

The blue tent: A pilot experience of the order of Malta's Italian relief corps (CISOM) to face the family need of caring for young children during public events

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To the Editor,

Looking at various public events, we observed that while safety of participants is always guaranteed with the presence on site of firemen, ambulances and sometimes also a First Aid Point with emergency medical technicians and physicians, instead a primary need such as nurturing and caring for a baby, an infant, or a small child is almost always ignored. We therefore tried to address such a need (1-3) by developing "The Blue Tent Project" within the ambit of the social actions carried out by La Spezia Group of the Order of Malta's Italian Relief Corps (CISOM). The aim of the project is to supply parents/caregivers of young children with a safe and clean place where to feed and/or clean their child during public events lasting more than half a day. This place is a specifically equipped blue tent. The tent is a 3.5 x 3.5 m water-proof tent with side closures: on two facing sides, there is a midline zipper that allows entrance; on the other two facing sides, there are transparent plastic windows that allow the passage of light. To avoid the influence of wind, the tent is then fixed on the ground by means of 4 poles that are stabilized thanks to adequate bags containing water or sand. Inside, an easily cleansable changing table is positioned in front of the entrance,

and n.2 folding chairs with high seatbacks are arranged at the two poles of the changing table (Figure 1).

On a small table, n. 2, bottle-heaters are available for mothers to warm milk or mush. A specific dust-bin for diapers is available in the tent. An electrical power source must be available, either connected to the general electrical source or with a battery or a current generator, for bottle heaters and light. Before entering the tent, the caregiver is given an instructive form (Table 1).

By signing to have received and read it, he/she accepts the service rules. Given CISOM's neutral, impartial, and apolitical nature, out of the tent is a banner with the words: "Here you can freely clean and nurture your child." The writing is presented in five languages: Italian, English, French, Spanish, and Arab. Our staff has been instructed to guarantee the place is clean and is cleaned up after every service, unless engaged in other activities of the Group that cannot be interrupted, in which case the parent/caregiver is asked to manage it. In any case, our staff can give support but never put the methods of care of the parents/caregivers under discussion. At present our experience is limited to 3 events: "70th National day of Bersaglieri Corps" in La Spezia (1 day), the centenary "Saint Giuseppe's fair" in La Spezia (3 days), and



Figure 1. Inside of the Blue Tent (particular).

Table 1. Instructive form contents

	The service is free of charge, and it is open to everybody. Since the contemporary presence inside of 2 infants is the maximum allowed, you are kindly requested to limit your time of use at the least possible, especially in the case of others in queue.
	Your child is always under your responsibility and CISOM is not responsible for any failure of the equipment.
	The changing table must be cleaned and disinfected after every use. If our operator will be engaged in other activities, you are kindly requested to arrange for doing it by yourself.
	Diapers, napkins and every kind of paper must be put in the adequate bin after use.
	If a breastfeeding Mother is inside the tent and a Father or anyway a male asks to enter to care for his/her child, the consent of the breastfeeding Mother will be mandatory.
	In case of special anti-infectious rules, they will be applied.

the centenary “Hazelnuts’ fair” in Sarzana (2 days). During the above-cited events, 22 families took advantage of the tent, 15 for changing diapers and 7 for cleaning and feeding. All the parents/caregivers did very much appreciate the experience. The only problem we encountered was during an unforeseen rainy day. On that occasion, we were positioned on a lawn and had to arrange a dry floor in an emergency, laying out a truck cover as a groundsheet with top-turned edges to impede the entrance of new water from the bottom of the tent. The Sovereign Military Hospitalier Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta is one of the oldest institutions of Western and

Christian civilization. It is a lay order of the Catholic Church since 1113. It is a subject of international law and has diplomatic relations with over 100 states and the European Union, and permanent observer status at the United Nations. It is neutral, impartial and apolitical (4). Today it is active in 120 countries caring for people in need through its medical, social and humanitarian works. Since 1834 the Order of Malta’s government has been in Rome, where it is guaranteed extraterritorial rights. CISOM was founded on June 24th, 1970, as a civilian voluntary corps of the Italian Association of the Order of Malta. CISOM acts together with the Italian Civil Protection in many

emergencies (earthquakes, floodings, management of migrants, medical support to the Coast Patrol on boat and helicopters) and to ensure sanitary assistance during events and to needy people in addition to the social services, by providing physicians, nurses and rescuers (5). To improve support for families with children during long-lasting events, La Spezia Group of CISOM has proposed “The Blue Tent Project.” The aim is to facilitate the care of a small child by providing a clean, adequate, and private place to change the diaper, clean the child, and nurture him/her, either by breastfeeding or by formula or mush. In our pilot experience on 22 cases recruited during three long lasting public events we could register a very positive answer from the caregivers. Problems were not observed during this pilot experience; however, we propose some changes to improve the service. Indeed, during the cold season, it might be useful to have an infrared system to warm the tent. Similarly in the summer season the inside temperature might be too high. One can open two sides of the tent in the middle, but this reduces privacy. A mobile refrigerating unit might help, but it is currently unavailable. To place the tent in a shady area might be an alternative and cheaper solution to avoid inside temperature rises too much. In addition, during rainy days, it would be useful if the tent’s floor was waterproof and prevents the entry of water. In conclusion, this pilot experience has been very positive for parents and caregivers. We observed that its use in long-lasting public events really satisfied the needs of families and caregivers. Besides, it has raised the idea of some improving changes. One cannot forget that the presence of the Blue Tent in a public event delivers and supports the important message that civilization means to respect the needs of children and their caregivers.

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