



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

HANDS THAT PROTECT: ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD IN JIJOCA DE JERICOACOARA – CE

The *Hands that Protect* Project is an important initiative by ACER Brasil's branch in Jijoca de Jericoacoara (CE), primarily aimed at ensuring the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents. The project focuses directly on prevention, awareness, and strengthening the support network, addressing one of the most serious forms of violence: child and adolescent sexual abuse and exploitation.

In May, the project's actions gain even more prominence through the campaign around **18th May – National Day to Combat the Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents**. This date commemorates the Araceli case, which occurred in 1973, and today represents a major mobilisation in defence of children's rights across the country. *Hands that Protect* has been working effectively and sensitively in Jijoca de Jericoacoara, a region with intense tourist activity and social vulnerabilities that demand heightened attention to childhood.

How the project contributes in practice:

Educational workshops with children and adolescents, addressing themes such as rights, self-protection, trust, and safe communication.

Training sessions with families, educators, and community leaders, promoting listening, support, and tools for prevention.

Psychosocial support for children who have experienced sexual abuse and their families, aiming to repair harm and prevent further situations.

Partnerships with public bodies and the protection network, ensuring quick and effective responses to suspected or confirmed abuse cases.

The project understands that protecting childhood is a shared responsibility — of families, schools, public services, and civil society. Therefore, its actions target not only direct care for children but also the formation of a community culture of protection, vigilance, and solidarity.

In Jijoca de Jericoacoara, this mission becomes even stronger due to the specificities of the area. Through activities involving different social factors — such as community discussions with families, training workshops for educators, actions with community leaders, awareness campaigns, and coordination with local protection networks — the project strengthens social bonds and promotes an integrated response tailored to the realities and needs of the municipality.

The goal is clear: to ensure every child has access to a safe, welcoming environment conducive to their full development. This requires active listening, respect for the region's cultural diversity, and recognising childhood as an absolute priority in local policies and practices.



By valuing community leadership and encouraging shared responsibility, the project helps build a solid support network where any sign of neglect, abandonment or violence is promptly identified and addressed. Thus, protecting childhood in Jijoca de Jericoacoara becomes not just an occasional action but a collective and ongoing commitment.

More than providing immediate responses, the project invests in preventive and educational actions, forming a solid foundation for a culture of peace and rights. Every activity is a step towards a fairer Jericoacoara, where all children can grow up with dignity, affection, and real opportunities to dream and shape their future.

Protecting childhood is a collective challenge requiring ongoing commitment, coordination between sectors, and sensitivity to local realities. The experience developed in Jijoca de Jericoacoara shows that when direct care efforts are combined with community mobilisation, support network building, and strengthening social ties, it is possible to

create safer, fairer, and more welcoming environments for children.

The project, by working in an integrated manner with families, schools, public services, and civil society, demonstrates that child rights protection goes beyond responding to risk situations — it starts with listening, strengthening community bonds, and building a culture of solidarity and civic vigilance.

In this process, support from Santander's *Amigo de Valor* programme has been essential in expanding the project's reach and strengthening strategies for prevention and rights promotion. This support reinforces the importance of private sector engagement in social initiatives committed to structural transformation in the lives of children and adolescents in Brazil.

Moreover, the project also benefited from an important counterpart investment by ACER Brasil, which provided two Pop 110 motorbikes.

This resource has been vital in ensuring the mobility of the technical team and facilitating access to more remote areas of the municipality, directly contributing to the effectiveness and success of fieldwork.



The experience of the *Hands that Protect* Project, developed by ACER Brasil's branch in Jijoca de Jericoacoara, reaffirms the importance of local initiatives that are sensitive, integrated, and committed to ensuring the rights of children and adolescents. In a context marked by social inequality and the intensification of tourism, it becomes urgent to strengthen protection networks that not only respond to violations but also focus on prevention, education, and community mobilisation.



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LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: WHEN FOOTBALL OPENS DOORS TO THE FUTURE

The *Levelling the Playing Field* project, run by ACER Brasil, has been transforming the lives of children and adolescents through football. More than teaching the sport, the project promotes values such as respect, teamwork, discipline, and self-esteem — creating real opportunities for personal and social development.

Levelling the Playing Field was founded on the idea of using football as a tool for inclusion, learning, and empowerment.

The project offers re We spoke to Mark, a Briton who has trained young athletes in various countries and currently leads the *Levelling the Playing Field* sessions. His international experience has brought a fresh perspective to the project:

“I’ve learned a lot from the children at ACER. They show great interest and, as soon as you arrive, they greet you warmly. That reflects a genuine desire to learn, especially in the world of football. It’s really rewarding to spend time with them here.”

“The aim is for the children to find

balance between their dedication to football and other important aspects of life. Everyone has a dream — many think, ‘I’ll be the next Neymar.’ But there’s only one Neymar, just as there’s only one Mbappé among millions. If you want a better life, you need to take every opportunity that comes your way. If you have access to many opportunities, that’s brilliant. But the reality is not everyone does. That’s why it’s important to ensure that children develop a range of skills so they can open more doors in the future.”



“One example is Khan Academy — a website available not just in Brazil but worldwide, offering excellent content to support learning in maths and many other subjects. It’s a free tool for anyone to use. Still, many people don’t even know it exists. The idea is not to replace school, but to provide supplementary support, a boost that can help children do better in their studies.”

Mark’s insights show that the project goes far beyond sports technique. It’s a space for human connection, where children and educators build a network of mutual learning and growth together. In *Levelling the Playing Field*, every training session becomes a chance to reinforce values, broaden horizons, and strengthen community ties — proving that sport truly has the power to level the playing field and open paths towards a fairer, more inclusive future.

“The methodology I developed in the Caribbean focuses on each player’s individual development. Often, coaches prioritise team performance, but when the ball reaches you, it’s essential to have strong individual skills. Many children end up giving up because they see that some of their teammates are more skilled. My goal is precisely to create opportunities for everyone to develop these skills in a balanced way, giving each one the chance to improve at their own pace and build confidence on the field.”

Levelling the Playing Field shows with every session that sport is a powerful tool for inclusion and social transformation. By

combining football, education, and human development, the initiative offers children and adolescents much more than technical skills — it provides values, confidence, and new perspectives for the future.



The presence of professionals like Mark, with international experience and a keen eye for each young person’s potential, reinforces the project’s purpose: to shape conscious citizens, prepared to face challenges on and off the pitch. By investing in individual development and collective learning, *Levelling the Playing Field* helps reduce inequality and strengthen communities.

The project is structured into two boys’ groups, in the under-10 and under-12 categories. They take part in activities twice a week, on Wednesday and Friday mornings. Upon arriving at ACER, one group is taken by

van to the *Camisa 9* pitch for a 90-minute training session with coach Mark. Meanwhile, the other group remains at ACER, engaging in online educational activities using the Khan Academy platform. Midway through the morning, the groups switch: those who trained return to ACER to study, and those who were studying go to the training session.

In addition to the weekly routine, participants often play matches against other teams at weekends — a moment that is eagerly awaited and greatly enjoyed by all.

In a setting where so many children and adolescents face social, economic, and educational barriers, *Levelling the Playing Field* stands out as a concrete example of how sport can be an agent of change.

Through football, the project creates a safe, welcoming, and stimulating environment where every participant is encouraged to dream, learn, and grow holistically. More than forming players, the

project shapes confident, aware individuals prepared to forge their own paths.



Through football, the project creates a safe, welcoming, and stimulating environment where every participant is encouraged to dream, learn, and grow holistically. The focus goes beyond technical skills, promoting emotional, social, and cognitive development in an inclusive space where each child feels seen and valued.

More than forming players, the project shapes confident, aware individuals prepared to forge their own paths. By nurturing values like teamwork, resilience, empathy, and respect, it empowers young people to make positive choices, build meaningful relationships, and become active agents of change in their communities.