



FROM SOCIAL ISOLATION TO SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN: GOVERNORSHIP ONEM PROJECT, KOCAELI, TÜRKİYE

Aslıhan Polat*¹, Osman Nejat Akfırat², Bahadır Geniş¹, Ezgi Şişman¹

Kocaeli University, ¹Faculty of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry; ²Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance And Psychological Counseling, Kocaeli, Türkiye

ORCID iD: Aslıhan Polat: 0000-0001-9649-8701; Osman Nejat Akfırat: 0000-0002-6748-9539; Bahadır Geniş: 0000-0001-8541-7670; Ezgi Şişman: 0000-0001-9496-991X

*Sorumlu Yazar / Corresponding Author: Aslıhan Polat e-posta / e-mail: aslihanp@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Objective: Addressing the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable children and young people is of vital importance in today's society. Comprehensive efforts within both educational institutions and the wider society are essential to provide support and opportunities to these vulnerable groups. The aim of this article is to present the model of the Kocaeli ONEM project, which aims to increase the social integration of disadvantaged children.

Methods: Children from broken families, children from families with members in prison, refugee children and children with health problems were included in the study. The study was carried out in 3 different periods. Nineteen activities were planned to improve the social integration of the children. Questionnaires were sent to children, teachers and their families for feedback.

Results: A total of 14682 activities were organised, consisting of 19 different categories. A total of 65.695 children participated in the activities. Totally, 15860 supporters were involved in the project. Satisfaction rates obtained through feedback surveys for the last two study periods were 84% for students, 81% and 82% for teachers, 75% and 81% for parents.

Conclusion: The activities carried out in the ONEM project served to improve children's problem-solving skills and quality of life. Thanks to these activities, children were able to cope better with the stress caused by biological and social changes, the effects of peer pressure were reduced and their desire to be part of a group was positively addressed.

Keywords: Disadvantaged child, social support, psychological consultancy, ONEM project.

Introduction

Children At Risk

In today's society, it is important to address the needs of disadvantaged or at-risk children and young people. Both educational institutions and wider societal efforts are crucial in providing support and opportunities to these vulnerable groups. Turkey is the second most populous country in both Europe and the Middle East. Children make up 26.5% of the total population.¹ This demographic indicator highlights the significant societal presence of the child population in Turkey. Rapid social change around the world can also lead to various economic and social problems. Factors such as income inequality, divorce, involvement in crime and substance use can place children at a greater disadvantage or risk in their developmental stages.

Risk is understood as the conditions - individual, family and environmental - that lead to or maintain a situation that results in undesirable outcomes for an individual. The risk factors that school-aged children are likely to encounter are predominantly psychosocial in origin, which can lead to the onset or exacerbation of problems. When considering risk factors, it is possible to speak of individual, family and environmental risks.

- Individual risks include premature birth, chronic illnesses, gender, difficult personality, insecure attachment, low self-esteem, impairments in cognitive, linguistic, or motor domains, sexual abuse, deficiencies in social relationship skills, conduct disorders, and substance addiction.
- Family risks include parental illness or psychopathology, early parenthood, parents' divorce or death, living with a single parent, conflicts between family members and the child, inadequate parenting, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of the child, marital conflicts, parental substance use, and parental unemployment.
- Environmental risks include economic hardship and poverty, social violence, peer rejection, loss of a relative or friend, social trauma such as war and natural disasters, homelessness, stressful and traumatic events at school, physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children, low academic achievement, living in rural areas and the level of development of the society.²

In the literature, child maltreatment (e.g. physical, emotional and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect) and family dysfunction (e.g. divorce or separation of parents, incarceration, violence, mental illness and substance abuse) are defined as adverse childhood experiences.³ Adverse childhood experiences are known risk factors for mental health problems.⁴ Adolescents exposed to adverse childhood experiences are also at greater risk of depression and anxiety than their peers. Finally, early exposure to adverse childhood experiences has been found to increase the risk of later maladjustment.^{4,5}

Risk Management and Prevention

In order to deal with the risks mentioned here, public administrations, educational institutions and health and social care organisations should work together. Schools, in particular, have a crucial role to play in supporting the positive development of individuals at the age of compulsory schooling. According to the contemporary understanding of education, the aim of education is to educate individuals who can move society forward and provide changes that can improve it (active adaptation), rather than adapting to social and environmental conditions without questioning and maintaining them (passive adaptation).⁶ In order to achieve

the goals of contemporary education and realise the function of education, the structure of the school in formal education has also changed and Student Personality Services (SPS) have been included as a third group of services in addition to teaching and administrative services in traditional schools. Student Personality Services (SPS) is a group of professional services that the contemporary understanding of education considers to be obligatory in formal educational activities. It includes the activities provided to the student in the school, apart from the classroom teaching, which serve to develop his/her personality in a healthy way with its emotional and social aspects. SPS is an inseparable part of modern formal education, a group of services that function separately from, but in parallel with, teaching and administrative activities.⁶ Since the beginning of counselling services, different approaches have been used such as crisis intervention, curative (therapeutic), preventive (protective) and developmental counselling. It is very important to carry out preventive studies based on the developmental guidance approach, which is more effective today. Preventive studies are used in the sense of taking precautions now to prevent undesirable events and situations in the future and carrying out some activities to increase desired events and situations in the future.⁷

Prevention studies have been defined in different ways by different researchers. Caplan (1964) divided preventive approaches into three categories, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, and accepted primary prevention studies as the ancestor of all others.⁸ Primary prevention aims to reduce the occurrence or recurrence of all health-related illnesses in the community. Secondary prevention aims to prevent the spread of events that have already occurred in terms of duration and number. It is implemented when the first problems are identified. Tertiary prevention aims to reduce disorders and deficiencies resulting from problems. It is close to traditional medical models.

Protective Factors

In the literature, protective factors are defined in 2 groups:

A- Individual characteristics and skills can reduce the negative effects of stress. The acquisition of certain behavioural and cognitive skills can provide the ability to cope with stressful situations and thus reduce psychological symptoms. In order to protect children and adolescents from risks, it is recommended to develop "basic life skills", such as self-awareness and acceptance, effective communication, responsibility, self-regulation, efficient study and career planning.

B- The child's having social support resources, feeling the warmth of parents, receiving appropriate discipline, having adult guidance and supervision, family loyalty and the presence of friends who facilitate socialisation also play a role as protective factors.⁷

Research focusing on resilience to adverse childhood experiences shows that disadvantaged young people can overcome risks and succeed in the face of adversity.⁹ Positive youth development research argues that children's skills developed through prevention efforts (e.g. self-efficacy and self-regulation) and the appropriate environmental context (e.g. supportive parents, friends and neighbours) contribute to adaptive development during adolescence.¹⁰

Adverse childhood experiences are recognised as risk factors for depression and anxiety, while positive childhood experiences are protective against these mental health conditions. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and supported by research on psychological resilience and

positive youth development the environments in which children live, such as their families, schools and neighbourhoods, play a crucial role in protecting them from risk.⁹⁻¹³

Research on parent-child relationships highlights that positive communication between parents and children, emotional support from parents, the provision of rich and functional cognitive stimulation by parents, collaborative problem solving within the family, and high levels of father involvement - referred to as co-parenting - lead to fewer behavioural problems in children later in life and to better academic and social outcomes.¹⁴⁻¹⁸

Furthermore, when children have secure, stable and nurturing relationships with their parents and their basic needs are met, they are less likely to report psychological distress.¹⁹

Given the significant amount of time children spend in schools, these institutions are highlighted as key contexts where early intervention, screening and prevention efforts for mental health can be effectively focused.^{20,21} Schools play a crucial role in facilitating positive childhood experiences. Research has shown that positive experiences at school protect children from adversity.^{22,23} A sense of belonging at school, fostered by acceptance, respect and support, is recognised as a protective factor.^{24,25} Furthermore, studies show that enjoying school and feeling connected to it act as protective factors against the development of mental health problems.²⁶⁻²⁸ Numerous studies have also shown that the positive characteristics of a school climate have a significant impact on the academic success of students from low socioeconomic status (SED) and ethnic minority backgrounds.²⁹⁻³¹

Neighbourhood conditions also have a significant impact on children and their families.⁴ Empirical evidence suggests that fostering relationships within neighbourhoods is associated with lower levels of mental distress among parents and children.³²⁻³⁵ Furthermore, some studies have found that high levels of neighbourhood engagement (e.g., high levels of neighbourhood closeness and trust) are associated with lower levels of adverse childhood experiences, parenting stress, and peer bullying, all of which have positive outcomes for adolescents.^{36,37}

Prevention Programmes Worldwide

There are various programmes in place around the world to build resilience and mitigate risks. It is argued that these programmes can be developed using different strategies. Masten suggests four different strategies for promoting individual resilience and strengthening adaptation:⁹

1. Vulnerability reduction: In this approach, programmes seek to prevent high-risk situations before individuals experience their effects.
2. Promoting positive outcomes: This approach focuses on reducing stressors, for example through parent education.
3. Strengthening existing resources: Improving access to community health, education and recreational services can reduce many of the stressors associated with poverty. Support from social services is one example.
4. Activate protective processes: Protective factors support interventions by directly reducing dysfunction, limiting the impact of risk factors, preventing the onset of a specific risk factor, or breaking the chain of risk that perpetuates the disorder.

The strategies outlined above are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, the use of all of them in prevention efforts will be more effective.

An important element of prevention efforts is the cooperation of all institutions and individuals surrounding the person. For example, cooperation between all teachers, school counsellors, school administrators and support staff, as well as health institutions, museums and social service organisations, both public and private, is crucial.

Kocaeli ONEM Project

Aim of the Kocaeli ONEM Project

Kocaeli ONEM (Obstacles with Special Causes) Project aims to facilitate activities through schools and institutions for students who need social support. The initiative aims to equip disadvantaged children with skills to cope with challenges such as lack of love and affection, raise awareness of national and spiritual values, and contribute to their development as patriotic individuals. The project also aims to improve their quality of life by making them feel special and valued through various activities.

The project aims to foster positive attitudes and develop essential life skills in children by encouraging their participation in psycho-social, cultural, sports, arts and environmental activities, thus helping them to make healthy choices. In addition, supporting disadvantaged and at-risk children, combating drug addiction and implementing interventions in line with the National Strategy Document and Action Plan for Combating Drugs 2018-2023 are among the main objectives of the project.

Methods

Target Groups of the Kocaeli ONEM Project

This social project aims to support students facing various challenges. The target groups include students from families that have been disrupted for various reasons, such as those with separated or deceased parents, those living with relatives other than their parents or in foster homes, and those living in institutions such as child protection agencies or homes of affection. In addition, the project extends its benefits to children with chronic illnesses, those requiring ongoing medical treatment, students with special educational needs and those with mental health problems. The project also includes children from families with chronic illnesses, mental health problems, disabled parents and those whose parents struggle with substance addiction. It includes children with a family member in prison, those facing economic hardship and families without a regular income. The target groups also include drug-dependent students, refugees and students from earthquake-affected regions. Through the comprehensive support of this project, significant steps are being taken to improve the living conditions of these diverse and varied groups. In addition to the students in these target groups, other students who volunteer to participate in the project's activities have also been involved, broadening the scope of the project and aiming for a holistic approach.

Activities of the Kocaeli ONEM Project

The activities planned for disadvantaged children were carried out in three implementation periods: October 2020 to June 2021, September 2021 to June 2022 and September 2022 to June 2023. A total of 19 different activities were planned to support and develop these children. Data on the objectives achieved and the total number of students involved are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistical data of the implementations

	Implementations		
	1	2	3
Number of Students	25.002	21.311	19.382
Number of Schools	786	751	
Activity	2089	7079	5514
Number of Target Group Students Participating in Activities	22.804	83.287	71.588
Total Participation in Activities	100.053	454.499	448.085
Number of Supporter	5208	5708	4944

1. Let's get started: educational seminars

In this project, with the support of academics and university students from Kocaeli University, protective and preventive seminars on "Living in Harmony with Life" were organised for classroom teachers and ONEM children in our schools. These special seminars, held by experts in the field, aimed to improve the thinking processes of our children and contribute to their development as self-confident individuals capable of making healthy choices.

As part of the activity, experts conducted 650 seminars and conferences to improve children's thinking, decision-making and self-confidence. These seminars and conferences aimed to improve children's ability to cope with challenges and develop into happy individuals. It was emphasised that children's self-confidence is closely linked to how they are perceived by parents, teachers and other significant adults in their lives. Children who feel noticed, valued, trusted, given responsibility and appreciated for their achievements tend to have high self-esteem. Perceptions of love and belief in one's own abilities have a significant impact on all areas of a child's life, while self-confidence shapes their social relationships and successes. These seminars and conferences, focusing on harmonious living, have been presented to classroom teachers and children in schools with a protective/preventive purpose, supported by the involvement of academics and university students.

2. I am here too: supporters spending time with children

Supporters are individuals who provide protection, guidance and support. In this activity, supporters selected by collaborating stakeholders spent quality time with ONEM children in need of love and affection. The aim of the event was to reach out to ONEM children suffering from a lack of love and affection and to reduce their social risks. Throughout the project, the supporters took part in various activities with the ONEM children in their care, including cultural and artistic events, discovery trips, sports activities, leisure activities and social responsibility trips.

The focus of the activity was to ensure that children deprived of material and emotional support, especially love and affection, spent valuable time with their supporter individuals/families. In the project, 4.744 supporters participated in this activity with the children. According to the results of the satisfaction surveys, the activity enabled the children to be protected from harmful environments and to participate in social life, thanks to the guidance provided by the supporters. The children reported some anxiety at the beginning of the activity but noted significant changes in their lifestyle and thinking patterns over time, stating that they began to see life in a more positive light and gained new experiences. The 'I Am Here Too' activity demonstrated the importance of positive role models in shaping children's lives through the Supporters' Process. As part of this activity, 2,158 home visits were made, creating an environment in which supporters provided support not only to the children but also to family members.

3. See-think-imagine: photography and art courses

It is well known that children do not have adult levels of self-awareness and communication skills. They often try to express themselves through movements, tone of voice, facial expressions and changes in behaviour when they cannot articulate or make sense of their thoughts and feelings. Drawing is one of the ways they express themselves. It is an important skill that gives children a sense of ability. This activity within the ONEM project aimed to develop the children's photography and drawing skills, thereby illustrating that not everyone sees the world in the same light and highlighting the importance of different perspectives. Children participating in the project were taken to community education centres for drawing and photography classes, and cameras were provided where possible to those who did not have them.

As part of this activity, selected children were offered photography and drawing courses through the Community Education Centres and the artwork produced, a total of 301 photographs and drawings, was displayed at an exhibition. The children's activities during the event were showcased at the year-end gala programme.

4. Be my guest: home visits to combat addiction

In Turkey, an important role in the fight against addiction has been played by the Turkish Addiction Combat Trainers (TBM), psychologists from local health authorities and representatives of relevant institutions, who have provided valuable information to families and relatives of children through home visits. These visits addressed critical issues such as drug addiction, family interaction and safe internet use, with the aim of guiding families and raising awareness of necessary precautions. In addition, during these visits, children were introduced to brain and puzzle games to encourage them to use their leisure time more productively. Where physical deficiencies were identified in the homes, these were addressed in collaboration with philanthropists, NGOs, local governments and communities. Support was also provided to the Narco-Guide training programme, as outlined in the Ministry of the Interior's Circular 2017/02.

Within the scope of this activity, 227 support events were held throughout the country in order to achieve the objectives set out in the National Action Plan and Strategy Document for Combating Drugs 2018-2023. The aim of these events is to prevent students from acquiring harmful habits and to promote conscious use of the Internet, with school-based activities aimed at achieving these goals.

5. Doing what I love: guiding towards hobbies

Children's participation in courses offered by the municipalities in their districts or organised in their schools was supported, so that the focus on their hobbies aimed at improving their thinking, experiential learning, combating negative thoughts and creativity. In line with this aim, the children participated in various courses and expressed themselves in areas such as drama, assistant cooking, values education, glass bead making, rhythm, sports, music, painting, illumination, calligraphy and paper marbling. As part of this activity, 443 events were held in 12 districts, facilitating encounters with successful people in their fields through events such as "Career Days" and "Job Introduction Days".

6. The stage is yours: drama and folk-dance performances

In Kocaeli, drama and folk-dance classes were provided for ONEM children, and drama and folk-dance teams were

formed within the district. The drama workshops opened by the district drama leader teachers have developed the children's capacity for original and empathetic thinking, especially by removing them from their usual environment. As part of this process, performances of plays prepared in the drama workshops were staged to build their confidence. In particular, children who had never been to the theatre before were introduced to it. Through 270 events organised as part of this activity, the children had the opportunity to express themselves on stage. At the KOCAELI ONEM GALA, the children and their carers successfully presented their improvised performances derived from the experiential workshops. The aim was for these children, with an appreciation of art and newly gained confidence, to articulate their feelings and thoughts more fluently and effectively, and to develop the ability to see situations from different perspectives.

7. We value our heritage: introducing scientists and artists

The aim was to cultivate a process whereby values are taught, embodied and translated into behaviour. Through value-oriented activities organised both in schools and in the external environment, the aim was to internalise social emotions, beliefs and values among children. Values are seen as fundamental elements that hold society together and regulate social life. In this context, renowned personalities from the world of science, sport and the arts have been introduced to the students through their character traits and included in school activities. The aim was for students to acquire a sense of civilisation, to appreciate the cultural wealth of the country, to evaluate the journey of our civilisation from the past to the present, to respect social norms and to embrace the culture of living together. In this regard, various trips have been organised to enable close acquaintance with our historical and civilisational heritage, prioritising visits to places of historical and spiritual significance in the province and surrounding historical sites, both in the city where the project is implemented and in neighbouring provinces.

8. We are with you: children's festivals

The aim was to raise awareness of children with imprisoned family members. This awareness has been reinforced among carers, teachers and the institutions that care for these children. A children's festival organised in a park provided an opportunity for these children to step out of their social environment for a moment and express themselves freely through games and fun activities. The aim of this event was to help the children to continue their daily lives as normally as possible.

It was observed that psychological counsellors working in counselling and research centres, in collaboration with school counselling services, provided trauma-focused interventions for these students. Through 119 organised seminars, individual psychological counselling services were provided according to the needs of the children.

9. The importance of exercise: camping and hiking

ONEM children were taught about outdoor sports by the Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports, and received practical training on topics such as choosing a campsite, pitching tents and hiking. This initiative increased the students' interest in outdoor sports and improved their level of knowledge. Hiking was organised as an activity to maintain the physical and health condition of the students,

emphasising the importance of staying fit. The picnic held after the walks reinforced values such as love, respect, sharing, brotherhood and solidarity among the children. The sports activities, courses and competitions organised in collaboration with schools and relevant institutions, and the support for participation in these events, have enabled the children to lead a life intertwined with sport. As part of this activity, 434 events were organised in all districts of the country with the aim of encouraging children to spend their leisure time in sporting activities, developing sportsmanship, responsibility, self-discipline, team spirit and a sense of fair play.

10. Boundless blue skies: kite flying event

The kite flying event, organised amidst the diversity of the sky and nature, contributed to the development of children's observation skills. During this activity, children learned the principles of kite flying through hands-on experience, providing an important opportunity to enhance their observational skills. These flights, which took place in suitable areas such as seaside locations, offered children the opportunity to develop both their physical and social skills. As part of the Boundless Blue Skies event, the children also participated in artistic and cultural activities such as puppet shows and face painting organised at the festival site, gaining experiences that enhanced their social interactions and creativity. All of these activities were seen as contributing factors to the children's overall emotional, social and cognitive development. Through 184 activities, the children were encouraged to spend quality time together, with the aim of raising their awareness and experiencing the beauty of living together.

11. Our culture matters: traditional games

During the Ottoman era, the mangala/transfer game was widely played and recognised as a means of socialisation and cultural exchange, particularly in palace, inn and mosque courtyards. Popular over a wide geographical area, Mangala has contributed to the cognitive, affective and motor skills of its participants, enhancing their strategic thinking and originality. In this context, Mangala courses have been organised through public education centres. At the end of these courses, a 'Mangala Tournament' was organised in each district among the trained students. Students who performed well in the tournament were awarded prizes at the annual ONEM gala. In addition, the District National Education Directorates have organised activities in the first week of every month involving traditional games such as hoop rolling, nine stones, hopscotch, handkerchief grabbing and dodge ball. This initiative included 500 activities.

12. Nature matters to us: environmental activities

The relationship that children develop with nature from an early age fosters a lifelong love and respect for the environment. Time spent in nature, which includes walking, camping, exploring and playing, becomes increasingly valued and integrated into individuals' lives over time. Raising people to live in harmony with nature involves more than just camping; small rituals such as feeding animals, planting seeds and caring for a tree are valuable and effective starts for children. The Nature Matters to Us activity, which included environmental clean-ups, planting saplings and flowers, and maintenance work, has raised awareness in this area. They also visited animal shelters and helped feed and care for the animals there. Children in Kocaeli ONEM have contributed to the creation of the Kocaeli ONEM Forest by

planting their own saplings during the Sapling Festival. The establishment of ONEM Nature Gardens in the districts was facilitated based on projects carried out in schools in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education and the TEMA Foundation. A total of 469 schools participated in this activity and 500 saplings were distributed to guests during the project gala.

13. Pen pal: improving communication

In order to promote the habit of reading among ONEM children, a monthly book-reading event was organised for each child and their supporter in suitable places such as parks, gardens, book cafes or children's libraries. In addition, correspondence between children living in different cities was encouraged to maintain the culture of letter writing, strengthen cultural ties between different regions of the country and build a bridge between ONEM children. As part of this activity, 311 events were held to improve the children's Turkish language skills, including thoughtful writing, using paragraphs, keeping paper clean and orderly, structuring thoughts sequentially, and supporting their language and cognitive development. The activities were planned according to the children's year groups and individual abilities.

14. Every child matters: refugee children

Refugee children living and attending school in Kocaeli were included in the scope of the project. These children, who have experienced the severe effects of war, have been identified and various activities have been organised to accelerate their integration into society and the local environment. As part of the activities, schools have organised events to support the social integration of refugee students. For the refugee children in Kocaeli, 153 special activities were carried out. In order to address the adjustment problems and psychological problems of refugee students, psychological counselling and guidance services have been provided in schools and various psychological support and assistance activities have been carried out at Counselling and Research Centres. In addition, academics have provided "Multicultural Education Seminars" to teachers in the districts, thus achieving the objectives of the activity. In addition, various cultural days and events have been organised to introduce students to the local and national culture of Turkey.

15. Under the stars: camping event

A "camping event" was organised in a suitable location to teach students planned living habits and to protect them from harmful habits. This camping activity was supported by Turkey Anti-Addiction activities of Green Crescent Society. As part of the event, children were taken outdoors with the aim of experiencing safety, discovering and being inspired by nature, learning about balanced nutrition, understanding the benefits of outdoor health activities and understanding the importance of cooperation. To this end, 77 activities were organised across the country to promote a love of nature and environmental awareness. The activities held at the Ballıkayalar National Park Campsite in Gebze aimed to instil planned living habits and protect children from harmful habits. Schools without access to a camp environment created their own school gardens to enable children to experience this activity.

16. My future, my hope: career meetings

Trips to science centers and universities were organized for students from low socio-economic backgrounds with high

academic achievement in order to increase their self-esteem, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and develop healthy expectations for the future. ONEM children, selected from students with the same socio-economic conditions and high academic achievement, attended a foreign language course at district facilities and received language training. Guardians paired with these students ensured that they met with relevant professionals, taking into account their interests, talents, values and career goals. A total of 216 activities were organized to help the children identify their individual career goals.

17. Discovering our past: meeting history and art

Museum trainings were organised to improve children's understanding of time and space, to help them understand and preserve cultural heritage, to help them relate past, present and future in a meaningful way, and to develop their ability to protect, understand and preserve cultural assets and antiquities. Within this framework, training sessions were organised at Kasr-ı Hümayun Palace Museum, Osman Hamdi Bey House and Museum, Fatih's Otağ-Hünkâr Çayırı, Kocaeli Archaeology and Ethnography Museum and SEKA Paper Museum in Kocaeli province. At the SEKA Paper Museum, there are traditional papermaking workshops, workshops on paper arts such as marbling and exhibitions. Through the workshops organised at the museum, children have learnt what can be done with paper and have had the opportunity to observe the paper making process. In particular, in the "Handmade Paper Workshop" in the museum's special activities area, children made their own paper and were introduced to paper arts such as paper painting, calligraphy, miniature, illumination and marbling.

18. Tell me a story: story days

Fairy tales evoke childhood memories and serve as a delightful and natural motivation for bonding with children. As a result, the District Directorates of National Education organised storytelling nights for children, with a total of 407 events held under this activity. Through fairy tales, children gained basic knowledge about the world and life around them, had the opportunity to reason about this knowledge, establish cause-and-effect relationships and understand social expectations. By enabling children to learn from the experiences of others, storytelling contributed to their personal development and provided a safe learning environment. The story days explored a variety of stories, including local stories; children interacted with storytellers and were encouraged to tell their own stories. In addition, adults who acted as facilitators during this process had the opportunity to spend quality time with the children by listening and sharing stories together.

19. Kocaeli ONEM gala: presentation of productions

As part of the See-Think-Imagine activity, photographs and paintings created by children were presented at the end of year exhibition. In this activity, children's interpretations of their own or others' photographs and paintings were displayed alongside the original artworks from the activity programme. For the 'Your Stage' activity, drama, poetry recitals, dance performances and similar activities were selected on a district basis. Those deemed suitable for presentation by the Provincial Project Coordination and Implementation Office were included in the end-of-year programme. In addition, activities such as "I Love What I Do", "Tell Me a Story" and "Exploring Our Past" displayed the results of courses

organised for children in the districts, and folk dances were performed.

Results

Project Survey Results

Within the framework of the Kocaeli ONEM Project, pre-test, post-test, and satisfaction surveys focused on "Social Skills Development" were conducted at the beginning and end of each implementation period. These surveys analyzed the satisfaction levels of students, teachers, and parents, evaluated the efficiency and quality of the activities, and assessed the extent to which the project's objectives were achieved (Tables 2, 3 and 4). Additionally, both structured and unstructured observational studies were carried out on teachers, parents, and students to evaluate the impact of the project and the achievement of its goals. As a result of these processes, it was determined that the children were nurtured to be aware of national, spiritual, moral, and cultural values.

Discussion

Education and learning in schools have strong social, emotional, and academic components. Students learn not only by themselves but also with the support of their peers, teachers, and families. In this learning process, children who feel valued and whose emotions are engaged are more likely to achieve academic success, remain committed to their school and family, and uphold ethical values.³⁸ Within the scope of the ONEM Project, children were introduced to branches of art such as music, painting, illumination, calligraphy and marbling. By learning about Turkish greats and their contributions to the history of civilisation, they developed an awareness of being better prepared for the future. Improving their public speaking and poetry recitation skills has helped them to feel valuable and to know what they want as happy individuals. Activities such as painting, and photography supported the children's mental and emotional development by increasing their concentration and self-confidence. In the process, ONEM children who discovered the value of art and increased their self-confidence gained the ability to express their feelings and thoughts more effectively and fluently through the knowledge and skills they acquired, as well as the ability to see events from different

perspectives. The effects of extracurricular activities (music, dance, singing, drama and visual arts, etc.) in community settings or in schools in general on healthy life skills and well-being were evaluated in a meta-analysis of 20 research articles. Although the studies had some methodological differences, the common conclusion was that participating in creative activities can have a positive effect on behavioural changes, self-confidence, self-esteem, knowledge level and physical activity.³⁹

It has long been known that the shift towards intensive academic instruction in childhood and the consequent decline in social well-being are significant issues. In recent years, the increasing academic pressures worldwide have highlighted changes in educational content.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is crucial to revitalize social relationships in students' lives, plan activities for their leisure time, and foster the development of new hobbies. Although not every child has a special talent, having a hobby or interest plays an important role in their lives. Hobbies have the potential to positively influence an individual's life. With the opening of the courses, the children were supported to reveal their talents without being discriminated against by other students. In the provincial workshops, students discovered their skills and created successful works that were exhibited in schools and at the project's gala event. Children who had not been exposed to different places and cultures were able to discover new places and meet different examples of life through cultural trips. These trips helped the children to learn about the historical and cultural values of the country, to meet their social needs and to strengthen their dialogue. The ONEM project prioritised the best interests of the most disadvantaged children, which meant that decisions and actions were taken with the children's best interests in mind. In a sample of 703 adolescents and their parents, it was shown that highly structured leisure activities decreased children's antisocial behaviour pattern. On the other hand, low structured leisure activities, such as a youth recreation centre, have been shown to increase antisocial behaviour.⁴¹ Therefore, having highly structured leisure time activities such as excursion programs where students learn about different cultures as well as their own historical and cultural values, exploring their talents in provincial workshops and creating new hobbies will prevent discrimination and problematic behaviours.

Table 2. Student satisfaction survey responses

	2021-2022		2022-2023	
	Start	End	Start	End
Do you think that the activities increase your level of self-awareness?	42%	85%	32%	87%
Do you think that the activities at school contribute to your communication skills?	37%	80%	42%	83%
Are you satisfied with your extracurricular sharing with your teachers?	32%	75%	31%	77%
Do you think that the activities contribute to your social and emotional development?	41%	87%	29%	81%
Do you think the activities contribute to your personal development (self-confidence, coping with stress, career planning, etc.)?	43%	86%	37%	88%
Do you think the activities improve your group work skills?	32%	85%	22%	76%
Would you like to participate in activities that will contribute to your personal and social development?	45%	90%	45%	96%
TOTAL	38%	84%	34%	84%

Table 3. Teacher satisfaction survey responses

	2021-2022		2022-2023	
	Start	End	Start	End
Do you feel that the activities in your school are sufficient for the social and emotional development of your students?	38%	85%	42%	87%
Are you satisfied with the personal, social and professional development of your students?	35%	80%	37%	83%
Do you think that the social skills acquired by your students through school activities are reflected in their social relationships (family, peer relationships, etc.)?	45%	75%	34%	77%
Do you think that school activities improve your students' group work skills?	62%	85%	58%	84%
TOTAL	45%	81%	42%	82%

Table 4. Parent satisfaction survey responses

	2021-2022		2022-2023	
	Start	End	Start	End
Do you think the family education activities you take part in at school are sufficient?	35%	70%	32%	78%
Do you think your child's self-expression skills are sufficient?	38%	75%	39%	81%
Do you think that the social skills your child has acquired through school activities are reflected in your child's social relationships (family, peers, etc.)?	41%	85%	45%	88%
Would you like the school to organise activities that contribute to your child's personal and social development?	52%	86%	49%	87%
Do you think your child's ability to cope with stress is adequate?	37%	70%	38%	81%
Do you think your child has adequate problem-solving skills?	29%	70%	31%	72%
Do you think your child is aware of his/her interests, abilities and values?	31%	75%	45%	86%
TOTAL	37%	75%	39%	81%

The activities carried out in the ONEM project aimed to improve children's problem-solving skills and quality of life. Thanks to these activities, the children were better able to cope with the stress caused by biological and social changes, the effects of peer pressure were reduced and their desire to be part of a group was met in a positive way. In addition, their self-motivation and functional interpersonal communication skills have improved significantly. This project has left the children better equipped and with a more positive outlook on life. The ONEM project is important as it demonstrates that well-being in disadvantaged groups is possible when the mutual dedication of relevant stakeholders and the proactive attitudes of managers come together.

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Conflict of interest

The authors related to this article declare no conflict of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Statement

This study is a retrospective analysis based on survey data collected from a social responsibility project conducted by the Governorship of Kocaeli. As it is not a clinical trial and involves the analysis of anonymised data, the Ethics Committee of our institution did not consider formal ethical approval to be necessary. All procedures performed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 and its subsequent amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Author's Contributions

AP: conceived the idea for the project, liaised with the Governorate, coordinated the writing team, and facilitated access to data; ONA: conducted a comprehensive literature review on studies involving disadvantaged children, including adolescents, and wrote the majority of the introductory section; BG: conducted a literature review and wrote the discussion section, performed formal editing, organised the references, and conducted English language checks; EŞ: wrote the methodology and results sections based on the project data, contributed to writing part of the introductory section, and translated the manuscript into English.

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