Sport & Play for the Earthquake affected populations in Abruzzo, Italy

**Numbers of the catastrophe**:  
(updated at 27 April 2009)  
*provided by Civil Protection*

- 287 people lost their lives.
- about 1.500 were wounded.
- more than 100 people were rescued alive from the debris.
- 30.000 people are displaced on the long term (at least 1 year), because their houses have been destroyed or damaged.
- 35.000 people are displaced temporary (1-2 months) (until they have the permission to come back to their houses).
- approximately 10.000/15.000 people remained without a job.
- schools remained closed for about a month after the earthquake.

Among the **65.000 people in need of assistance**, around 20.000 found shelter in private houses, while others (around 10.000) have been placed in hotels.

The remaining **35.000 people are now living in tents** that have been provided by the **Italian Civil Protection** (5.700 tents have been installed).

**Recovery Areas:**

These tents are placed in 178 different **Recovery Areas**, most of these areas are composed only by few tents and they are generally located in small mountain villages.

However **5 main Recovery Areas** have been set-up (each one containing from 1000 to 4000 people).

*The Recovery Area of Pizzoli, where we were assigned, is now operative for 1.500 people which soon will become 2.500.*

*The only free space available for play activities in safety was in this part of the camp, between the wall and the last row of tents.*
Recovery Area of Pizzoli:

In the initial phase of the emergency, only the Civil Protection was allowed to enter and operate in the camps, therefore in order to deliver sport activities it was necessary bypassing this issue by joining one of the Civil Protection associations and then, once into the camp, to start independently with the activities.

Each association is allowed to work only in one camp. Our association was assigned to the Pizzoli town camp which is situated 15 km away from L’Aquila, were the earthquake hit the most.

Most of the people living in this camp were not affected in a traumatic way from the earthquake, however there were new problems they had to face:

- uncertainty over the future developments (job restart, damaged houses, etc);
- fear of other shakes;
- need to adapt to the new life conditions (sharing tents with other families, common bathrooms, meals all together, having to depend by aid-organizations);

Moreover, children and adolescents had to deal with:

- schools were closed;
- anxiety of the parents;
- lack of material for recreational activities (sport equipment and toys);
- lack of spaces were they could play and stay together.

In regard to this last aspect, it’s well known that in emergency situations the places to play and practice sport are the first to be eliminated. Specifically, in the post earthquake emergency, the Recovery Areas utilized for the tents are the soccer, or athletic fields, which are normally safe in case of further shakes.

The soccer field of the little village of Pizzoli became the Area to place the tents, while the gym was used as warehouse.

The volleyball net.

Here, fire workers are destroying a soccer field and a volleyball field that was built by the adolescents.

The space is going to be utilized for a parking lot and to add more tents.
Official data about the residents of the camp were not available, according a rough estimation, the camp population included:

- 15 infants aged 0-3;
- 10 children aged 3-6;
- 35 children aged 6-10;
- 20 pre adolescents aged 10-13;
- 20 adolescents 13-18;

Regular teachers were still shocked and not able to re-start the school lessons while other people, normally responsible for the sport activities, were occupied with other worries and therefore they were not ready to give their contribution.

The intervention of the Sport for Youth in Emergencies (SYE) Referent.

The arrival on the field happened the 6th day after the earthquake. At this point:

1- There were not educational nor sport/playing activities organized regularly for the youths.
2- There were not “Child Friendly Spaces”.
3- Sport equipment was poorly available.

“Playing Safe Areas” for children were not considered in the structure of the camp; the kids often run in a dangerous way among the tents and the rescue trucks.

Time frame of the intervention:

Monday 6th of April at 3 a.m.: Earthquake.

From Monday 6th to Friday 10th: these days were used for the priorities as rescue the people, provide food and clothes, building of the camp areas, coordinate all the relief supplies from other Italian regions.

Arrival on the field of the “Sport for Youth in Emergency” referent: Saturday 11th

Beginning of the activities → Sunday 12th in the morning.

The sport and play activities have been implemented with regularity from the 12th to the 26th of April 2009.
These means that we were operative less than one week after the earthquake and were able to cover until the end of the third week, after which, the schools were re-opened.

The **SYE Referent**, remained on the field from the 6th to the 12th day and from the 18th to the 22th day from the beginning of the emergency; however other young volunteers of the Civil Protection with particular capacities (psychologist, coaches etc.) were invited to join the activities with the kids. Some of them (2) received an introduction about the use of sport and physical activities with a *Value Added* component. A list of games appropriate for children with different ages was also provided.

In the absence of the SYE Referent, these volunteers were able to carry on the activities with regularity. In addition the team was composed by *some local youths* who were responsible for the sport equipment maintenance and helped during the sessions with children.

**Sport equipment took to the field:**

The day before the departure, a major sport shop in Roma was contacted asking for donation. The employees made a found raising and 1.000 euro of equipment was purchased and donated. Initially we managed to take to the field:

- 10 volley balls; 7 soccer balls;
- 8 tennis rackets; 20 tennis balls;
- 15 jumping ropes;
- 6 mini soccer goals; 20 coloured training jersey in different colours;
- 10 tennis table rackets with balls;

**Schedule of the activities implemented with regularity:**

- **Every Day from 10-11.30:** *Outdoor Play Activities and Sport* for children 6-10
- **Every Day from 15-16:** *Outdoor Play Activities and Sport* for children 6-10
- **Every Day from 16-18:** *Indoor activities*** for children 4-10 (drawing, movie watching, playing cards, clowns, puppet show, laboratory of creativity with plasticine)
- **Every Day from 16.30-19:** *Outdoor Sport-related activities*** for adolescents (volleyball, soccer, rugby, ultimate frisbee)

* These Play activities generally included: cooperative games, games to develop trust and respect for the others, Problem Solving through Motor Creativity.

Most of the games were taken from the *Right To Play* manuals and *Moving Forward Toolkit*.

However since the children were not affected in a traumatic way from the earthquake it wasn’t necessary to involve activities with a strong psycho-social component.
** Indoor activities involved many children with different ages (from 4 to 10); therefore it was difficult for only one operator to follow accurately all the kids. In this case the material was provided and the children were simply supervised by the responsible who was supported by some parents and older adolescents.

*** Outdoor activities for adolescents are sport-related games that maximize the participation of both girls and boys. Initially they were coordinated and supervised by the SYE Referent, then already after few days when a routine was established, they became able to manage by themselves these moments.

Boys and girls are playing Ultimate Frisbee.

*This is the field (shown in the first pages) that was destroyed in order to put more tents.*

**The Importance to find or to create friendly spaces for the activities:**

In these contexts it is important to create some "Structured Spaces" for the playing activities. As shown here, we used ropes to delimitate the playing area. This is very helpful because:

1- It allows to carry on the activities in safety.
2- It helps to control the group.
3- It gives a sense of belonging and protection to the children.
Other Recreational Activities:

Among the donations stored in the warehouse there were many second hand books and magazines. At the entrance of the lockers we set up a small library that was run by some young girls. They took care of everything (classification of books, manage the loans, opening times).

Due to the lack of human resources it was difficult to follow also other age groups. However we provided adults and old people with bocce, playing cards, newspapers and chess for community use.

As Italian tradition many hours were spent playing bocce and cards after dinner.

Results:

Due to the instable situation and the related necessity to start as soon as possible, we were not able to do any pre-post assessment of the impact of the activities.

However we observed that:

- children were provided with a daily schedule of fix commitments which, in absence of regular school, it was for them helpful to re-establish a sense of normality and adaptation to the new reality of the camp life;

- adolescents used the time of the afternoon sport activities as opportunity to stay more together and talk about the events. Some of them were nominated responsible for the sport equipment and supervisors of the younger kids. Their sense of Civil Responsibility extended to other activities of the camp (distribution of the meals, support to the volunteers etc.);

- a huge quantitative of sport equipment, school equipment and toys for different ages was selected from the warehouse and it is now stored in a container. Such equipment is intended to be used on the long term when donations of such materials will probably stop to arrive;

- we managed to create a small room within the camp where to store the everyday use sport and play equipment. It was called “Ludoteca”. A part from the practical use of such space, it is very important because its presence is interpreted by the population and by the camp workers as a “sign of the necessity” of implementing recreational and playing activities for youths;

- after a constant pressure on the Camp Developers and Local Administrators, we obtained that in the new permanent camp that is being built, an area next to the school-tents will be dedicated to create a “Child friendly space”. We are still waiting for the realization of a “Sport friendly space”, however the youths of the camp have prepared an official written request asking for the realization of such structure. Such document was read and signed as commitment by the Camp Developers.
Next Phase:

Entering in the forth week after the disaster youths in the camp have re-started school activities. The people of Pizzoli, who are now living in the camp, are going to come back to their houses soon. They will be replaced by the people from L’Aquila town who have instead completely lost their houses.

Therefore, it’s perceived that we are now entering in a new phase of the intervention: while in the first emergency our efforts were directed to use sport activities to bring back a sense of normality and control over the camp life, now the attention is more devoted to advocate for the importance of sport and play activities.

In a concrete way this means that we are asking for new sport structures around the permanent camp and we are asking for founds for local sport associations and social cooperatives.

For the people from L’Aquila town that will arrive to the camp, this instable life situation is going to last for at least one more year, therefore the need of a long term planning of the activities is necessary.

Few days ago, we started to share information with some key persons within the camp (sport coaches, the owner of the soccer field, a local physiotherapist). We were informed about the activities that had been regularly implemented before the earthquake and we have been shown the sport structures available and safe within the Pizzoli town.

Founds will be soon available and, considering that the main priority is to involve local realities as direct implementers of the sport activities, the contribution of the SFY Referent will be more related to:

1) - Helping these local realities to receive governmental founds (by writing reports, creating new formal structure of such associations, promoting partnerships).

2) - Provide ongoing formation (workshops, training, manuals) of these local operators.

The SYE Referent, Andrea Brunelli, is a Sport Educator for children. After an International post graduate Master in “Physical Activity and Health” and an internship at UN in New York, he travelled and played with children in Iran, India and South Thailand where he volunteered for Right To Play as coordinator of a Sport for Development project in the Tsunami regions.

In 2008 he attended the ICSSPE Seminar in “Sport in Post-Disaster Intervention”.

Andrea is actually a PhD student in Roma, studying the role of physical activity to promote neuronal plasticity.

For further information:
brune.andrea@gmail.com
andrea.brunelli@iusm.it