

A Holistic Approach to Child Recovery:

The role of stimulation therapy in malnourished children

BACKGROUND

Acute malnutrition in children under the age of 5 has severe impact on their overall development. While nutritional care is a priority, **appropriate daily stimulation is essential to engage and improve their psychomotor (motor, sensory, language and cognitive) development and restore their desire to play, experiment, and thrive.** In resource-limited settings, this component is often neglected.

“One aim should be to play with each child, individually, for 15–30 minutes each day, in addition to informal group play”

World Health Organization. (2000). Management of the child with a serious infection or severe malnutrition

In 2023, Humanity & Inclusion set up a pilot stimulation therapy for malnourished children (STMC). This project in Burao IDP camp, Somaliland, aimed at preventing or reducing developmental delays linked to malnutrition in children aged 6 months to 5 years old, referred by our nutrition partner.

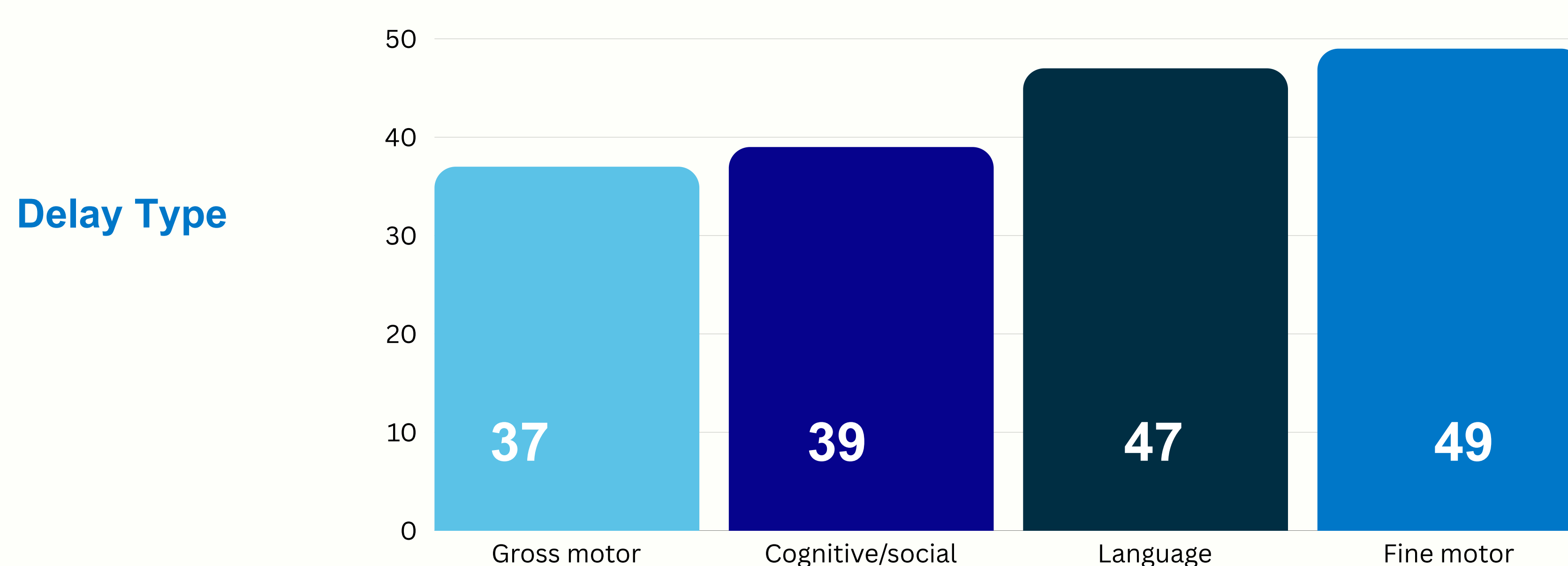
Since then, our physiotherapist has provided stimulation therapy for 151 severe acute malnutrition (SAM) children

- Each child is offered a face to face (child, caregiver, therapist) program of seven sessions, including initial and final assessment, therapeutic play activities, and strong involvement of caregivers to continue the stimulation in their home environment;
- Locally-made toys and equipment encourage caregivers to continue play activities at home;
- HI facilitates service access by providing transportation allowance for those who can't afford it.

METHODS

Although no formal impact study has yet been conducted, regular data collection on children's profiles, feasibility of the protocol, and family commitment to the sessions has been carried out. A case study, complementary to this abstract, illustrates the progress of one child during the protocol.

A total of 151 children and 151 caregivers participated in the program, with a total of 1,051 sessions conducted, an average of 6.9 sessions per child.



#56

Results

Based on the subjective assessment tools used during the pilot study, the results and observations reveal:

- An improvement in children's motor, sensory, cognitive, language and social skills
- A strengthened relationship or bond between the children and their caregivers which resulted in improved caregivers' abilities to stimulate their children.

“By the end of the program, smiles and play were at the heart of parent–child interactions.”

As shared by the physiotherapist who led the sessions

Conclusions

The aim of the next phase of the project is to strengthen the use of tools used for assessing child development (MDAT) and parenting skills.

The goal is to objectively measure the impact of the sessions and parental involvement on reducing delays, and improving motor, sensory, language and cognitive development in acutely malnourished children, and their engagement with their environment through play.