
When the look changes, the relationship changes: the experience of the ICDP with professionals and families in Ipojuca

A mother observes her three-year-old daughter playing alone. Before, when faced with behavior that she considered inappropriate, her reaction could be immediate: speak harsherly, correct, scold. Now, something happens between the child's behavior and her own response. She stops. Observes. Tries to understand.

"I have this rigid side and my daughter is calm and quiet. When I want to talk tough and I see her playing alone, that's where I take time, and now I communicate in a softer way, she has her way of communicating, I see that now." **Participant in Camela's group, Ipojuca**

This small change helps to tell the story of the implementation of the **International Child Development Programme (ICDP)** in Ipojuca, Pernambuco. An experience that began with the training of professionals and reached the daily lives of mothers and caregivers, proposing something apparently simple, but fundamental: **looking at the child as a person — someone who feels, desires, expresses and communicates with the adults who take care of him.**

It is in this daily encounter between adults and children that the ICDP seeks to produce change.

The project was born with the proposal to support the implementation of the methodology **I am also a person** with the Mãe Coruja do Ipojuca Program, strengthening municipal actions aimed at early childhood. To this end, it articulated training of professionals, implementation of the methodology with families, updating of the material for multipliers and actions aimed at expanding the experience.

First, to train those who are with their families every day

Between August 6 and 14, 2026, **20 professionals** from the areas of Health, Education, Social Assistance, and the Mãe Coruja Program of Ipojuca participated in the training in the ICDP methodology. They were teachers, pedagogical coordinators, psychologists, nurses, social workers, and other professionals who, from different public services, are part of the lives of children and their families.

The proposal was to prepare them to apply the methodology with families served at health centers, schools, social assistance services and by the Mãe Coruja Program. Training was at the center of the strategy designed for Ipojuca: to qualify professionals to understand and experience the ICDP and, later, to conduct the methodology with families of children up to six years old.

But the experience produced a first result even before it reached the families.

By bringing together professionals from different public policies around early childhood, the training created a meeting space that was not part of their routine. One of the participants said that she had worked for more than 13 years in the municipality and had never met with colleagues from other areas to jointly develop actions aimed at early childhood.

During those days, Health, Education, Social Assistance and the Mother Owl Program were able to talk about something they all shared: **how do we take care of the children of Ipojuca?**

And, progressively, the question gained another dimension: **how do I relate to a child?**

Recognize the child as a person

The methodology led the participants to reflect on the child not only as someone who needs to be protected, educated or guided, but as a person who has needs, feelings, desires, opinions and their own ways of communicating what they are experiencing.

Recognizing this modifies the interaction.

It means trying to understand what a child is communicating before simply correcting their behavior. It means exercising empathy, keeping track of their discoveries about the world, and helping them recognize their feelings and regulate their behavior.

And this reflection went beyond professional performance.

One participant said that the experience with the ICDP worked as a "trigger" to revisit situations experienced at school. The stress and difficulties of daily life had sometimes made her relate to children without the empathy that she now recognized as necessary. The training awakened in her the desire to review this practice.

Another professional noticed the same movement at home. She recognized the rigidity with which she educated her own children and reported that, after the experience with the ICDP, she began to try to put herself in the place of her three-year-old daughter, trying to understand what she was feeling and communicating before simply reprimanding a behavior considered inappropriate.

These are changes that begin in the adult. And this is particularly important because it is these same adults who, every day, build the experiences of care, protection, learning and affection lived by children.



Photo of the training with professionals from the Mãe Coruja Program and the Municipal Secretariats of Education, Health and Social Assistance, of the ICDP Multiplier Training in Ipojuca-PE, August/2026.

Learning from experience to multiply it

While the training of professionals was taking place, another important part of the project was being built: the revision of the **ICDP Multipliers Agenda**.

The material was revised to assume a more applied format. In addition to a theoretical introduction to the methodology, the Agenda offers multipliers a plan for conducting each meeting with mothers and caregivers. At this moment, it is being tested in the very realization of the groups of mothers in Ipojuca. The practical experience will serve as a basis for the final adjustments and, later, for its layout.

The training of professionals also continues to be monitored. A group was created in a messaging app with all participants, used to send guidance and answer questions throughout the multiplication. In addition to this continuous communication, virtual follow-up meetings are scheduled in the months of **September, October and November**.

This process is important because the 20 professionals trained are not only participants in a training, they are part of the strategy to make the methodology reach new families.

Between September and November, **each pair of professionals will apply the ICDP with a group of ten mothers**, taking the experience to women they meet daily in health centers, schools, social assistance services and in the Mãe Coruja Program.

From formation to families

In September, the experience reached directly to the mothers accompanied by the Mãe Coruja do Ipojuca Program, with the constitution of two groups in the districts of **Camela and Nossa Senhora do Ó**. So far, **each group has held three meetings**.

Participation has shown different characteristics in the two territories. In Nossa Senhora do Ó, the group started with five mothers, reached ten participants and has **seven mothers with effective participation**. In Camela, adherence has been stronger, with **11 mothers actively participating**.



2nd Meeting of the Camela Mothers group - Ipojuca-PE/ "Dynamics of drawing the qualities of your child" | August/2026.

These groups materialize another central dimension of the project: experimenting with the methodology directly with the families and, from this experience, generating learning that can guide its continuity and eventual expansion.

From the first meetings, it became evident, however, that working on adult-child interaction would require something prior: **building trust with the caregivers themselves**.

These are women who face situations of vulnerability and who often accumulate the care of children and the home with the work necessary to generate income, without having a sufficient support network. In the meetings, experiences of overload, absence of parents in the care of children, family conflicts and domestic violence appear.

Therefore, before talking about the experiences of caring for children, it was necessary to build a space in which they could talk about **what it is like to care in the concrete conditions in which they live.**

Sharing doubts. Anxieties. Difficulties. But also recognizing what they already do well.

The experience thus brought a central lesson for implementation: **to strengthen the care offered to children, it is also necessary to look at those who take care of them and strengthen families.**

Small changes in the way we see and hear

We are still at the beginning of the journey with the mothers, but the first three meetings already offer important signals about how some participants are reflecting on their daily relationships with the children.

A mother of Our Lady of Ó summarized one of these discoveries:

"I learned a lot, to observe how my son wants to talk to me."

Another participant, in Camela, said:

"The person who cares has to be loving and polite."

And another mother defined care based on an important combination:

"A caregiver has to be responsible, understand a child's needs, [give] limits."

These are simple phrases, but they reveal important movements: **observing, trying to understand the child's needs, showing affection and reflecting on one's own way of setting limits.**

Gradually, the exercise of empathy has been inviting these women to look at their sons and daughters in a different way. And when the look changes, the possibility of building relationships with less conflict and violence and with more dialogue, love and compassion opens up.

One of the participants went further and began to realize that interaction does not happen in a single direction:

"I compare it a lot with the moments that happen, the children reflect most of the time how we are with her."

This perception shifts attention exclusively from the child's behavior to the relationship that is being built between him and the adult.

It is precisely in this space of interaction that the ICDP operates.



3rd Meeting of the group of Mothers NSÓ- Ipojuca-PE/ Snack time.

An experience that can break new ground

The implementation in Ipojuca is still ongoing. The meetings of the groups of Camela and Nossa Senhora do Ó will conclude in the first half of October, while the trained professionals will advance in the application of the methodology with new groups of mothers.

Thus, what began in Ipojuca with 20 professionals and two groups of mothers is also beginning to produce lessons learned about how the methodology can be incorporated into the services that are close to the families.

It is still too early to talk about consolidated results. But the experiences reported by professionals and mothers offer **initial qualitative evidence of changes in the way some participants observe the child and reflect on their own interaction with him.**

A professional begins to question the way she responds to children at her school. One mother tries to understand what her three-year-old daughter is communicating before scolding her. Another starts to observe more carefully how her son tries to talk to her.

These are small changes when seen in isolation. But they happen precisely where care is built every day: **in the relationship between a child and the adult who is by their side.**

The desire is that the experience started in Camela and Nossa Senhora do Ó and multiplied by the professionals of Health, Education, Social Assistance and Mãe Coruja is a first step so that the ICDP can progressively reach other families with children up to six years old in Ipojuca.

And we want to go further. The project provided for an articulation with the Mãe Coruja Pernambucana Program to discuss possibilities for strengthening the ICDP at the state level. With the definitive discontinuity of the state program, this meeting will not be able to be held. In October, however, a meeting is scheduled between representatives of the **Mãe Coruja program in Recife** to analyze possibilities for expanding the experience. An important next step.

What we learn on this path is that sometimes an important transformation begins in a very simple way: **an adult learns to stop, observe, and try to understand a child before responding to him.**

These are changes that happen in relationships.

And, in Ipojuca, they have already begun.

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