

Alyssa Volkmann
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Children in Crossfire's Role in Promoting Social Change

Children in Crossfire (CIC) is an international NGO that seeks to address the destructive affects of poverty that impacts the wellbeing of children and young people around the world. Dr. Richard Moore founded the organization in 1996 with the purpose of responding 'to the rights and needs of children caught in the crossfire of global poverty and injustice' (Children in Crossfire). Richard grew up Derry, Northern Ireland during the Troubles and at the age of 10, he was blinded when a British soldier fired a rubber bullet at point blank range. Remarkably, Richard was able to accept his reality and forgive the soldier who fired the rubber bullet, stating that 'forgiveness is a gift to yourself [and although] it doesn't change the past, it can change the future' (Moore). Richard has been able to live a happy life, while cultivating compassion and forgiveness in order to see his blindness as a positive experience. He accredits these positive experiences in his life to a few factors, which include coming from a good family, a supportive community, and having the access to choice and opportunity throughout his life (Moore). The birth of CIC came from Richard's recognition that although other children may have their sight, they do not have the same access to education, choice and opportunity that he has had.

The organization's mission is 'to work with others to tackle the injustices and poverty affecting children' (Children in Crossfire). Over the past 20 years, CIC has worked in South America, Asia and Africa. Currently, CIC works in Tanzania and Ethiopia. There, CIC has implemented their readiness programs (Ready Children, Ready Families, and Ready Schools), which provides and educates children, parents, schools, community members, and government officials on things such as nutrition, education, health, and protection. CIC has shifted their focus to these two nations because of the strong partnerships that have been established, which creates better

opportunities for sustainable change (Children in Crossfire). Within Ireland, CIC focuses on development education that focuses on working with youth workers, teachers, and youth, to equip them with skills in global education. Development Education is a process which aims to support youth and educators to explore the underlying causes of poverty, some of the themes we work to explore include fair trade, aid, debt and exposing corruption. CIC acknowledges that young people have the ability to influence change and seeks to provide the space and support for young people to do this (Children in Crossfire 1-26).

As Children in Crossfire continues to work in Tanzania and Ethiopia, the organization seeks to continue to increase the quality and enrollment of and in early childhood education centers, improve the nutrition and health of young children and build community structures that improve access to essential services for young children. Due to CIC's small size and its goals of creating sustainable change, the organization is reliant on the creation of lasting relationships with local partners who are also seeking to make sustainable improvements of the quality of life for youth, families and communities in general. Children in Crossfire recognizes that fighting 'poverty isn't about charity, it's about justice and access' (Moore). Due to Children in Crossfire's dedication to seeking justice and looking at the root causes of why these injustices exist in the first place, I myself wouldn't call Children in Crossfire a charity, but a humanitarian organization. American Political Theorist Michael Walzer describes the difference between charity and humanitarianism, as such: "Words such as "charity" and "philanthropy" describe a voluntary act, a matter of kindness rather than duty. But international humanitarianism seems more like duty than kindness, or maybe it is a combination: two in one, a gift that we have to give" (Walzer 69-80). He explains that within humanitarianism, citizens in powerful states arguably have a duty to intervene on issues of injustice. Although not explicitly written in the organization's mission, the view of helping others as a duty is something that is very much apart of CIC's ideologies and teachings on interconnectedness.

In order for the organization to be successful abroad and make lasting change, it requires the support, understanding, and involvement of local people as well. Due to the way the world is rapidly becoming more interconnected through globalized economics, politics and communication, it is important that students around the world are not only informed of what is occurring in the world, but also how to become involved and be active global citizens. According to a 2009 study titled, "Global Connections: 'A Tool For Active Citizenship,'" youth regularly find themselves overwhelmed by local and global issues, often finding that there are not enough resources or opportunities to become engaged in these issues. Research has shown that while youth may be concerned about global issues like war, poverty and social division, they do not believe that they can make a difference with any of their own personal contributions (Schultz et al. 1023-1034). This is where development education comes in to help prevent lack of action, and increase the belief of young people that they can make a difference in the world. As CIC continues to impact young people, youth workers and educators through teaching about active global citizenship, while providing resources to get actively involved in even the most simple ways, such as purchasing fair trade products and engaging in compassion learning programs such as Educating the Heart. Development Education seeks to eliminate feelings of apathy and helplessness youth may experience when first engaging in local and global issues, and instead, empower youth by increasing their ability to connect with, engage and demand change in the world. As students in Ireland understand their role as global citizens, they may also understand the international work of CIC and other international NGO's as something less distant and with more value than they did previous to experience with global learning in development education (Murphy et al. 52-69).

Since Children in Crossfire is an international NGO that relies heavily on funding from grants, investments, government and institutional funders, trusts and foundations, fundraising and publicity, as well as organizational and individual donors, it is important that their work is consistent

with their mission, otherwise the organization's funding could potentially be terminated. While this reliance on funding is necessary to insure organizations follow through with their work, it also dictates the freedom of certain departments because those who fund it then can shape programs, resulting compromise becoming necessary. This can pose as a major challenge to people like Caroline and Donna who are working to develop innovative programs, and require extra effort from them to get folks who are funding the programs on the same page. It requires her to be an extremely skilled communicator when articulating ideas for new programs.

Another issue that CIC faces is a lack of public understanding of what the organization exactly does abroad, and in Ireland. Folks in Derry and around Ireland often know of Richard's story, but may not understand the organization itself. While Richard's story definitely is impactful and important to shed light on, it's easy to get caught up in his story and not really think about CIC beyond merely knowing his story. If people think they understand the organization because they know Richard's story, and then perhaps see the CIC donation buckets with African children on it, it could be easy to see the organization as an international charity that *donates* money to Africa, instead of an organization that works to build partnerships abroad to create sustainable changes and improvements in the lives of children abroad, as well as engage youth and community members here in Ireland in becoming more aware and active global citizens. It's also understandable that community members might not initially look at the mission statement and understand CIC's vision and work with engaging local youth and educators as a way to also help fight the injustices of worldwide poverty. Furthermore, due to lack of funding and organizational size, CIC cannot afford a campaign that explains all of this, hence why they rely heavily on their website, as well as staff, partners and supporters to help communicate a more complete story of the work that the organization is engaged in locally and globally.

Overall, my experience as an intern at the Children in Crossfire office in Derry has been extremely positive. The space itself feels very welcoming because of the fact that CIC is located within a house instead of a conventional office building. The environment in the office feels relaxed, yet everyone is always busy with his or her work within and outside of the office. The staff is made up mostly of women, which could definitely be apart of the reason I've felt so comfortable and welcomed. The only men who I regularly engage with are Richard and Kevin from Finance. I believe that all the people who are apart of Children in Crossfire try their best to socially and globally engaged, and when folks fall short on some issues, such as gender roles/stereotypes, I've seen other staff members challenge each other's views in healthy, productive ways like questioning and adding information to better inform them on the issue.

While things are very pleasant in day to day interactions, I think that one place where I think that CIC could improve on is making sure that their female staff feel valued and heard when engaging with men who are higher on the organizational latter, especially since one of the organizations main values is equality, meaning that 'everyone is treated fairly and respected' (Children in Crossfire). Obviously this is not an issue that is exclusive to CIC, and it occurs in workplaces around the world, but I was disappointed to learn that colleagues at CIC experience feeling belittled or devalued at staff meetings, especially when these colleagues are essential contributors to the organization. Although this isn't something the general public may able to witness from the outside perspective, it's just as necessary that the organization seek to address internal sexist micro aggressions and understand how that could potentially hinder the organization's morale in the long-term.

The vision of CIC is 'a compassionate world where every child can reach his or her potential.' Obviously, CIC cannot make this vision a reality on its own, because it's only one small piece of a larger effort to work to eradicate the injustices from global poverty; however, they are

doing lots of work globally and locally to incorporate compassion into their efforts of creating a more just world. One of the ways I've been engaged in understanding this work in Ireland is through conducting research to understand the outcome of CIC's Educating the Heart Program, which is apart of CIC's TIDAL (Teachers in Development & Learning) curriculum. Another program I have been apart of at CIC is the Global Learning Program, which works in partnership with CIC and seeks to educate teachers across Northern Ireland about integrating social justice and global learning into their classrooms. The program encourages teachers to engage in critical thinking and to expand the archetypal narratives of history and the world that we receive from media, textbooks, and from our society in general. Teachers are reminded that social justice can be taught within any subject, and they are given the tools to begin to help educate and empower kids on important issues of global injustice. This program is key in helping young people in Northern Ireland become more aware and engaged as global citizens, which is just one small component that is needed to continue the process for creating a more just world. These two programs/projects I've been apart of at CIC both embody the organizations consistent effort to create more aware and active citizens who are prepared to take action in fighting injustices in our world.

Both of these programs implemented in Ireland can be seen as examples of how CIC seeks to promote social change because they seek to engage youth, youth workers and educators across Ireland. Not surprisingly, one of the biggest challenges for these programs is funding and misunderstanding by the public of who is funding the programs. To elaborate, there was an instance during a session of Educating the Heart where a teacher was unaware that the funding for the program did not come from people's donations, so she assumed the program was being funded by money that could have been sent abroad. This misunderstanding resulted in the woman being initially hostile and unresponsive to the program until was later brought to her attention that the funding of Educating the Heart was not impacting the funding allocated for international efforts in

Ethiopia and Tanzania. This goes back to the issue of public opinion and a lack of understanding of the work that CIC engages in here in Ireland. It's important that the organization remains transparent, especially when it comes to finances and local engagement.

My time with Children in Crossfire has taught me the importance of critically engaging with assumptions and biases. Before my internship here, I had negative assumptions and connotations of global 'charities,' especially Western ones; however, CIC is an organization that understands that global injustice and poverty cannot be solved by throwing money at issues, but instead, there needs to be a layered approach that isn't reliant on philanthropy, but sustainability, awareness, and education. The organization has also taught me of how important it is to work with people who support and believe in you. The work that Development Ed department engages in is not easy and can prove to be difficult to get people engaged in, but I've observed first hand how important it is to work with people who support and help you along the way. Donna and Caroline both are extremely kind, passionate and bright women who work to foster compassion and support, while making sure to always laugh along the way. They unapologetically speak their minds and leave space for my contributions too. Being apart of this space has helped me grow and understand that I am much more adaptable and resilient than I've thought myself to be. I've always had a bad habit of undermining the positive qualities of myself while focusing on the negatives, but my time here has tested me, and required me to be flexible, brave and confident in myself. While these traits aren't necessarily new, before I came here, I often found myself failing to acknowledge their presence within myself. I am pleased to say that my time here this semester has definitely helped me cultivate more self confidence and self awareness, and I know it's something that I can carry with me no matter where I am.

While I can't be sure if I will work in the realm of development education in the future, it was extremely helpful to see how social justice influences the field of development education.

Regardless of what work I end up doing in the future, as long as it is in the realm of social justice, I know that I will need to be apart of an environment that fosters support and encouragement for the people I working and sharing space with. I know from experience that it can be tiring to always be engaged with social justice initiatives, but when you're working alongside others who also are deeply invested in a more just world, it's easier to remember you're not alone and that you can make a difference.

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