

Thailand: Child care centres are a boon for both economic recovery and child development [TH] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Three-year-old Mutita was fortunate: She escaped injury in last year's tsunami, clinging tightly to her father's neck as they fled the surging waters. The rest of her family also survived. But the tsunami did more than just kill or injure people - it also inflicted tremendous economic damage. Now Mutita's family is struggling with its effects.

The waves swept away Mutita's home, her family's fishing boat and gear, as well as the small grocery shop they operated on Phi Phi Island. Their livelihood was essentially wiped out.

Mutita's mother, 31-year-old Pranee Wankama, says she and her husband are now earning only half of the income they had before the tsunami and are having difficulty just making ends meet.

Working with other organizations and UN agencies in an effort to restore families' livelihoods on Sriboya Island, UNICEF has been helping the island's schools and child development centres play a supporting role in economic recovery for affected families.

UNICEF helped reconstruct two child development centres on the island, as well as three others in the Nue Klong district on the coast. One of the rebuilt facilities is the Koh Sriboya Child Development Centre. This Centre was originally housed in a 12-year-old dilapidated wooden building that was on the verge of falling apart. The building has now been replaced with a new brick and concrete structure, the construction of which gave some work to the island's masons and labourers.

Little Mutita, who attends the Centre while her parents are at work, likes it because "it's big and has more toys."

Naree Kongderm, a caregiver at the Centre, says that in addition to providing children and parents affected by the tsunami with a sense of security and optimism for the future, the Centre is also generating a great deal of interest in early childhood development activities among all the island's parents.

Pranee says the centre is helping Mutita develop the skills she will need once she starts primary school, and that her daughter has lots of friends to play with there.

The centre has also "helped ease the burden of taking care of our daughter during the day," says Pranee, allowing her and her husband to concentrate on improving the family's economic situation. She is hopeful this will help her family get back on their feet as soon as possible.

- reprinted from UNICEF Newsline

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