This report presents an overview of learning and innovation at JUCONI Ecuador during the BwB project.

Building on the findings about ‘resilience’ from the initial BwB research phase, the implementation phase sought to focus on practice change and development in terms of understanding how organisations can work in resilience-based ways and what happens when they do so. This report describes the journey of JUCONI Ecuador in terms of how and why the resilience-based approach at JUCONI Ecuador evolved through the project, their most significant learning points about resilience-based practice and some stories of change from their experiences through the project.

Building with Bamboo is an international learning project exploring resilience-based approaches to working with street-connected children who are exposed to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The project builds on findings from Oak Foundation’s Bamboo research initiative, which sought to understand resilience in street-connected children exposed to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. It is led by the Consortium for Street Children (CSC) and undertaken in collaboration with three partners from the CSC network: CWiSH in Nepal, JUCONI in Ecuador and S.A.L.V.E. International in Uganda. Each partner has conducted learning and innovation activities to explore the forms a resilience-based approach to working with street-connected children might usefully take. Activities were designed and overseen on behalf of CSC by the social development consultancy Keep Your Shoes Dirty (KYS&D) and led by Resilience Champions at each learning site.

UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE IN ECUADOR

The terms fortaleza and resistencia in Spanish can be used to talk about ‘resilience’ but fortaleza is more commonly used in everyday conversation. Fortaleza is developed not in response to an external situation but through the internal experience of having a positive relationship in one’s life. Such a positive relationship is characterised by love, respect, care, protection, comfort and understanding and serves as more than simply a positive role model: it is something that can be internalised, forming an internal ‘template’ for coping with life. As such, fortaleza is connected with other internal capabilities such as self-reflection, self-control and an ability to plan for the future. A person with fortaleza is one who:

• is strong (fuerte) and determined so that, no matter what the situation is like, can keep going and not ‘fall down’
• has a vision or a purpose in life
• has initiative to change the things in life, to make it better for themselves and those around them
• is tolerant of criticism and jokes
• is optimistic, in terms of being able to see the best in situations, even very difficult ones
• is emphatic in terms of being able to relate and respond to those around them
• can manage stress and relax easily
• doesn’t feel overwhelmed by difficult situations and can manage and / or adapt to them well
• is proactive in seeking help and solving problems
• displays openness and compassion rather than aggression when faced with difficult situations.

JUCONI Ecuador is BwB’s Learning Partner in Ecuador. JUCONI Ecuador takes a personalised approach to working with street-connected children and their families. This means that in each intervention with each street-connected child they co-design a personal plan based on a strengths-based therapeutic approach. The intent is to support the child towards a transitional attachment with their keyworker. This type of therapy helps children to identify what has worked for them to achieve success. JUCONI Ecuador also works with the child’s potential network by providing key stakeholders in the child’s life with their own programme(s) to help them to take co-responsibility for the child’s well-being. JUCONI Ecuador joined CSC’s BwB project as an organisation that was already explicitly using a resilience-informed or strengths-based approach to working with street-connected children at risk of sexual abuse and / or exploitation, informed explicitly by resilience or similar principles, reflected in strengths-based interventions guided by the organisation’s aims and values. The intent in joining our project was to share their learning and to take their work even further.

JUCONI Ecuador’s Resilience Champion is Martha Espinoza. Martha is the Executive Director of JUCONI Ecuador. She has a Masters in Clinical Psychology from the University of Guayaquil. She has 19 years of experience working with children in street situations and their families. Martha also trains local and international organisations who work with children and families who are either currently working, or at high risk of working, on the street in intervention methodologies and family reintegration.
LEARNING AND INNOVATION IN RESILIENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Learning partners took a dynamic, iterative and flexible approach towards resilience-based practice change and development, using cycles of learning and innovation to continually learn and feed this learning into adaptation and innovation in their resilience-based approaches over the project period. This kind of process is highly generative for practice change and development in terms of maximising opportunities to learn from challenges and failures, as well as successes. It is also particularly suitable to the unstable, uncertain and chaotic settings in which the learning partners work on a day to day basis: street-connected children’s needs are complex, they fluctuate and are influenced by a variety of factors and, therefore, require a flexible, agile, adaptable and responsive approach.

OVERVIEW OF RESILIENCE PRACTICE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT AT JUCONI ECUADOR

JUCONI Ecuador has evolved their approach with street-connected children and families so that they can better recognise the different ways trauma and vulnerability manifest themselves in the communities they work. They want to be more effective in promoting resilience at the community level, ensuring that street-connected children are ultimately supported and protected within the places they live, rather than primarily by organisations.

OUR LEARNING APPROACH

To Prepare

1. We conducted learning activities to gather qualitative data
2. We identified emerging learning to develop themes in the data and distill key insights
3. We made sense & innovated to reflect on current approaches and develop small innovations to pilot

Learning and innovation was organised over 3 cycles which took place over a year.

We developed local narratives of ‘resilience’ and ‘wellbeing’ to situate concepts in local socio-cultural settings

We developed local learning frameworks to guide learning around local components of resilience and wellbeing

We designed learning activities to be used with children, staff and community members

We trained the resilience champions to lead the learning activities

PRACTICE CHANGE & DEVELOPMENT

Start

Building positive relationships between staff and family members including street-connected children.

...and working closely with the family unit to rebuild the emotional connections and create a positive attachment for the child that enhances their resilience.

End

...and promoting the resilience of street-connected children who become more proactive in creating a positive community environment and protective community networks...

Beyond

...continue to promote the resilience of street-connected children who become more proactive in creating a positive community environment and protective community networks.

Key

Focus on promoting resilience in individual street-connected children
Focus on promoting resilience in family unit
Focus on promoting resilience in community context
WHAT kind of resilience-practice change and development?
When JUCONI Ecuador began BwB, they already had an explicit resilience-based approach which was tightly focussed on responding to psychological trauma amongst street-connected children and their families. Through the changes they made, JUCONI Ecuador have retained their focus on psychological trauma but worked to build the ability of staff to more readily recognise and respond to some of the multifaceted ways psychological trauma is manifest in terms of complex connections between street-connected children (and family members') emotions, thoughts and behaviour.

WHY did they do it?
JUCONI Ecuador’s approach has developed in response to their learning about how it can be difficult to identify trauma in street-connected children (and their family members) from their outward behaviour. They have learned to look at how trauma manifests itself in more complex and hidden ways. In other words, in the child who seems to be coping but really isn’t. JUCONI Ecuador have also recognised that their staff team were increasingly prone to becoming overwhelmed by the extremely difficult situations in which they worked on a daily basis. The pervasive context of poverty, physical violence, shootings and drugs trafficking negatively affects the staff, as well as the children they are working with. This can lead to staff exhibiting similar negative patterns of behaviour as those exhibited by the street-connected children and families they support, detrimentally impacting both on their ability to provide focussed and effective interventions and their own personal well-being.

HOW have they done it?
JUCONI Ecuador have concentrated on developing the skills and abilities of staff to recognise and respond to trauma and vulnerabilities alongside a careful balance of personalised (individual) and peer-to-peer (group) work with street-connected children and families and the creation of some new processes and systems to support all this. This has involved:

Staff training. Training with staff on trauma identification and personal and social vulnerabilities to help them recognise the ways these manifest themselves in less obvious ways amongst street-connected children and families.

Regular staff reflection on practice. Regular reflection sessions where staff can discuss their practice together, share the issues they are facing and feel more supported and protected so they can cope better with the challenging contexts and interventions they are involved in. For example, they began by using some of the staff conversation tools used as part of BwB to gather reflections on practice change and development and gradually integrated these reflection sessions into a weekly staff meeting.

Highly personalised approach. Working in a highly personalised approach with individual street-connected children (and family members) to develop a resilience profile and personal plan based on strengths and what the child feels they want to achieve for themselves.

Mentoring by programme ‘graduates’. Involving street-connected children who have ‘graduated’ from JUCONI Ecuador programmes as mentors for street-connected children they are currently working with. The mentors gain recognition for their own achievements and have a chance to reflect on their own resilience through their activities as role models for other street-connected children, whilst current street-connected children in their programmes benefit from hearing about their experiences.

Peer-to-peer experience and story sharing. Providing opportunities for peers to share their experiences and develop their ability to self-reflect and manage their emotions. In particular, through the sharing of positive and negative stories with peers, those who are less articulate and confident are helped to find words to explain their experiences and express themselves. The story game with children, developed as part of the learning activities for BwB, has proved a helpful way for JUCONI to integrate story telling practices into their approach.
Developed local narratives of ‘resilience’ and ‘well-being’ to situate concepts in local socio-cultural settings.

Developed local learning frameworks to guide learning around local components of ‘resilience’ and ‘well-being’.

Trained Resilience Champions to lead the learning activities.

During each cycle we: conduct learning activities > identify emerging learning > make sense and innovate

LEARNING & INNOVATION CYCLE 1
- CROSS-SITE VISIT: UGANDA
- MARCH 2017
- FOCUSED ON THE TEAM’S CAPACITY TO RECOGNISE TRAUMA IN STREET-CONNECTED CHILDREN – TRAINING PACKAGE ON TRAUMA IDENTIFICATION DELIVERED TO A SMALL GROUP OF STAFF.

LEARNING & INNOVATION CYCLE 2
- CROSS-SITE VISIT: ECUADOR
- JULY 2017
- BUILT STAFF UNDERSTANDING AND IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABILITY IN CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY EVEN WHERE IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE.

LEARNING & INNOVATION CYCLE 3
- CROSS-SITE VISIT: NEPAL
- FEB 2017
- ADAPTED AND EMBEDDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO CREATE REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF TO REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONS IN RELATION TO WORKING IN SUCH CHALLENGING SITUATIONS.

Recognised it was difficult to find a time and place to involve programme ‘graduates’ as mentors – they lived far from each other and had to fit their involvement in around school commitments.

Collected stories from children and staff about resilience-based programme experiences.

Observed streetwork in Uganda – it was a revelation seeing and hearing about how children behave in different cultures.

Focussed on the team’s capacity to recognize trauma in street-connected children – training package on trauma identification delivered to a small group of staff.

Recognised we need to better understand the behaviour of children who present as “difficult” children - what psychological trauma might they have?

Built staff understanding and identification of vulnerability in children, especially even where it is difficult to see.

Adapted and embedded learning activities to create regular opportunities for staff to reflect on their experiences and emotions in relation to working in such challenging situations.

Used a resilience test to develop resilience profiles with street-connected children and families and identify what would help to increase their resilience.

Met with programme ‘graduates’ to discuss how to involve them in mentoring and peer support for children currently in our programmes.

Took a personalised approach to family visits and focused specifically on resilience - meant conversations were highly relevant, children could open up about how they really experienced things and had access to a vocabulary for verbalising their thoughts and feelings.

It felt like I had a lot to do!

I started thinking about the potential psychological trauma of children who seem to be coping but are not really coping.

It was not easy but it felt better than thinking about our work solely in the context of trauma.

The learning was so important – it made us re-think how we identify children who require our interventions and make sure staff are equipped to do this.

I know the resilience test helps but it is not the whole picture. I have my own observations and then I can listen to what the child is telling me.

It was inspiring to really consider what is best for street-connected children.
**JUCONI ECUADOR’S MOST SIGNIFICANT LEARNING ABOUT WORKING IN A RESILIENCE-BASED WAY**

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO...**

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**1**...develop a positive relationship with street-connected children, not just fulfil an activity.

**How do we do it?**

- Give regular positive feedback based on the strengths of the child (or parent/caregiver).
- Be attentive and respectful, avoiding any criticism, judgement or ‘correction’ about the child (or parent/caregiver’s behaviour).
- Consistently being available for the child (or parent/caregiver) - same person during a period of time.
- Work closely on an individual basis with a street-connected child (or parent / caregiver) so activities and conversations are completely relevant to them, they can think about their own experiences and they are not required to share painful or shameful experiences of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and violence with others making it more likely they will open up about how they really experience things.

**What do we see happening?**

- Street-connected children having an experience of a safe and trusting relationship in which they feel truly able to open up about how they really experience their adversities and important to someone else. This, in turn, encourages them to view themselves more positively.
- Parents / caregivers who are able to internalise the experience of a positive relationship and use it to inform the way they (re)build their emotional connections with their own children.

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**2**...listen to street-connected children and their parents'/caregivers' stories and self-reflections.

**How do we do it?**

- Create safe spaces to listen to street-connected children’s stories on a one-to-one basis where there is consistency in terms of the staff member who works with the child (or parent / caregiver).
- Bring street-connected children together with mentors (children who have ‘graduated’ from JUCONI Ecuador’s programmes) to share stories with them and learn from their experiences.
- Work closely with parents / caregivers to prepare them for hearing negative experiences from their own children, including ‘difficult to hear’ feedback which reveals their faults and failures.
- Work closely with street-connected children to help them understand why their parents / caregivers may have acted in certain ways (but not to normalise or condone the behaviour) due to the trauma they themselves experienced as children.

**What do we see happening?**

- Street-connected children having the emotional space and emotional responses that they need to think and talk about their worst experiences of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and violence, without fear of criticism or judgement; opportunities for street-connected children to focus on their positive experiences; and the chance to develop the ability to self-reflect, both on their own stories as well as on others’ stories to examine what happened, what could have been different and how they might keep themselves and / or their own children safe in the future.
- Mentors who, by helping other street-connected children, consolidate their identity as a ‘success’ and feel more resilient as a result of recognising their agency to change their own lives, as well as impact on positively changing the lives of other children.
- Parents / caregivers who are more available for their children, able to reflect on how to protect their children from sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and violence; are less stressed and more interested in their children and are in a better position to form a positive attachment with their children.

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**Antony, 6yrs**, used to work on the streets. He was very impulsive and easily became angry and aggressive with others. On one occasion, when other children tried to joke with him, he took it as an attack and threw stones at them, becoming very distressed. His keyworker, in order to calm him down, gave him a hug and then asked him to help organising his lesson materials. The keyworker made much of telling Antony that he is very collaborative and that he is organised because he did such a good job with the materials.

**Gina, a 35 year old mother**, did not realise the risk of sexual abuse that her daughter faced. After many meetings with her, where the focus was about her own story which included her having been sexual abused when she was 13, she said: “I think I could have been coped with the experience of being sexual abused but what makes me really sad and angry was that my mother did not believe me and she did not protect me.” It was only then that Gina was able to understand about the need to protect her daughter.
how do we do it?

• Work on a one-to-one basis with the most vulnerable street-connected children who have very little resilience.

• Use a ‘resiliency scales’ test to help develop a resilience profile for children. The test helps to better focus the intervention on the particular situations that are affecting children and to develop personal plans to address these challenges.

• Take account of street-connected children’s own views about their resilience rather than solely relying on the resilience test results.

• Develop personalised plans together with street-connected children (or parents / caregivers) which are based on their strengths and what they want to achieve.

What do we see happening?

• Street-connected children who are more deeply engaged in thinking about what they want to achieve for themselves and who form strong transitional attachments with staff, enabling them to disclose their worst experiences in the context of a trusting and meaningful relationship.

Monica, 10yrs, was extremely violent at her school and home. Her resilience test showed that her connections with others and sense of trust was low. She used to say: “if they are bad with me then I will be evil.” We asked her what she would like to do and she say: “I want my mom but she does not care.” Her keyworker started planning many sessions where Monica and her mother enjoyed playing games together and spending time with each other. With time, Monica’s level of aggression began to reduce.

3 ...work in a very personalised ways with street-connected children which draw on their strengths.

4 ...create regular opportunities for staff to reflect and share about their interventions with street-connected children and their families.

How do we do it?

• Create weekly opportunities for staff to meet and reflect with each other about their current interventions with street-connected children and their families, to explore and understand their interventions more deeply and share and discuss the challenges they are facing in delivering the interventions.

• Use regular, short, focussed one-to-one conversations between staff to encourage openness and sharing about the challenges they face in their work with street-connected children and families, and contribute to each other’s approach and next steps in a particular intervention.

What do we see happening?

• Staff who have a more positive attitude in their work with street-connected children and their families, are able to give more thoughtful feedback to children and parents / caregivers and more appropriately shape their interventions with them.

Through the regular opportunities that JUCONI Ecuador created for staff to meet and reflect with each other, Diana, one of the keyworkers was able to realise how her thoughts and feelings were starting to match those of the children she was trying to help and hindering her ability to do so. She said: “I started feeling very angry because Juanito was not enrolled at school and he didn’t care. I now realise that the anger I was feeling was the same as the way that Juanito was feeling. His mother did not go to school and she did not know how to support her boy’s education.” Diana was able to use this realisation, together with the support of her colleagues, to address her feelings and refocus her attention on Juanito’s problems.
JUCONI ECUADOR’S MOST SIGNIFICANT LEARNING ABOUT WORKING IN A RESILIENCE-BASED WAY

IT IS IMPORTANT TO...

5...create opportunities for street-connected children to hear each other’s stories.

How do we do it?
• Involve ‘graduates’ from JUCONI Ecuador’s programmes as mentors in group discussions with less resilient children who we are currently working with to provide them role models and support from children who are comfortable sharing their own experiences.
• Use a preventative approach in which mentors work with children, share their experiences and help them learn how to protect themselves to prevent them from ending up in harmful situations.

What do we see happening?
• Street-connected children learning from children who have had similar negative experiences (graduate mentors) on how to cope with adversity and protect themselves from adverse situations.
• Mentors having a chance to reflect on their own resilience and what they have achieved, develop their own confidence and feel proud about doing something that will help others. They also support each other by giving feedback to other mentors about their respective contributions to group discussions.
• Children becoming more active in forming and maintaining a support network for each other within the community at large rather than purely in the context of JUCONI Ecuador’s group activities.

6...provide positive experiences for street-connected children (and/or parents / caregivers) with a consistent member of staff over a period of time.

How do we do it?
• Have a consistent member of staff applying an intervention process for particular street-connected children so they see the same children on an individual basis and in a personalised way every week.
• Continue working over the period of time that is required and at a pace which suits the child to develop a positive emotional connection between the child and a parent / caregiver which will, in turn, promote their resilience.
• Establish a routine for weekly visits so that the child is ready and waiting for these visits and can look forward to the time with their keyworker.
• Share nice moments with the street-connected child on a regular basis, involving other family members where possible to model a positive environment.

What do we see happening?
• Children experience a sense of trust in their transitional attachment with their keyworker and are supported to (re)build positive connections in their lives which they can draw on for the future, in terms of having a good support network around and internalising the mode of positive relationship building that can help them form positive relationships with others.
• Parents / caregivers who internalise these positive experiences, better understand how to develop a positive environment, family relationships and connections within the community and are more proactive in doing so.

*All names have been changed

Susanna, 16yrs, said: “I was living on the streets and then I ended up in a foster home. That experience was so painful for me because I knew I had a mother and just thought that she didn’t love me. Now I understand that she could not protect me and so she couldn’t have me with her at home. Now I know she loves me.”

Maria, a keyworker at JUCONI Ecuador used to visit a family. The mother wanted the visit but at the same time she rejected Maria. After six months, Maria had to stop making the visits because she had to leave work on maternity leave and so the family were provided with a new keyworker. The mother responded to this saying: “no.. I do not want someone else ...I will wait for Maria.”
...ABOUT A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

JUCONI Ecuador started working with a mother, Gina, who was sexually abused as a child. Gina had grown up in an environment in which she was not given support or affection by her mother and this, combined with the psychological trauma caused by the sexual abuse she suffered, meant that she was unable to see that her own children were also at risk of sexual abuse by their step-father. Gina simply did not want to believe that her own daughter, Melina, could be in the same situation that she had been.

Through JUCONI Ecuador’s interventions, she came to realise that she had never overcome her own traumatic experience of sexual abuse. When she was a child, her own step-father regularly drugged and abused her and her sisters at night time despite their attempts to avoid him, for example, by dressing in many pairs of pants and hiding the youngest sister in the corner of the bed. This abuse caused deep emotional trauma and contributed to Gina’s need for male attention to the extent that, when JUCONI Ecuador’s male Social Workers visited, she demanded all their attention. Gina’s daughter, Melina, also grew up in an environment in which she didn’t receive attention or affection from her mother. This made Melina particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse from her step-father because it constituted some kind of replacement for these things in her life.

For Gina, it was painful to reflect on the abuse she experienced in childhood but JUCONI helped her to understand her own experience of sexual abuse better - to reflect on what she had wanted from her own mother at the time and then use all this to think through how she could now support and protect her own daughter. Through this, Gina gradually began to identify the signs of sexual abuse in her own home. She is now able to recognise danger and make decisions to protect her children. For example, she has recently ended her relationship with her abusive partner and decided to focus more on loving and taking care of her children.

As a result, she has become closer to her daughter and is more proactive in seeking support from others to better support her daughter, for example, going to her daughter’s school to seek help for dealing with her daughter’s aggression problems. Gina’s growing closeness with her daughter has allowed trust to develop between them and made Melina feel loved, safe and secure, increasing the resilience of the whole family.

...ABOUT JUCONI ECUADOR

Staff at JUCONI Ecuador have good understanding about the ways in which street-connected children’s behaviour is connected to trauma they have experienced and their vulnerabilities.

Through working on the BwB project with CSC and other partners they have also realised that children react in certain ways as a means of protecting themselves. For example, aggressive behaviour may manifest due to trauma, but also as a protective mechanism to keep people away. This has heightened JUCONI staff members’ ability to recognise vulnerabilities in children who appear to be coping, including those who continually seem to reject their support and give those children the support they need.

...ABOUT A COMMUNITY

Over the past two years, one of the communities that JUCONI Ecuador works in has been affected by extreme violence – shootings, the presence of gangs and drug trafficking. Very few organisations are willing to work in this particular community due to understandable concerns for their own safety. JUCONI Ecuador have also gone through periods where they considered the same – to stop working there because it is so dangerous for their staff and the sense of hopelessness they feel in making any progress in a context of so many unsurmountable problems.

However, JUCONI Ecuador continues their work and now sees that their presence has made the community more hopeful. They began to mobilise community members through organised protests to raise awareness about these problems and gradually managed to convince other organisations to join forces with them.

Street-connected children and their families are now more active in the community – they are proactive about building the resilience of the whole community, they reach out to JUCONI Ecuador with ideas about how to bring the community together and actively work to involve more children and families in the various initiatives that are going on.