

Viva's Child and Family Phone Mentoring Programme Phase 1: What are we learning?

Executive summary

Between June 2020 and January 2021, over 8,000 families took part in Viva's Phone Mentoring Programme, which was developed by Viva as part of our COVID-19 response with partner networks. This report provides a summary of the programme and its impact, and explores what we are learning through this project. We can then build on the successes and strengthen future response within partner networks and in emergency response.

The programme was an emergency response specifically targeting vulnerable families who were otherwise unreachable during the pandemic. We sought to effect impact in three of Viva's child-focused outcomes:

- **Children are protected from abuse** and danger, knowing how to keep themselves safe
- **Children are educated for life**, with the skills and experience needed to develop socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually
- **Families are strengthened** to increase care and support for children

Alongside these objectives, the programme was designed to equip churches and community organisations to respond to children and families effectively during this time.

Overall, Viva's phone mentoring programme has been used in **18 countries** across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, up until 25 January 2021. Approximately **37,000 people**, **8,000 families** and **26,000 children** have been reached so far.

In the Closing Call **98% of families reported seeing positive changes** in their family since starting the programme. This included feeling happier and less stressed, noticing reduced violence and having better communication in their homes. Following the calls, **99% of children have a positive strategy** for something to do when they feel worried or scared.

Over 100,000 'actions' have been completed by parents and children between calls. That's an average of 13 actions per family across the 8 calls. Actions include doing schoolwork together, trying the game of the week, talking more and being creative together. This helps build relationships within the family, and so reduces the risk of physical and mental abuse.

Highlights of learning include the importance of a rapid and collaborative development and the effectiveness of the commitment and strength of local communities. We developed a real-time Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system and have seen our flexible, evidence-based materials adapted across contexts.

We are so grateful to every mentor who dedicated time and energy to supporting families through this programme. These results would not have been possible without their commitment.

This programme is still ongoing so even more families and children will be reached and supported.

18 COUNTRIES 



44,000 CALLS

8,000 FAMILIES 

26,000 CHILDREN 

100,000 ACTIONS 

OUTCOMES

1. CHILDREN ARE PROTECTED FROM ABUSE 	 2. CHILDREN ARE EDUCATED FOR LIFE
3. FAMILIES ARE STRENGTHENED 	 4. COMMUNITIES RESPOND EFFECTIVELY

Viva - Together for Children

Background and Rationale

Viva's 8-week COVID-19 Child and Family Mentoring programme was developed to respond to the sudden isolation and devastation experienced across the globe due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many vulnerable families did not have access to safety information about Covid-19, and lockdowns, school closures and other pressures increased the likelihood of violence at home and mental health challenges. The programme was designed to reduce violence and abuse of children and to provide psychosocial support, through building meaningful connections with vulnerable families, working in a relational way through local communities to support positive relationships and practical strategies proven to reduce the likelihood of violence and abuse.

Viva's partner networks needed to keep reaching children and families, and although many excellent resources were produced to help families at this time, many of these resources were online and so not easily accessible to the low-resource settings where many Viva partner networks operate. The phone mentoring programme therefore sought to address a gap in existing programming by enabling access to support and information for some of the most vulnerable families who would otherwise have been unreached, particularly due to lack of internet access and economic vulnerability.

Globally, 1 billion children aged 2-17 years, experience physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect each year¹, and with most of this violence occurring in the home, parent-child relationships are a key determinant of whether a child will experience violence. Violence at home was exacerbated during the pandemic due to the pressures of full-time childcare in lockdown, reduced access to social support and child protection services, mental health pressures, crowded and cramped living conditions, increased time spent online, and financial and food insecurity.² We know that parenting programmes have been proven to have significant potential to reduce violence against children.³

Further to combatting the potential for increased violence against children during the pandemic, this programme was also designed to mitigate negative effects on mental health and the increased vulnerability to online abuse as young people would be spending more time online. Through a combination of working with families to promote positive parenting skills at the same time as working with children themselves to build their resilience, families would be demonstrably stronger, able to support one another and able to thrive during this crisis and beyond.



Participating family from Iraq

Our Response: Phone mentoring

The phone mentoring programme was developed collaboratively by Viva's global team in response to the emerging realities of COVID-19, where restrictions had made it difficult to carry out the usual face-to-face activities and support for children and families – but where it was also evermore critical given the rise in violence in the home resulting from lockdown. The programme development brought together a unique set of expertise and reach. Viva was able to build on a strong foundation of existing relationships developed over many years by our partner networks in their communities, and our expertise in child protection and working with children in emergencies was contextualised by our regional teams with their in-depth local knowledge.

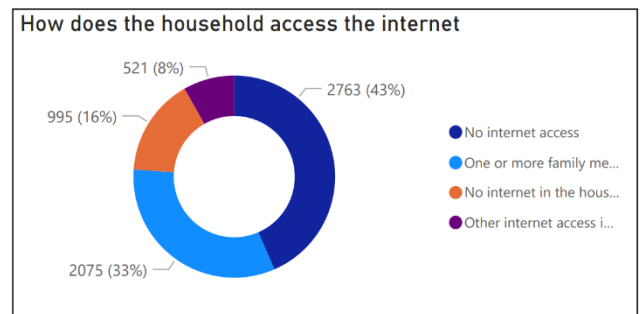
¹ [Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: a systematic review and minimum estimates](#), Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A, Kress H. *Pediatrics* 2016; 137(3): e20154079.

² Alliance for CPHA – Guidance brief

³ INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children (2018) shows that parenting programmes are proven to show reductions in proven child maltreatment cases and in referrals to child protection services, reductions in abusive, negative or harsh parenting, especially in relation to discipline, reductions in bullying and being bullied, reductions in physical, emotional or sexual violence victimization by partners or peers, reductions in aggression and delinquency

The model aimed to provide a simple, flexible framework which could be adapted and continue to be relevant for work with families beyond this current crisis.

The phone mentoring programme is based on information shared by the evidence-based 'Parenting Tips' materials developed by Parenting for Lifelong Health [PLH], among others. Viva wanted to find a way to help families and children engage with these in a meaningful way, including in settings where there is sometimes no internet access and now no opportunity to meet face to face. **43% of families in our programme had no access to the internet** and a further 49% had limited internet access in the form of a phone, or internet access nearby but not in their homes.



This vision led to the development of **Viva's 8-week COVID-19 Child and Family Mentoring programme** which takes place over the phone. Using resources created by Viva and piloted in Patna, India, partner networks around the world trained local volunteers who wanted to become mentors to support others in their community. They carried out a series of 8 calls with one adult and one child in each family, which consisted of an introduction and closing call, and a call on each of the following themes:

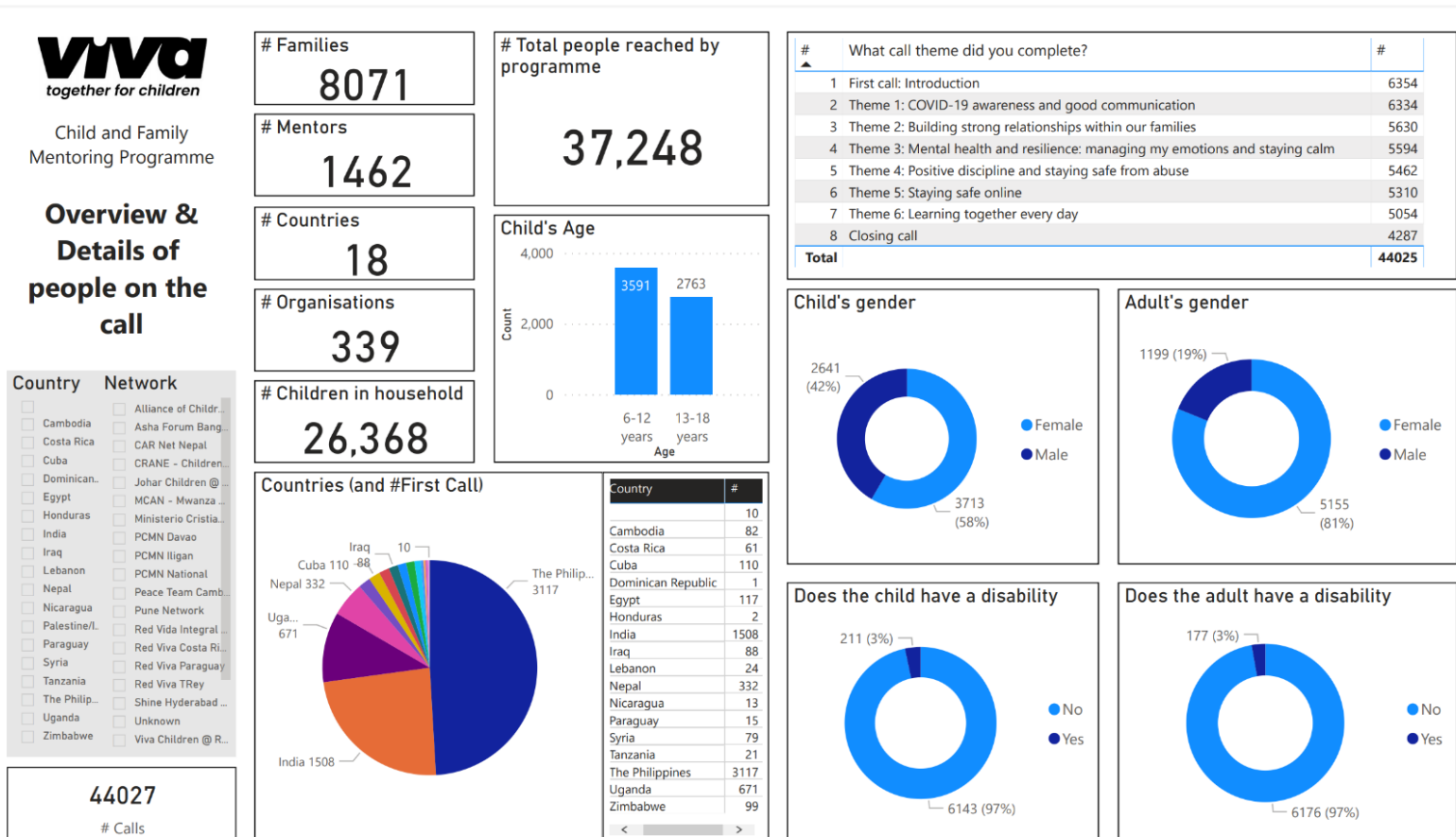
1. **COVID-19 awareness** – Good practices for staying safe and how families can talk about COVID-19 together
2. **Building strong relationships within the family** – How to listen to and spend time with children, helping children identify their strengths and their role in the family
3. **Mental health and resilience** – Techniques for staying calm and relaxing, understanding children's reactions, how to cope with strong feelings and how to talk about how we feel
4. **Staying safe at home** – Anger management and positive discipline strategies, recognising and preventing abuse and what to do when we feel unsafe
5. **Staying safe online** – How to engage with children's online world, risk awareness and setting limits, helping children to make positive choices online
6. **Learning together every day** – Supporting children's learning as a parent and structuring time at home in a positive way to stay healthy and active

Each conversation includes a visual 'poster' [PLH] of that week's theme, the opportunity for them to ask questions and the suggestion of positive activities the family could do each week to improve their relationships, including a weekly game [Right to Play]. The aim is that children and parents will explore these themes together and then as a result of the actions they take each week, build a stronger relationship and reduce the risk of violence at home. Where families were from a Christian background, an optional devotional image/question could also be shared.

The materials used for the calls can be found here: <https://childreninemergencies.org/mentoring/>

Following each session, the mentor completed a call log answering a maximum of 6 quick questions to show what had been learnt during the session by the parent and child. This call log also recorded the actions committed to by each family for the upcoming week and whether or not these took place, to enable measurement of change. These call logs have enabled us to understand the current situation as well as enabling measurements of overall change on key indicators around protection and wellbeing.

The results from the calls were presented on a dashboard. These were individualised to each region and sent out monthly to our partner networks so they could assess their progress, along with the global dashboard so they could see how their programme fits into the global picture. The first page of our Phone Mentoring dashboard can be seen below:



Programme reach

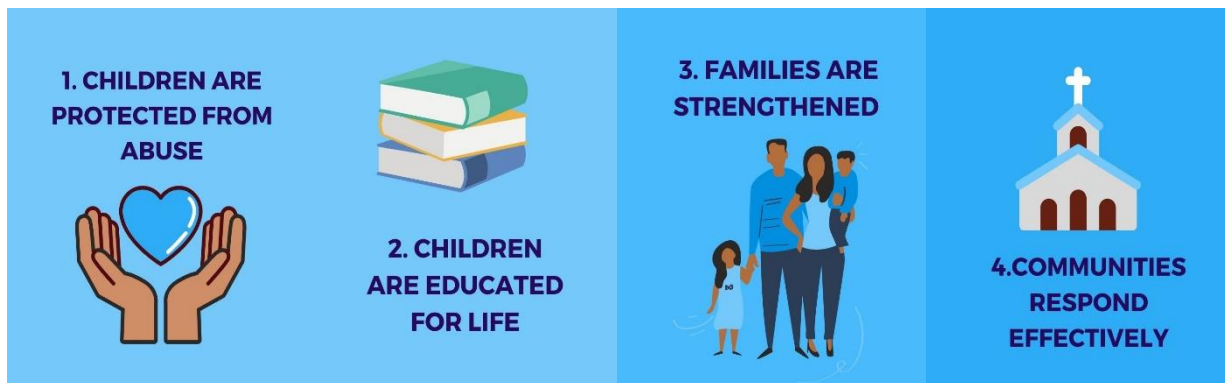
The programme was used widely and we quickly exceeded our expectation for the number of calls being carried out and the number of families and children reached, and the programme is still ongoing. As seen on the dashboard above, disaggregated data collected through the call log helps us to understand the gender mix and how far we were able to reach children and adults with disabilities.

By the end of January 2021, we had reached slightly more girls (58%) than boys (42%) through the programme. This is good because, although we are pleased to see a relatively even split, we know that girls may have been impacted by being required to take on increased caring responsibilities at home during the pandemic, so it is encouraging to have been able to offer this support to a good number of girls.

The dashboard also shows that 81% of parents were female. Take-up for this type of programme is very often much stronger with female caregivers and so we were encouraged that almost one fifth of participating caregivers were male. It is also encouraging that 3% of both adults and children who we reached through the programme had a disability, although there is clearly scope for further work on expanding this reach. Through Viva's partnership with Embrace the Middle East, the materials were adapted for use with children with learning difficulties.

Programme impact

This programme aimed to achieve impact in these four objectives.



1. Objective: Children are protected from abuse and danger, knowing how to keep themselves safe

- **5,462 children** received information on **staying safe from abuse**, which they could share with their siblings
- **5,310 children** received information on **staying safe online**, which they could share with their siblings
- **98% of children** were able to give a **positive answer when asked what they would do if they feel unsafe** (up from 96% when asked before the calls, however this figure may be higher than in the general population as some of these children were already linked to Viva programmes)

1. CHILDREN ARE PROTECTED FROM ABUSE



From the mentors:

- Children were 'made aware of the online sexual exploitation for children making them safe from danger' - The Philippines
- The programme 'helped the kids understand more about the Covid virus and take the necessary precautions' - Lebanon
- 'In the session on COVID-19, families learnt things they didn't know already - they knew already about washing their hands, using sanitizer and wearing masks, but not in detail and now they know how to apply it practically and more specifically.' - Nepal



India

2. Objective: Children are educated for life, with the skills and experience needed to develop socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually

8,071 children received life skills training or mentoring directly, with a total of over **26,368 children** impacted including siblings.

Improvement in children's social and emotional competencies following the mentoring programme:

- Parents believed that **95% of children are now able to talk about their problems**, compared to 92% before the programme
- **99% of children** now have a positive strategy for something to do **when they feel worried or scared**, compared to 96% before the calls
- **99% of children** themselves feel that they have changed in some way because of being part of the project



2. CHILDREN ARE EDUCATED FOR LIFE

From the mentors:



- *'In the first session of a family made up of a single mother and her 8-year-old daughter, the girl suffered a deep depression since she had no relatives in the country, no friends and the schools closed. She had no access to homework or to Internet. After meeting we developed the themes and she began to draw - the drawing of day one was sad, without color, without hope. The following ones improved and the last ones were with many colors and joys, all the themes were transcribed into drawings'. -Costa Rica*
- *'One child was very afraid of Covid-19 after hearing the news on the television and would cry, not touch anything and did not want to deal with his family. When we contacted him about the topic of Coronavirus awareness and how to prevent it, he began to calm down and deal with his family members calmly. Now he helps with the cleaning in his home'. -Egypt*
- *'Emotional support was provided to a girl who lost her father to Covid. During your calls she has improved a lot in this grieving process'. -Mexico*

3. Objective: Families are strengthened to increase care and support for children

8,071 families received input and support through the mentoring programme.

- The proportion of parents who could describe an **activity they enjoyed doing with their children** in the last 3 days increased from 82% to **87%**
- **98% of parents** could describe a positive strategy for dealing with feeling stressed or overwhelmed compared to 91% before the calls

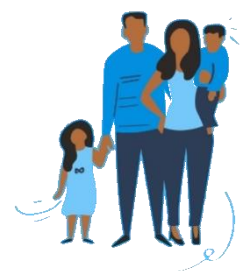
In terms of confidence in using **positive or alternative discipline** in parenting, the number of parents able to use positive discipline all or most of the time actually fell from 71% to **66%** after the calls. This may be due to learning more about what positive discipline entails during the session, but is something we could look into more in future programming.

Having said that, we have received some very encouraging feedback from mentors about how teaching about positive discipline has benefited families:



- *'After phone mentoring the parent realized that she should use positive discipline on her kids. She was enlightened after we discussed the topic about using positive discipline'. -The Philippines*

3. FAMILIES ARE STRENGTHENED



Overall, **99% of parents noticed at least one positive change in their family** since the start of the project. This includes:

- 2,244 (52% people who completed closing call) – better communication
- 2,148 (50%) – spending more time together
- 2,133 (50%) – understand each other more

On completion of the programme **1,178 parents** said they are able to **deal with anger better** and **1,224** said that there is **less violence at home**

98% of children noticed at least one positive change in their family since the start of the programme. This includes:

- 2,072 (48%) – spending more time together
- 2,076 (48%) – better communication
- 1,640 (38%) – happier or less stressed
- 1,069 (25%) – less violence at home

Over 100,000 ‘actions’ have been completed by parents and children between calls. That’s an average of 13 actions per family across the 8 calls. Actions include doing schoolwork together, trying the game of the week, talking more and being creative together. These activities help build relationships within the family, and so reduces the risk of physical and mental hurt.



Nepal

From the mentors:



- ‘A mother was about to end her life one evening because of the economic crisis due to the pandemic. But when she was about to do it, she remembered our lessons as she was looking at her little children. She confessed to me that because of our phone calls her plan to end her life was not realised. After hearing her story, I lead her to ask forgiveness from the Lord and pray for the restoration of her work and God answered our prayer, to God be all the glory’. – The Philippines
- ‘Children are now doing some painting and craft or other activities, instead of before when they were just sitting at home doing nothing. Many are helping their parents, and family relationships are being restored’. –India
- ‘One mother used to complain a lot about her daughter because she was stubborn and used to use her mobile a lot. After the program, I saw that the mother and daughter had become friends and were sitting with each other for a long time. So I think the program succeeded in creating a dialogue with a mother and her daughter’. –Egypt

4. Objective: Churches and community organisations to be equipped to respond to children and families effectively during this time.

The programme involved **18 countries, 339 organisations, 1,462 mentors, 21 partner networks,** and **8,071 families.**

- We received verbal feedback that the programme was an ‘answer to prayer’ at a time when churches and organisations were struggling to know how they could support families, this resource helped to make it possible.



**4.COMMUNITIES
RESPOND
EFFECTIVELY**

- All programme coordinators who provided feedback thought using phone calls was a **good approach to help families** during the Covid-19 Pandemic and would consider using phone calls again in the future to help families
- **80% of mentors** who completed our feedback rated the programme as **5/5** and a further 17% rated the programme as 4/5.
- **97%** of these mentors said that they **would mentor someone again in the future**.

This feedback is evidence that Viva’s Phone Mentoring Programme successfully helped to support families and connect them into their communities. This programme, its resources and implementation were found to be very successful by the mentors and coordinators.

From the mentors:



- ‘They are so blessed to take part because they felt important and valued even in the pandemic. They learned a lot of things from the program’. -The Philippines
- ‘A family I was mentoring had to move to another country, but despite moving they wanted to continue being a part of the program. The appointments were scheduled accordingly to fit their time schedule’ -Lebanon
- ‘The perspective of one my mentees changed. She was comforted that there was someone who was concerned about her and her family during the pandemic’. – The Philippines

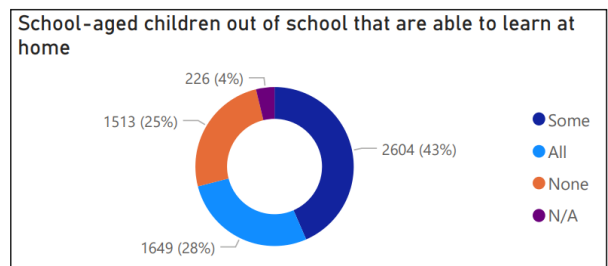
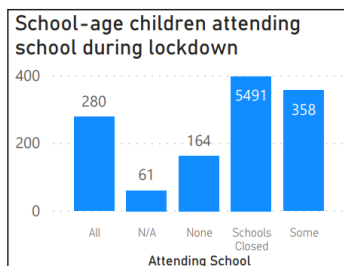
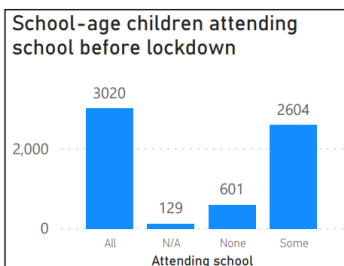
What are we learning?

What worked well

Rapid and collaborative development and launch – a clear, streamlined process and focus, and a simple structure enabled us to achieve impact quickly and widely in a useful way. This was important given the sudden onset of Covid-19 restrictions and impacts.

Leveraging the commitment and strength of local communities - the number of calls worked well, with families able to build relationships of trust with their mentors. Families then had the opportunity to further engage with other local network programmes, giving them longer-term support if they wanted it.

Real-time monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) - we monitored the calls using a simple online form through ‘KoboToolbox’. This was generally widely accessible and easy to use. Using a real-time monitoring and evaluation system enabled instant feedback and provided the opportunity for continuous learning within and between countries. This also enabled the development of further materials, making this a ‘living’ programme, adapting to support real, current needs of vulnerable children and families around the world. This real-time data is presented on our dashboard which shows us the impact of the programme, and has also highlighted key issues we need to focus on next, such as supporting access to learning.



Generating and building on external collaboration – the Phone mentoring programme saw a great deal of collaboration with new and existing external partners for Viva, which helped to expand the reach of the programme and also create opportunities for further development. Viva was able to connect representatives of the Global Parenting Initiative at Oxford University as well as the World Without Orphans, who were encouraged by the impact and reach of our adaptation of the parenting tips and are exploring further partnership with us as a result. Viva also presented the phone mentoring programme at the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action annual meetings in October 2020, enabling us to share the programme with a wider audience and relate it to other COVID-response programmes. Embrace the Middle East, one of our long-term partners, also partnered with us in the mentoring programme to reach families in 5 countries across the Middle East. Embrace also funded adaptations of the programme for children with disabilities and for adolescents, enabling a more in-depth reach for the programme.

Use of evidence-based materials – using materials already developed and peer reviewed as the basis for our material meant we had a good evidence base for the information shared in the call, and also built opportunities for collaboration as the creators were interested to see how we adapted and used the materials.

Simple, easy-to use materials which could be adapted across contexts:

- **67% of Programme Coordinators** whose feedback we received **found the mentor training resources really useful, rating them 5/5**. A further 17% gave the resources 4/5, with the remaining scoring them 3/5.
- **76% of mentors** whose feedback we received **found the mentor’s guideline pack really good, rating it 5/5**. A further 21% rated the resource 4/5, with the remaining scoring it 3/5.
- One of our mentors from Mexico said they found this to be a **‘very good project’** with **‘excellent material’**. Another mentor from Lebanon said this is **‘a very effective and positive program’**.
- A Programme Coordinator from the Philippines said: **‘It was an effective approach for families to vent-out their issues and concerns, and at the same time it helps them to gather psycho-social intervention through our volunteers’**.



The programme and materials are flexible to be used in different contexts using a range of approaches. For example:

In **Lebanon**, a church-based community project for Syrian refugees had begun the phone mentoring programme just before the explosion in Beirut (August 2020). A mentor said, *“Since Lebanon went through the terrifying explosion, this week’s topic involved making sure the kids and parents are dealing with the trauma in a healthy way, since such an event can cause them to relive the bad memories from Syria.”* Parents felt glad to have someone to talk to, and children were able to talk through how they felt as part of the mentoring programme.



In the **Philippines**, Viva’s partner networks have used the mentoring programme as part of their wider programming – using it as a component in family support to reintegrate children after online sexual exploitation and adapting it to use in group settings in IDP camps.

In **Latin America**, Viva’s partner networks have used the phone mentoring programme within their Community Centres model, which helps vulnerable families who have suffered from unemployment and economic hardship because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

89% of the mentors whose feedback we received thought **Phone calls were an effective way of supporting families during the Covid-19 Pandemic**, rating 5/5 or 4/5. The other 11% rated phone calls 3/5.

In all regions, the Phone Mentoring Programme has strengthened connections and relationships within families. This outcome has been noticed by the mentors:



- 'The program was really good and families that were involved changed so much, especially in building strong relationships within the family'. –Tanzania
- 'Family relationships were deepened due to the activities offered through this program. Some family relationships were also revived'. –The Philippines

In addition to the families, the mentors themselves were also encouraged by the programme, learnt from it and felt more connected to their communities. **86% of mentors** whose feedback we received said they **really valued the programme with a rating of 5/5**. A further 12.5% valued the programme and rated it 4/5, with the remaining 1.5% scoring 3/5.

Areas for improvement/development

The programme aimed to help the most vulnerable people in society, as they were the ones who most needed information about Covid-19 and support to get through lockdown. However, this did make the programme more challenging as some families did not have access to phones and some mentors could not access the internet. In these situations, networks formed their own procedures to log the calls into 'Kobo', for example by collecting paper versions from the mentors and inputting them all at the same time when internet was available. Families also borrowed phones from relatives or neighbours, and some networks carried out the sessions in person with Covid-19 safety measures in place.

Although the mentors received training and ongoing support, some found it quite challenging supporting families in these difficult situations. To combat this, many networks held weekly meetings with the mentors to get feedback, encourage and offer training top-ups. This approach was suggested by networks in The Philippines in their feedback, and we have since updated our training guide to include this. In this way, networks are able to learn from each other and adopt successful ideas into their own practice.

- Having said that, overall **97% of mentors** whose feedback we received thought **the Mentor's guideline pack which they received during training was good** – scoring it 5/5 or 4/5. The rest scored it 3/5.
- Furthermore, **78% of mentors** whose feedback we received **felt very supported throughout the programme**, with a rating of 5/5. A further 17% felt supported and rated 4/5, with the remaining 5% rating 3/5.

In their feedback, mentors also suggested the programme could be improved by increasing training. We have taken this on board and developed more in-depth mentor training as part of the second phase of our Covid response.

Mentors also reported that families were really happy with the topics of our calls, and that we could improve the programme by adding more topics so the programme lasts longer. Some also suggested some subjects required further conversations, not just one call.

From the analysis of call logs, we also noted that we could improve in engaging people with disabilities as well as adult men in the calls. We will need to consider how we can help networks to reach these populations in future.

Internally, this was the first time we have used real-time MEL system and whilst it has been effective, there were challenges in developing an analysis tool after launching the system. In future, we would more effectively test the tool and ensure the tool for analysis was also developed and tested before launch.

How are we responding to learning?

Responding to identified needs through further programme development:

- Supporting access to learning** – Our data shows that **89%** of children experienced school closures or were not able to attend school when they participated in our Phone Mentoring programme. **43% of families in our programme had no access to the internet** and a further **49% had limited internet access** in the form of a phone, or internet access nearby but not in their homes. This data highlights a huge need for children to receive support with their education, especially when many of these same families cannot access the internet so cannot easily learn independently. **Viva is developing a ‘Learning Spaces’ model which will enable community mentors to support children’s engagement with learning.**
- Developing approaches to enable more in-depth support for families** – A second phase of the Phone Mentoring Programme has been developed to enable mentoring support through a **further three calls**: Finding hope in hard times, Coping with loss, and Staying safe under pressure (looking at mitigating risks of child labour, early marriage and trafficking). These three additional calls aim to connect families to other support programmes and projects within their communities. This is accompanied by more in-depth **training for mentors** which responds to the feedback around the need for further input and support for mentors’ wellbeing and skills training.



Nepal

The theme most mentors thought families would benefit from receiving further support on was **‘Building strong relationships within the family’**, with **72% of mentors** who completed our feedback thinking families would benefit from exploring this theme further. We would also like to provide more input on this theme to families to explore the reason behind the apparent reduction in the use of positive discipline after the programme. Another topic we would like to consider are how to support parents with children under 5 years. We will look at other ways we can work on family strengthening and understanding what works in reducing violence at home.

Continuing to build on a collaborative approach:

We recognise the need to be intentional about working collaboratively, as was demonstrated successfully in this project (both internally and externally) and we will build on this in ongoing and future programme development. We are continuing make the resources freely available and have developed training for new partners through the World Without Orphans in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Developing and refining our use of real-time MEL:

We will also look at using **real-time evaluation in other projects**, learning from this experience to do it more effectively. Building on our learning, we would ensure the tool is simple to use, and well trialled and tested with a good analysis tool before launching.

Through this programme, families have received guidance on protecting children and building relationships, as well as reliable information about Covid-19. Families have felt connected to and supported by their communities – all from the safety of their own homes. **Families and communities have been strengthened and are emerging from this global pandemic supported, better-connected and equipped to thrive.** A Syrian mother, who is a refugee in Lebanon, said, *‘Thank you for calling me. You are the only one who calls me from Lebanon! I feel loved when I talk to you’.*



We are grateful to all partners who contributed to the success of this programme in its first phase and in particular the mentors who have dedicated hours of their time to supporting families and achieving the above impact. As the programme continues, we remain committed to learning and growing so that we can support more families and children.

Highlights from Phase 1 of Viva Phone Mentoring: The first 6 Themes

