality of care and education in day care centres or other programs for young children, or focus on the home environment, seeking to enhance the parenting skills of parents.

The Foundation draws lessons from these field-based experiences and shares the knowledge and know-how generated

through these projects with practitioners and policy-makers through publications, audiovisual materials and workshops. The objective is to promote a better understanding of new ideas to improve opportunities for disadvantaged children.

When the Foundation was created in 1949 its annual budget was a few hundred thousand Dutch Guilders. Today it is nearly 25 million Euros. Since its inception, the lives of millions of children around the world have been enriched by the Foundation's activities.

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The Foundation's mandate

The Bernard van Leer Foundation's mandate is to improve opportunities for young children aged 0–8 years living in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage. It rests on a vision of a world that respects the rights, dignity and equality of children, their families and the communities they live in. This implies access to health care and education, social and economic justice, a sustainable natural environment, and opportunities for self-fulfilment.

The Foundation:

- is concerned with young children's **overall development** – and therefore promotes a holistic approach including education, health and nutrition;
- believes that children's development is the primary responsibility of **parents** – and therefore actively promotes the enhancement of parents' capacity to support their children's development;
- attaches great importance to the involvement of the **community** as a major factor in children's development – and therefore promotes a development strategy that is rooted in the community and is culturally, socially and economically appropriate;

- has adopted a contextual approach which **builds on people's strengths** as a guiding principle – and therefore encourages the building of local capacity, local ownership and working in partnership.

Concentrating on the development of young children and their environments will have a preventative and lasting effect, and will generate tangible benefits.

For children benefits include: enhanced survival chances; better general health; improved social skills and school performance in later years; greater self-esteem and a positive outlook.

For parents and caregivers it can lead to: enhanced capacity to support the development of children; and increased self-confidence and motivation.

For society at large it can lead to: lower repetition and drop out rates in the school system; lower delinquency rates; lower expenditure on welfare services; and a healthier and better educated population that is more able to obtain and keep productive employment and contribute fully to the development of its society.