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Intervening in the Lives of Street Children
A Case from Zambia

by

Brandy Blackman

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Contents

Abstract

There have always been orphaned, abandoned and working children in the world. Historically, however, adequate systems to deal with these children existed. In the more industrialized societies, they were placed as apprentices, into foster care or in institutions. In the more traditional societies, they were absorbed into the extended family network. Many of these same tactics are still used in industrialized countries. However, in the past few decades, the unmanageable burden of debt, the AIDS pandemic and the overall lack of development in non-industrialized countries have led to the near dissolution of the extended family safety net. It is no longer possible for needy children to be taken in, and even children who do reside with their families, may spend most of their time working in the streets. These children, known as street children, are the unfortunate products of modern-day social and economic systems. Unless these systems are amended, the street child phenomenon will not subside. Nevertheless, unique and individual children are on the streets today. They have a right to safety, shelter, adequate nutrition, education and the other basic necessities of life. Therefore, development practitioners concerned about street children, have an obligation to design and implement relevant and functional forms of intervention. This paper attempts to highlight the main factors underlying the street child phenomenon, the types of intervention that have been most often relied upon, and the details of one case study from Zambia. Finally, questions to be thoughtfully and carefully considered before beginning a program for street children, are offered.

The Global Street Child Phenomenon

During the last decades of the twentieth century, images of disheveled and dirty children working, begging and playing on the streets of developing countries began to make their way into the consciousness of Westerners. Coined "street children," they became the focus of much international attention and concern. Conferences were convened to discuss their fate, agreements were made and various programs and policies were implemented. Nevertheless, as the world watched and celebrated the dawn of the new century, more children than ever were themselves waking up from a night of sleep on city sidewalks and park benches. The global figure most often quoted is 100 million, with 25 million of these children believed to be completely homeless (U. S. House 1991).

At first glance, this problem appears to be insurmountable and all of the children who spend their days in the center of cities like Nairobi, Calcutta and Rio de Janeiro seem to be lost

and destitute. When one critically examines the history of specific geographical regions and the biographies of individual children, however, the vast complexity of the situation begins to surface. Some of the children are truly alone and abandoned, but the majority of them are not. In a similar vein, some of the projects designed to help these children are succeeding, whereas some of them are not. Either way, however, most of the projects have little or no impact on the street child phenomenon itself. That is, they do not typically address the underlying circumstances that pushed or pulled the children into the streets in the first place. Until these issues, such as the grinding poverty that exists in developing countries, the unmanageable burden of foreign debt and the AIDS pandemic, are solved, the street child phenomenon will continue unabated.

Nevertheless, individual children are on the streets today, and their lives and futures are at stake. Some programs assist them to become literate, to finish high school, to develop skills in a trade or to break a drug habit. Others have less positive results, but all of them have a very real and powerful impact on the lives of the children involved. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously assess the effectiveness of the programs, to share findings across borders and disciplines, and to use the findings to devise better policies and strategies for intervening in the lives of street children. Practitioners involved in working with street children have an obligation to understand their program, their city and their children, but also to understand the historical and global context within which the street child phenomenon exists. They also have an obligation to be aware of lessons learned in other places and times and to avoid repeating already-made mistakes. Finally, they must communicate with each other and constantly review and revise their tactics. With these obligations in mind, this paper attempts to examine the history of the global street child phenomenon, to analyze some of the broad causes and underlying factors, and to then describe a very specific example of a successful project from Zambia. It is also an attempt by a

former practitioner to share a few experiences and lessons learned and to offer a set of questions to consider when designing and planning to start a program for street children.

Street Children in Historical Perspective

Although the street child problem has received much international attention in the past two decades and the number of children spending their days and nights on the streets seems to have exploded, there have always been poor and abandoned children who have ended up in the streets. In response, societies have devised different interventions that have rotated into and out of favor depending on the need and the social values of the time. None of these responses, however, has deviated far from its roots in pre-industrial Europe. The same basic ideas of informal care, fostering and institutionalization have consistently been relied upon, and are still being relied upon in both industrialized and non-industrialized countries. Understanding some of this basic history and seeing the reasoning behind the decisions that were made, therefore, could still be useful to the practitioners of today.

Foundling homes are known to have existed in Europe as early as the thirteenth century. By the nineteenth century, they were in nearly every major city and it is estimated that 100,000 babies were abandoned per year (Kertzer 2000). While many of these children died before the age of one, those who survived were typically given to foster families with a lactating woman who could act as a wet-nurse. However, these foster families were only responsible for a certain number of years, after which the children could be evicted, returned to the foundling home, or simply left to their own devices on the streets. In southern Italy, for example, foster families only received assistance from the foundling home until a boy's fifth birthday or a girl's seventh. The situation was a bit better for the abandoned boys of northern Italy, whose foster families received assistance until they turned eight, twelve, fifteen or even eighteen in certain circumstances. Girls

had a more protected status because of the foundling home's legal responsibility of protecting

their honor (Kertzer 2000). This meant that even as payments to a foster family were stopped and

the family discontinued caring for a girl, the foundling home either had to readmit her

indefinitely or arrange for her to be married. Considering that the majority of foster families

returned or abandoned their charges immediately upon the cessation of payments, it can be

assumed that most girls were pushed into marriage at an early age, while most foundling boys

were pushed into the streets or labor markets. How these children progressed through adulthood

is generally unknown.

Judith Ennew explains how "there has been a historical progression in ways of dealing

with children whose links to the current generation of adults are not firmly embedded in

structures of legitimacy, ranging from kinship to citizenship. Care of children who are viewed as

outside these structures seems to have passed from a generalized societal investment in informal

fostering and welfare mechanisms within kinship-based societies, to institutionalized

abandonment in early modern states in which a public law solution is provided for a perceived

demographic problem" (Ennew 2000, xiv). A problem that had once been solved by private,

informal arrangements, had, by the thirteenth century, begun to slowly shift towards the public

realm and become a public responsibility. In fact, by the 1800's and 1900's, this shift was

completed in most of Europe and in the rapidly industrializing United States. Orphanages and

foundling homes were commonplace, and it was perfectly legal to abandon a child as long as it

was placed "where it would be promptly succoured" (dos Guimaraes Sa 2000, 29). As a matter

of fact, these children were seen as an asset that the "state could redistribute according to its

needs" (dos Guimaraes Sa 2000, 29). For example, French foundlings were sent to populate the

colonies in Louisiana and Algeria, and Napolean had a widely publicized dream of creating a

special military corps out of them (dos Guimaraes Sa 2000). Although this never occurred, abandoned children were routinely placed on labor-hungry farms and in factories. Isabel dos Guimaraes Sa writes, "The justification for this was that foundlings were, of course, a charge on public finances, and it was felt that the state, having spent money on their upbringing, was entitled to exercise authority over them" (dos Guimaraes Sa 2000, 29).

However, as women gained more rights and independence, as birth control became more available, and as public health greatly improved and per capita wealth increased, the number of orphans and abandoned children in Europe and North America rapidly declined. Around the same time, orphanages started being criticized for their impersonal nature and the caretakers began being accused of relying on harsh, authoritarian and punitive child-rearing methods. The White House Conference of 1909 officially recommended foster care as the preferred way of raising parentless children (Adler 1981). As a result, the number of children in foster home care increased from 8 to 49 percent between 1911 and 1942 (Adler 1981). This increase continued, and was mirrored by a steady decline in orphan asylums, until foster homes eventually became the primary method of housing abandoned children in Western Europe and North America. Institutions became reserved for those children who were emotionally disturbed or otherwise could not fit into a typical fostering environment. Thus, there was a full cycle of responses to the problem of unwanted and orphaned children. What had started as an informal and locally organized network of wet-nurses taking in other women's children, gradually became transformed into a system in which the state was responsible for the upbringing of these children. Originally, the state carried out this responsibility by placing the children in private homes and paying a stipend to the care-taking family. Then, the late 1800's and early 1900's saw a "golden age" of asylums, in which most orphaned and abandoned children were institutionalized, with

their expenses being met by the combined generosity of individual philanthropists, religious groups and local governments (Adler 1981). Finally, the preferred response shifted back to the fostering of children in private homes, with the state paying a standard amount for each child on its rosters.

Modern Homelessness and Run-Aways

In the modern landscape, street children can still be found in both industrialized and non-industrialized countries. There are some significant differences, however, in the overall prevalence of the population. In the United States and Europe, these children and adolescents are typically referred to as homeless youth or run-aways or both. They have usually left home of their own accord and are fleeing family violence, substance abuse or pervasive and protracted neglect. They make up about 29 percent of the total homeless population in the United States and are identified according to the Stewart B. McKinney Assistance Act of 1987 as:

- Lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence
- Living in (a) a shelter, (b) an institution (other than a prison or other institutionalized facility), or (c) a place not ordinarily used as a sleeping accommodation for human beings (Waxman and Trupin; U.S. Public Law 100-77).

Although some of the reasons why children end up on the street are the same in developing countries, the overall prevalence is much greater. For example, in 1997, there were an estimated 630,000 school-age children in the homeless population in the United States, although it is widely believed that this number represents an undercounting of homeless adolescents (U.S. Department of Education 1999). That is, there were 630,000 individual homeless children out of a total population of approximately 250 million. In Zambia, by comparison, a country of approximately 9 million, there are an estimated 90,000 street children

(UNICEF 2000). In other words, the United States has thirty times the population of Zambia but only seven times as many street kids.

Nevertheless, any street children are too many street children, and it is important to look for the common threads that run through both the industrialized and the non-industrialized countries. In both types of societies, the street child phenomenon involves questions of affordable housing as a human right, access to education for all, and the need to protect children from abuse and neglect. It also involves understanding the street children as both actors and re-actors. As Marc Posner writes, "Families from which children run – or from which they are expelled by parents – are often characterized by an inability to communicate and peacefully resolve conflicts: both the typical conflicts that arise during adolescence and more serious conflicts resulting from family dysfunction. As conflicts accumulate and intensify, family life becomes intolerable and the youth leaves home, or is physically locked out (or taken to a social service agency or police station) by parents" (Posner 2000, 248). In other words, the child often deliberately makes the decision to take his or her chances on the streets rather than continue suffering within an abusive or dysfunctional family situation. This scenario can also be seen in the street child population of the developing world. A study of street children in Durban, South Africa, for example, found that 61% had left home because of violent, overcrowded or unhappy family situations (Chetty 1997). The other 39% claim to have left because of not liking school, wanting to earn money or for the excitement and adventure found on the streets. Most interesting, however, is the fact that of the 193 street children included in the study, only 2 were push-outs or throwaways who were asked to leave by their families, while all of the others had left voluntarily (Chetty 1997).

Therefore, although at first glance the modern street child phenomenon may seem to be primarily a developing world concern, the child and adolescent run-aways of rich and poor nations share similar stories. They are young people fleeing intolerable home lives for the relative safety and camaraderie of shared days among peers. However, the longer the children stay alone on the streets and the less adult contact they maintain, the more likely they are to begin participating in illegal activities such as drug use and drug dealing, theft, gang violence, and prostitution. Vanitha R. Chetty includes the following overview in her study of street children in Durban, South Africa:

> A review of the literature reveals that most of the studies implicate street children in various acts of deviance. Street children's involvement in begging, prostitution, drug abuse and various types of theft is widely documented. Their exploitation and coercion into deviant activities by older children, gang members or adult criminals is also a reality. The longer they remain on the streets, the greater the possibility that they will be drawn into the web of illegal activities. When legitimate means of supporting themselves become unavailable, illegitimate activities provide a means of support (Chetty 1997, 50).

Of course, those children who have the least adult contact and who spend both their days and nights on the streets are at the greatest risk. Nevertheless, in developing countries, many children participate in some informal economic activity during the day and return home to their families at night. Even these children face dangerous and uncertain situations daily. They are usually expected to contribute to the family income and may be convinced to turn to more lucrative and chancy activities when sales are slow. It is common, for example, for both boys and girls to be propositioned to perform oral sex in exchange for money or to act as the runners of contraband materials. Thus, although children are on the streets for many different reasons (each of which calls for a different type of intervention) the street is a dangerous place for all children.

Street Children in the Developing World

A generally accepted definition of street children, which originated out of the 1983 Inter-NGO program on street children and street youth, is "any boy or girl who has not reached adulthood for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults" (Inter-NGO 1983, 832). Of course, the severity of the damage done to a child's physical and mental health, and to his or her social development depends on the amount of time actually spent on the street and the type and quality of family or other adult contact. When considering forms of intervention, therefore, it is critical to understand:

- What an individual child's history is
- How much time he or she has actually spent on the street
- Whether or not he or she maintains a relationship with some family member

These pieces of information will help the practitioner know into which of the following three categories an individual child fits, and thus, which type of intervention will tend to be most successful. As a hierarchy of children's street use, the categorization comes from a 1993 UNICEF sponsored publication called The Street Children of Asia, and is a general description. It is not marked by a rigid membership at any level, and some children move fluidly among and between the levels. Yet, it is still relevant to the discussion of street children and understanding the special tendencies and characteristics of children from each group is critical to designing and implementing successful programs for them. The categories are:

- *Children working on the street, with regular family contact*: Comprising about 70% of street children, these children have family connections of a regular nature. Most of this group still attend school and return home at the end of each working day. They are referred to as children on the street.
- *Children living and working on the street*: These children see the street as their home and from it they seek income, food, shelter, and a sense of family among companions. Family ties may exist but are viewed negatively, and their former home is infrequently visited. They are referred to as children of the street and are estimated to make up 20% of the total.

▫ ***Completely abandoned and neglected children*:** Having severed all ties with a biological family, these children are entirely on their own for material and psychological survival. They are estimated to make up the final 10% (Childhope 1993).

The group of children who tend to be the most visible and who make up the largest percentage of street kids are those who work on the streets and return to their homes in the evening. This group, known as children "on the street," attend school when possible and leave school when the family can no longer afford the fees or when the family requires a larger income contribution from the child. In a sense, this situation is the same as children growing up in rural areas of the developing world. These children may or may not attend school, but undoubtedly contribute to the family livelihood by working in the fields or garden, looking after livestock, doing domestic chores and childcare while the parents are working, or tending to a small family business. In the cities, some of these tasks are obviously irrelevant, but the child's labor and cash earnings are still critical to the family's survival. A 1995 study of nine Latin American countries concluded, for example, that the incidence of poverty would increase 10-20% without the incomes of working children between the ages of 13 and 17 (U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 1995). Interestingly, most developing countries have such a desperate shortage of schools in the rural areas that the possibility of sending children to school may be a primary factor in the decision of a family to relocate from rural to urban areas. Children in these families are still expected to carry out their income-generating activities, while also having the opportunity to attend classes during part of every day.

A 1997 UNICEF background paper entitled "Education and Child Labour," describes how children in Asia and Africa are regarded "first and foremost as members of the family, whose duties and responsibilities are seen as central to their development and may seem to take precedence over their individual rights" (UNICEF 1997, 5-6). The article goes on to say that, in this context, "work is a means to integrate children into a family and kinship network. Helping

the family is paramount in a child's development, is not seen as hazardous, and may even be viewed as serving her/his best interests" (UNICEF 1997, 6). The other contributing factor in many developing countries is the seemingly irrelevant curriculum in most public schools. It is clear that only a tiny minority of adults will ever secure employment in the formal economy. Therefore, because parents know that practical skills such as cooking, sales techniques, simple carpentry or bicycle repair will guarantee some type of income in their children's future, they may feel that working provides a much more sound footing for adulthood than does schooling. Again according to UNICEF, "Children develop many useful skills from concrete experiences such as work, including using tools, negotiation, organization of time, persuasion, and survival. There is evidence that moderate work can itself be a positive educational experience which boosts self-esteem and inculcates responsibility" (UNICEF 1997). Thus, especially in the developing world, there is actually a fine balance between the positive and negative aspects of children working and children being in school. The children need the literacy, mathematics and general information found in primary education. At the same time, they need the income and practical skills gained from work.

Conclusion to Part One

Orphaned, abandoned and working children have existed for hundreds of years and have filled various niches in society. In recent years, industrialization and ever-increasing wealth in some countries have been accompanied by a complex change in the beliefs surrounding the very concept of childhood and what it should entail. Whereas child labor and non-attendance in school may have been common, for example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States, these practices are now illegal and generally viewed as reprehensible. However, families

in developing countries face a completely different set of constraints and possibilities. The schools that do exist there tend to be remnants left over from colonial governments. They focus on overly academic subjects, use European languages that are not commonly spoken among the people, and prepare children for matriculation into secondary school even when it is known that only a tiny minority of them will go. At the same time, survival is often a day-to-day undertaking and requires the contributions of every member of the family, be they children or adults. School, therefore, is seen as a luxury that would be nice, but simply is impossible.

It is these underlying conditions and the differences among types of street children that must be recognized by the practitioners and policy makers who design and implement programs for them. Working children and children "on the street" will find certain types of programs useful, whereas children "of the street" will benefit from a completely different form of intervention. The following section focuses on a project in Zambia that has been successful in helping children "of the street" stay safe, obtain an education and learn marketable skills. It is one possibility of many, but seems to offer a few insights to the practitioner interested in this subgroup.

A Look at Zambia

Every country has a specific history, culture and economic base that combine to make it what it is. These characteristics also contribute to the push and pull factors that lead to the creation of street children, and they form the context in which intervention policies and programs must be developed. This part of the paper offers a detailed look at Zambia, a country that is representative in many ways of other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the world. However, Zambia also has its particular story that must be understood in order to devise appropriate responses to the street child problem. Taking this into consideration, therefore, an overview has been offered of the specific underlying causes of the street child phenomenon in Zambia. An example of a successful project has been given, and finally, a few of the locally important policies have been highlighted. Practitioners working in other countries will have to read this description for its spirit and its anecdotal value, extrapolate what is and is not relevant to their particular situation and then creatively devise their own forms of intervention.

As a sovereign nation, Zambia came into being in October of 1964, when it gained its independence from the British colonial power. The Europeans had opened numerous copper mines in North-Central Zambia and the majority of the country's economy rested on profits from the mines. In fact, more than 75% of its export earnings came from copper (Brown 1995). With this lack of economic diversification, a steep drop in copper prices led almost immediately to a severe economic depression in the 1970's. This depression was made worse by conflict in the

region and by Zambia's conspicuous support of Zimbabwe's black liberation movement, which made some governments unwilling to engage in trade with Zambia.

Exacerbating these difficulties, President Kenneth Kaunda declared Zambia a one-party state in 1972, and the country did not return to a democratic system until 1991. Although President Kaunda was generally respected and was thought of as the father of modern Zambia, his government was notoriously inefficient, controlling and corrupt. Michael Barratt Brown describes this somewhat common situation in his book, <u>Africa's Choices</u>. He writes, "By the 1970's many states which had semi-competitive one-party systems, like Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, became increasingly authoritarian. The scope for opposition was reduced and the independence of cooperatives, trade unions and other interest groups was curbed. Ruling parties became entrenched in the system of clientelism" (Brown 1995). A professor from the University of Zambia also admitted "that much state spending in Zambia as elsewhere was wasteful, low priority being accorded to those sectors such as health and education which provide the necessary inputs for the building up of human capital" (Brown 1995, 267).

This general decline in the economy due to the falling copper prices and the mismanagement of the public sector, combined with nearly unreachable interest repayments on the foreign debt and rapid urbanization, created declining living standards and disintegrating families. Real wages plummeted, unemployment rose, and the percentage of Zambians living below the poverty line multiplied. For example, between 1981 and 1986, the wages earned by mineworkers fell from between 60 to 80 per cent and the wages earned by government employees only lasted, on average, for five days (Brown 1995). During approximately this same time, urban unemployment was over 60% (Brown 1995). Not only did the combination of all of these events make it impossible for many families to pay the school fees required by government

schools, but many of them also depended on the wages earned by their children's economic activities in the informal sector. The International Labor Organization recognized the importance of this income in a 1988 report declaring that the provision of totally free schooling would be inadequate to solving the nonattendance problem, because "one of the major costs associated with schooling is the loss of the child's earnings" (Bequele and Boyden 1988). Johann le Roux made an even stronger argument by claiming that, as "unskilled, energetic, available, low-cost and short-term employees," the labor of street children is absolutely necessary to modern economies (Le Roux 1996, 966). Thus, the existence of street children is not inimical to modernity, but is actually sustained by it and is an integral part of it.

Orphaned by AIDS, Adopted by the Streets

AIDS, unfortunately, is also a devastating and unforgettable part of this modern landscape. In 1999 alone, it claimed 2.6 million lives (85% of which were in Africa), and by the end of 2000, an estimated 10.4 million African children under 15 will have lost their mothers or both parents to the disease. Zambia has been dealt a tremendous blow by the AIDS epidemic. It is currently believed that 19% of the adult population is living with HIV/AIDS and that approximately 360,000 children have lost at least one of their parents to AIDS related illnesses (Bartholet 2000). Undoubtedly, if one single explanation for the upsurge of orphans and street kids in Zambia were to be identified, it would be AIDS. A report posted on the official UNICEF web site described the situation as, "a country already crippled by poverty and debt, Zambia is facing overwhelming challenges, as a generation of young people prepare to grow up without the love and support of their parents. Although the majority of orphans are still absorbed by the extended family, the number of children living or working on the streets is estimated at more

than 90,000 and growing" (UNICEF 2000). Nearly every family is effected and the government is unable to cope.

Several different studies conducted in Zambia between 1991 and 1995 found that between 32% and 40% of all households had already taken in at least one orphan (University of Zambia 1995). Because of the relatively recent nature of the AIDS epidemic, primarily adults and young adults have been infected, leaving the elderly generation to raise young children for a second time. In the Katete neighborhood of Lusaka, for example, researchers found that there was an average of three orphans per family among those households that had adopted orphans. They also found that the caregivers were much more likely to be women, that over half of them were grandparents, and that only 18% had enough maize (the staple food) to plant and consume until the next harvest (University of Zambia 1995). It is easy to see that these families would probably not have the resources to pay school fees, buy uniforms and buy school supplies. Living far below the poverty line, they need every able-bodied family member, child or adult, to contribute to the household income.

Besides of this lack of schooling, AIDS orphans are also much more likely to be malnourished, to not receive health care and to be abandoned. There is a powerful stigma attached to the disease and some caretakers see raising an AIDS orphan as a poor use of limited resources, since the child may be infected and die anyway. Referring to this pattern, Tom Masland and Rod Nordland wrote, "When AIDS takes a parent, it usually takes a childhood, too, for if no other relative steps in, the oldest child becomes the head of the household" (Masland and Nordland 2000, 43). Reliable data on the prevalence of child-headed households in Zambia does not seem to exist, but without a doubt, there are thousands. The children are forced through consequences to look after themselves and to raise their younger siblings. Being typically

unskilled and illiterate, they turn to hawking inexpensive goods in the markets and in the streets.

Desperation and a desire for quick money may also prompt them to sell or run drugs, steal or rely

on prostitution. They become inextricably enmeshed in the cycle of poverty, ill health, ignorance

and despair. Everything combined, these circumstances have led to a drastic reduction in life

expectancy at birth. While life expectancy in the United States has gone up 30 years in the last

century, in Africa it is plunging and expected to be only 45 by the year 2010 (Bartholet 2000). In

Zambia, it is currently estimated at 36.9 years (CIA World Factbook 1999).

The Unmanageable Burden of Debt

The Reverend Violet Sampa-bredt, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Zambia

writes, "As we are all aware, Zambia suffers heavily under an immense burden of external debt.

Over US$7.1 billion is owed to donor countries and to international financial institutions such as

the World Bank and the IMF. That amounts to a debt of almost US$ 750 for every woman, man

and child in Zambia!" (Sampa-bredt 1998, 3). Zambia, considered by the World Bank to be one

of the world's forty-one Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs), is forced to channel much of

its budget into interest payments. Up to one in every two aid dollars received boomerangs back

to donors in the form of debt repayments and approximately 40% of the national budget is

earmarked to service the foreign debt. In comparison, less than 10% of the budget goes to the

provision of basic social services (Ramphal 1999). The Africa Policy Information Center

describes the situation clearly by writing, "When debt payments come first, with macro-

economic adjustment policies imposed by creditors, health and education budgets are squeezed

to the bone" (Africa Policy Information Center 1998, 1). Considering this situation, it is easy to

see that even when government officials want to invest in children and improve the prospects for

street children, they simply are not able. They face an unmanageable burden of debt that severely limits their options and capabilities.

The children of Zambia and other heavily indebted countries face entire lives of laboring to pay off loans that were granted to carry out half-baked projects and Cold War-influenced policies. Typically, the money was borrowed under the auspices of leaders who were not democratically elected and did not have the interests of the poor in mind. It tended to be used unwisely in most cases, and sometimes in a blatantly corrupt and self-serving fashion. Now, however, long after most of the old Cold War rulers have retired, passed away or otherwise disappeared into history, the citizens, and especially the children, continue carrying the burden of debt. Shridath Ramphal unabashedly writes, "Debt has a child's face. Debt's burden falls most heavily on the minds and bodies of children, killing some, and stunting others so that they will never fully develop. It leaves children without immunization against fatal, but easily preventable, diseases. It condemns them to a life without education or – if they go to school – to classrooms without roofs, desks, chairs, blackboards, books, even pencils" (Ramphal 1999, 27). Debt is crippling countries such as Zambia, already among the poorest in the world.

A Specific Case

A few fortunate street children, however, find their way into programs designed specifically to meet their needs. This is the story of one such program. I met Moses Zulu in September of 1996, when I was hired as the manager of a school for street children. He had already been working with the children for several years, and had cultivated the ability to calmly handle any situation that arose. His patience and love for the children seemed to be inexhaustible. At the time, I simply thought that he was lucky to have been born with the perfect

temperament for working with street children. With hindsight, however, I realized that one either acquires these skills or ceases to work in that field. The school, which was called The Children's Town, was located near the rural village of Malambanyama, Zambia. In fact, it was much more than just a school. It was a home, skills training institution, recreational facility, social network and safe haven for ninety former street children ranging in age from 8 to 18. It was also a day school for 120 disadvantaged local children, a place of employment for 25 Zambian teachers and supporting staff, and a six-month international opportunity for small teams of European, North American and Japanese volunteers.

The project, which was run by a non-governmental organization called Development Aid from People to People (DAPP), had been established in 1990 after a report came out estimating that there would be 600,000 orphans in Zambia by the year 2000. Although DAPP had initially specialized in agricultural, environmental and community health projects, the management at the time decided that the organization should do its part to stem the tide of unsupervised, uneducated, and sometimes unwanted children roaming the streets of Zambia's cities. A traditional leader from one of Zambia's many tribes gave the organization permission to use a large and totally undeveloped parcel of land that was located approximately sixty miles from the capital city of Lusaka. Thus, with one project manager, a group of ten young and dedicated Zambian employees, and a few street boys, the project was born. Classes were held under a shade tree and the children and staff slept in the mud-brick and thatched roof houses that they had built.

By the time I arrived at the project in 1996, a school building and dormitories had been constructed, roughly 25 acres of land had been put under cultivation and the first group of girls had joined the program. There was still no running water, electricity or paved roads, but the daily

schedule was intact and the children were organized. Each child was in an academic grade (between 1 and 7), a practical skill discipline and a "family." The families each consisted of a group of sixteen same-aged children and one educator who those children could go to with problems, concerns or just for general advice and companionship. There were also spare time activities, such as sports teams and clubs. The basic idea was that each child would go through a program of progressively more and more difficult academic lessons and skill disciplines, until they were either selected to proceed into grade 8 or were old enough and responsible enough to be on their own. So that they could concentrate on learning, developing and enjoying childhood, the children were also supported financially and provided with such things as clothes, shoes and school supplies.

The academic lessons were given according to the Zambian Ministry of Education's primary school curriculum, and in fact, the project was officially registered as a private school under this Ministry. In this system, which was based on that of the former British colonizers, standardized national examinations were given after grade 7, grade 9 and grade 12. These examinations were the sole determinant as to whether a child was eligible to proceed, and because of a shortage of schools and teachers, gaining admittance into junior or senior secondary school was highly competitive. Knowing this and knowing that the students at The Children's Town would be pursuing their academic studies from a disadvantaged starting point, the creators of the project designed it so that academics would only be one aspect out of several. That is, because most of the children had spent some years out of school or had never been matriculated to begin with, they tended to be older than average and to not have a working knowledge of the basic building blocks (such as the alphabet). Some of them literally learned to hold a pencil when they came to The Children's Town at the age of ten or twelve.

Nevertheless, we knew that becoming educated was the only way to gain employment in the formal sector in Zambia and that some of the children would have the innate abilities to succeed in their schoolwork and the resilience to overcome their difficult childhoods. We also knew that, even if some of them were never able to advance to grade 8, seven years of education would provide them with a better than average level of literacy, numeracy and competence in the English language. Because it was the country's official language, the language of the business sector, and the language often used by Zambians whose indigenous languages were not mutually intelligible, speaking and reading some English was a skill that would greatly increase their prospects for the future.

However, it is not always possible to convince a child who has grown up with little supervision and who has spent his or her days on the fast-paced streets, to sit quietly at a desk reading, writing and listening to a teacher. These children are used to being independent and self-sufficient. "Street children are street clever. They don't fit into normal school because they can't wait – or they have been used to earning and want money" (Fonseca, Snehasadan and Bombay 1990, 837). They have often also assumed adult roles and responsibilities, and have mastered situations that are not typically encountered by non-street children. Describing this "assumed adulthood" response in children, Jones-Davies and Cave write, "Some children, through force of circumstance, acquire adult responsibilities and experiences and are given adult status by their families. School life, by comparison, can appear petty and restricting, and attempts to impose a subordinate pupil status on them meet with resistance and often withdrawal" (Jones-Davies and Cave 1976, 835).

At the Children's Town, we put this maturity, energy and precocity to use by filling more than half the child's day with hands-on skills training, sports and cultural pursuits. The young

ones participated in scouting activities, while the older ones passed through short courses in animal husbandry, home economics, basic business and vegetable gardening. The oldest and most advanced children entered into a junior vocational training program, which was registered with the Zambian Department of Technical Education and Vocational Training. This was an agricultural program that included both a theoretical introduction to animal and soil science, crop husbandry, and agricultural planning and budgeting, as well as a practical component of managing the school's 25 acre farm and its pig unit. The goal was to otherwise prepare those children who would not or could not advance to grade 8. Upon completion of the program, they would move through a transitional phase in which they lived near the project, received some limited financial support, and began to live independently.

The Children's Town students were also widely recognized in the local community and even throughout the district and in the capital city, for being talented in sports, art and cultural pursuits. After the academic and vocational lessons each day, the children would join the extra-curricular activity of their choice. The project had outdoor areas for playing soccer, volleyball and netball (an English sport still played in their former colonies, predominantly by girls and women). The teams competed in the local sports league and the project often had children elected to compete in district and even provincial level sports tournaments. For those children who were not especially interested in or skilled at sports, the Children's Town also had a chorus, brass band, steel band, drama troupe and traditional dance squad. These groups were led by an interested educator or sometimes by one of the older children. They would practice several times a week and perform at all of the project gatherings and events. Although it may seem as though these activities were simply a nice way to keep the children occupied in their spare time, they were actually an integral and meaningful part of the whole program. Those children who had

feared, disliked or felt incapable of performing well in academics, could shine in the skills training or in the sports and cultural activities. They could be publicly recognized for being good at something, which was an important boost for children often plagued by feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. In addition, they gained the ability to work as part of a team, to practice and prepare for the future (an important ability among children used to living a very immediate, hand-to-mouth existence), and to speak and perform in front of an audience.

Intermingled throughout all parts of the program was also an emphasis on social development and rehabilitation. Many of the children were orphans, and many of them had been surviving as street vendors, petty thieves or even prostitutes. Yet, when placed in a safe, stable and well-organized environment, they exhibited an amazing ability to flourish. In their article, "Psychological Characteristics of South African Street Children," Johann le Roux and Cheryl Sylvia Smith describe this phenomenon as follows.

> Research supports the notion that young people are resilient and that their psychological wounds will heal if given the opportunity. According to Garmezy (1983), "if there is any lesson to be derived from recent studies, it lies in the reaffirmation of the resilience potential that exists in children under stress" (p. 73). This does not mean that they are unaffected by their experiences, but that they have the capacity to resist being overwhelmed by them. Garmezy (1983) has noted that this capacity to recover is dependent upon the provision of a nurturing environment in the post-trauma phase. The challenge for those committed to addressing the plight of street children is to provide such an environment (Le Roux and Smith 1998a, 892).

This nurturing environment was created and maintained primarily by the team of Zambian educators who managed the daily running of the school. Not only were most of the decisions made in a weekly educators' council meeting, but the educators also shared evening and weekend duty, invited the children to visit them in their homes and often participated in activities even when off duty. Having this level of access to adult attention, guidance and companionship seems to have significantly enhanced the children's abilities to adapt to their new environment and to begin positively changing their behavioral patterns. As Le Roux and Smith aptly point out, street

children are often guilty of self-destructive and anti-social behavior, but "this self-destructive behavior frequently results from a lack of knowledge, rather than from negative and fatalistic attitudes" (Le Roux and Smith 1998b, 685).

Of course, all was not as easy and successful as it may sound. There were frequent instances of fighting and bullying among the children, theft of school and personal property and sometimes a child would run back to the streets. There was a constant testing of the rules and plenty of explosive tempers. There was also a huge difference between the way individual children acted, reacted and responded to the various facets of the program, which forced the staff to be highly creative and adaptable. As L. Richter writes, "One of the chief difficulties in trying to help street children is to find ways of bringing them back into so-called normal society. Their socialization into this lifestyle has been prematurely, and, often, traumatically ended" (Richter 1988, 919). Teaching the children how to treat others, how to follow simple rules and schedules and how to respect themselves, was the overwhelming challenge to the staff and the deeper daily work of the project. Inevitably, this was a slow and difficult process. It proved to be possible, but only through consistency, humor, patience, clear and immediate consequences for unacceptable behavior, and a certain level of allowance.

Policies, Programs and Examples of Intervention

As did nearly every country in the world, Zambia signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989, is known as "the most comprehensive human rights document ever agreed to by nations." It outlines the rights of children, including the rights to education, health care and housing. It also specifies the need for improved protection of children in especially difficult

circumstances, which includes street children, and several articles of the convention directly relate and refer to street children (Pinto 1994). In addition to trying to uphold these ideals, the Zambian government has also made adjustments to its existing policies and has started to implement some new policies that are hoped to help reduce the number of children in the streets. For example, the government has repealed the law mandating that children in public schools wear uniforms. The wearing of uniforms is widely known to contribute to truancy and absence from school. In situations where uniforms are required, poor children are often ashamed of the condition of their uniforms and would rather miss school than be teased by the other students. For even poorer families, the purchase price of the uniform is simply prohibitive. In his article entitled, "Who are Street Children? A Hierarchy of Street Use and Appropriate Responses," Christopher Williams describes how the South African government in 1989 deliberately reintroduced school fees and uniforms so as to deter a backlog of students (Williams 1993). Fortunately, the Zambian government is moving in the opposite direction.

Because of a lack of schools and trained teachers, the government is also actively promoting the establishment of "community schools" and is allowing untrained teachers (who have a specified level of education) to give lessons in some public schools. These community schools are operated by the neighborhoods and villages where they exist, and are usually managed by an untrained teacher who is paid in some combination of cash and kind. They are also organized under an umbrella, community-based organization called Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS). As of the beginning of 2000, ZOCS counted eighteen schools as its members, with approximately 4,500 children in attendance. The community schools are also known for giving priority to girls and orphans, with 60% of ZOCS' pupils being girls and 39% being orphans (Zulu 2000). The programs offered typically have a four-year basic education

focus, giving young people the opportunity to learn simple reading, writing and calculating skills. Often, they also include an emphasis on health, hygiene and the acquisition of a trade such as tailoring or carpentry. The education gained in these community schools is obviously not equivalent to the formal public and private schools in Zambia, but it is far preferable to the children being left totally illiterate and unexposed to any schooling whatsoever. It also tends to provide a protected and organized environment and to prevent the children from spending all of their time on the streets.

Through the Ministries of Education, Health, and Community Development and Social Services, the government also runs or partially sponsors many programs relating to the causes and needs of street children. For example, the Department of Social Welfare, which is within the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, attempts to maintain a list of totally destitute children and to refer these children to foster families or to programs run by non-governmental organizations. Most of the children in The Children's Town program had been referred this way, and the project also received periodic grants from the government.

In addition, there are numerous other indigenous and international NGO's working with street children and other types of disadvantaged children. One common and seemingly successful model, for example, is the drop-in center. These centers are typically located in low-income neighborhoods and offer the children living there a place to go and play, have a meal and have some academic or practical lessons. The first drop-in center to be established in Lusaka is run jointly by Street Kids International and the Zambia Red Cross Society. The center, which provides services to more than 100 children each day, has enabled twenty students to attend secondary school and has enrolled ten children in vocational training or craft production programs. They also operate the "Chivano Bank" (a local adaptation of the famous Grameen

Bank), which provides small loans to many of the children's mothers. They report so far that the profits exceed loans by a factor of seven (Street Kids International 2000).

A program such as this one run by Street Kids International and the Zambian Red Cross seems to be highly appropriate to those children who are said to be "on the street." They still have some family support and contact, but spend most of their time on the street because of a need to make money and a lack of funds to pay school fees. Children in this type of circumstance can probably be prevented from retreating further into street life by the provision of a meal, some fun and companionship, and limited financial support to their families. Because we can assume that their financial contributions are critical to the family's welfare, the provision of free schooling alone will probably not be an adequate solution. For this same reason, taking the child out of the family could actually have the effect of decreasing the family's standard of living. Instead, this type of street child only needs for his or her existing family unit to be strengthened.

Other types of street kids, such as children who have been abused or totally abandoned, will need to be placed into the care of non-familial adults, such as foster families or orphanages/educational institutions. Although the question of whether or not to institutionalize street children has been debated and is still up for discussion, it seems to be a viable solution for certain sub-groups of the population. Most practitioners agree that finding foster families would be an even better solution, but in Zambia, the social fabric is already stretched to the point of ripping because of the depressed economy, AIDS deaths and the orphans who are left behind. Most families are, therefore, not financially capable of fostering a child, or because of prevalent negative stereotypes, are not willing to take in a former street child. This combination of factors seems to mandate the existence of some institutional facilities where the most at-risk and destitute children can be protected, nurtured, rehabilitated and educated. Jerome Beker and

Douglas Magnuson agree with this sentiment in their book, <u>Residential Education as an Option</u> <u>for At-Risk Youth</u>. They write, "Despite the conventional 'wisdom' in the field that has tended to reject out of hand the exploration of residential group care alternatives in child and youth services, many professionals and academics have continued to support the efficacy of such programs in appropriate situations" (Beker and Magnuson 1996, 4). One of these appropriate situations could be for the totally abandoned and unwanted street children of Zambia, and in fact, of the world.

Why Does the Children's Town Succeed?

Although there are many daily challenges to overcome and some children admitted into the program do not manage to graduate, the Children's Town is a successful and effective boarding institution for former children of the street. This success can be attributed to a whole array of factors, including a highly dedicated staff, skilled management, cooperation with traditional leaders and government officials, and continued intentional outreach into many levels of society. The combination of academics, skills training, social development and sports and cultural activities also gives the children a well-rounded education and a chance to find an area in which they can personally excel. The various activities provide the children with plenty of outlets for their energy and creativity, while still teaching them how to operate inside an organized structure. Instead of trying to force all of the children to fit snugly into a mold, the project staff encourages their strengths and attempts to guide them towards those activities in which they feel comfortable. For example, the children who excel at academics are guided towards secondary school, the children who love hands-on activities are guided towards skilled professions and assisted with limited tools and implements, and the children who do well in

sports or cultural activities are encouraged to pursue them further. Many of the project's graduates have gone on to grade 8, many have settled in the local area as farmers, several have been admitted into the official steel band of the Zambia National Service, and at least one has gone to secondary school on a soccer scholarship.

Of course, none of these possibilities would be available if the management did not continuously nurture and strengthen a whole network of acquaintances, friends and allies. A project such as the Children's Town cannot possibly exist in isolation, and support from local, national and international sources is critical to its success. The management must devote a substantial amount of time to such activities as writing and distributing a monthly project newsletter, attending all sorts of conferences and meetings, submitting official reports to donors and government agencies, and arranging social and cultural events for local villagers and schoolchildren. For example, the project hosts an annual culture festival in which children from eight nearby primary schools compete and perform in traditional dance, poetry, choir and drama. From afar, this may seem like an unnecessary expense that is not directed specifically towards getting more children off the streets. However, hundreds of local villagers attend each year, cheer for their own children, and get the opportunity to meet the Children's Town staff, managers and students. It takes all levels of society to run a long-lasting and fruitful development project, and this very important tactic has been heartily understood and embraced by the people at the Children's Town.

Designing and Running a Program for Street Children

Designing and running programs for street children is a complicated endeavor, but with thorough planning and forethought the programs can be successful and can effectively augment government educational and economic policies. In this section, I will mention point by point those issues which both my experience and my research have led me to see as critical in the design and implementation of street child projects. First of all, the project designers must specifically find out who the children are, why they are on the street, how much time they spend on the street and exactly what they do everyday. This is important because appearances can be misleading, and especially if the program managers are not familiar with the realities of life in developing countries, they may wrongly assume that all of the children they see in the streets are destitute and alone. Of course, most of these children probably live with their families and a first-rate program would intentionally strengthen their existing family ties instead of weakening them. For example, an income-generation or micro-credit scheme for the parents could improve the lives of the children more than any form of intervention directed at the children themselves. Therefore, both the donors and the intended managers of the project should be open to the possibility that they could achieve their goal of decreasing the number of children on the streets without even working with children. Open minds and receptivity to numerous ideas will help ensure the design and implementation of the most cost-effective program and the one with the highest likelihood of succeeding.

If the project designers have identified that most of the street children have weak or non-existent family ties, or if they have singled out these children as their preferred target group, then

a new set of decisions will need to be made. For instance, is permanent adoption a realistic

possibility or does the domestic situation allow the children to be placed into foster homes? Both

of these options have the advantage of keeping the children in family environments where they

will have direct adult care and supervision. For many developing countries, however, the average

family income is so low that it does not allow for "extra" children to be taken in. If this is the

case, the project designer will probably have to implement either a drop-in facility or a boarding

facility. In either case, the following questions should be discussed and agreed upon before the

first child is approached.

- Should the facility be in the urban or rural area?
- How will the children be identified and admitted?
- Will both boys and girls be admitted, or will it be a single sex facility?
- Will there be an age limit or age requirement?
- Will the former street children be mixed with children who have not been on the streets?
- How long will the program last and what will the children do upon completion?

Urban vs. Rural Placement

Placing the project within the city has several advantages and disadvantages. Of course, if

the program designer prefers to implement a drop-in facility, it will have to be located in the city

so as to be easily accessible to the children. In this instance, the child clients will be able to retain

their street incomes and still have some time each day to relax, play with other children, study or

take part in skills training courses. The drop-in center also has the advantage of incurring very

low per child costs, which allows the program to help substantially more children than could be

expected in an institutional setting. Nevertheless, it does not function as a way to get the children

permanently off the streets. Le Roux and Smith write, "The more time these children spend on

the streets, the greater the likelihood that they will show signs of cognitive or emotional

dysfunction" (Le Roux and Smith 1998b, 685). Thus, although running the program from an

urban area allows more children to be reached for a lower cost, it also allows the children to continue spending part of every day on the dangerous streets. Placing the project in a rural area, on the other hand, has the built-in advantage that it is difficult for the children to return to the streets or to revert to their old and self-destructive ways. This may seem odd, but children who have been socialized on the streets tend to be highly mobile, active, distrustful and impulsive. When first placed into a structured environment, they experience deep personal adjustments and challenges. If it is easy to quit and run back to the streets, some of them undoubtedly will. In my experience, however, if the project staff can convince the children to work through the initial crucial window of time, they tend to adapt and thrive.

The principle difficulty of putting a project for street children in the countryside is that the local villagers may protest having these children housed in their area (since they may perceive them as criminals, drug abusers, prostitutes or some other form of unsavory character). The staff at the Children's Town overcame this difficulty in two distinct and significant ways. First of all, representatives from the project met with the village headmen and agreed to offer a certain number of school spaces free of charge to the most disadvantaged local children. Each headman identified the poorest children in his area and they were then allowed to attend academic lessons at the project. This was an effective solution to the problem, although care still had to be taken to ensure that the chosen children fit into the project's target group. In other words, it was essential to double-check the background information received on each child. As a project, we fundraised by advertising ourselves as a school for street children and other disadvantaged children. It could have been a devastating blow to our reputation if children not fitting into these categories had been unknowingly matriculated. Thus, we took the headmen's advice, but we also verified the information by making occasional spot checks in the villages.

These spot checks were carried out by our teachers, who were also members of the project's Parent-Teacher Association. The establishment of a PTA was the other way in which we cultivated a good relationship with the local people. The association met quarterly, and these meetings served as a way for the elected PTA representatives to learn about the project and to present any comments or concerns that they had. It also provided a forum in which problems could be discussed, common goals could be articulated and parents and teachers could become better acquainted. These policies were intentionally devised to help the project establish a place for itself in the community and to give local people the invaluable sense of being a part of and benefiting from the ongoing work. Without a doubt, they were well worth the investment of time and money.

Identifying and Admitting the Children

Once the appropriate location has been chosen, the project designers will need to decide how the children will be identified and admitted. It is not, for example, possible to simply approach children in the streets and ask if they want to join a program. As was previously mentioned, these children tend to be distrustful of strangers and adults and will not necessarily represent themselves in an accurate way. If, for example, they believe that they have something to gain from the program, they may mislead the representative into believing that they are destitute when they are not. The opposite can also occur if they feel ashamed of their circumstances and do not want to admit their dire straits. In Zambia, for example, there were street children who were known to hop from project to project or who participated in a program until they found an opportunity to steal valuable items and then disappear back into the streets. It

is, therefore, necessary to network with government officials and other organizations in the field

so that a standard and effective method of identification can be determined.

In many countries, for example, there is a government office or social service agency that

keeps a running list of destitute children or children in need of institutional care. In Zambia, this

list was maintained by officers within the Department of Social Welfare, under the Ministry of

Community Development and Social Services. These officers would go into the streets and

interview the children in order to keep a case file with as much biographical background as

possible. When the Children's Town had a graduation, and thus made room for new pupils, the

appropriate individuals from the Department of Social Welfare rosters would be recommended.

Unfortunately, however, this system, although it was surely not intentional, seemed to have a

built-in preference for boys. The social welfare officers looked for and interviewed those

children who were causing problems, who were endangering themselves or who were residing in

very public places. With these criteria, they tended to find boys almost exclusively. The

Children's Town, however, was striving to offer half of its spaces to girls. We knew that there

were actually more girls out of school than there were boys, but it was difficult to identify them.

In addition, considering that we did not reside in Lusaka and were not individually familiar with

the residents of the low-income neighborhoods, we felt that we were not equipped to choose the

children ourselves. We needed an intermediary who had contact with and knowledge of the

orphaned and abandoned girls in the community and who could play the same role the

Department of Social Welfare was playing.

Eventually we found this partner in the drop-in center run by Street Kids International.

The center, which was located in the middle of one of Lusaka's poorest neighborhoods, catered

to the out-of-school children of Garden Compound. Because of the different ways in which boys

and girls were treated, raised and behaved, there were hundreds of young girls languishing in the over-crowded neighborhood. Boys may have been in school or in the city center, whereas the girls were doing housework and child care, walking the dirt roads selling trinkets and fruit, or engaging in prostitution. Nevertheless, many of them found time during the day to pass by the drop-in center for a meal, some lessons or a game with the other children. In this way, the workers at the facility came to personally know the girls and to be familiar with their stories. They knew, for example, which girls were truly abandoned and "of the street," and which ones were not. Consequently, they served as a perfect referral source for girls who fit into the target group of the Children's Town. They were also thrilled to see the needy girls being placed into a safe and stable environment, being educated and being looked after.

Co-Educational or Single Sex?

Of course, some project designers may decide to make an all girls' or an all boys' facility. Because street children have often been exposed to unwanted sexual advances during their time on the streets, they may need to heal their physical and emotional wounds before being able to relate positively to members of the opposite sex. For example, the boys may be aggressive and domineering while the girls may be fearful and submissive. If these characteristics exist, it would probably be more beneficial to place the children in single-sex facilities. If these characteristics do not seem to exist, a co-educational program could be a possibility. The children could benefit immensely from sharing academic lessons, vocational classes and extra-curricular activities with members of the opposite sex. Within a safe, structured and supervised environment, they could hopefully learn to interact with and positively relate to all of their classmates, be they male or female. Of course, this decision is directly tied to the hours of the program, the physical structure

of the buildings or rooms and the type and quality of adult guidance. For instance, it is very expensive and labor-intensive to run a boarding facility that includes both boys and girls. The children have to be closely supervised day and night, which demands skilled and willing adult caretakers, and the infrastructure has to include separate sleeping and bathing areas. Much attention also has to be paid to the children's interest in and experimentation with sex. As they move into adolescence, they will undoubtedly begin engaging in sexual behavior and will need honest, compassionate and constant advice. If ignored or not given, the results could be tragic. Girls could end up pregnant, children could end up with sexually transmitted diseases, and young hearts could be broken.

The Age Range

The decision about the gender of the children is also tied to the age range of the intended target group. The older the children, the more interest they will have in sexuality and other adult activities, which will in turn impact the subject matter and activities offered in the program. In fact, street children do not tend to be very young or very helpless. Rather, they tend to be early to middle teen-agers who have episodically run away from home before permanently joining the streets. As Vanitha Chetty writes, "A profile emerges of male adolescents (primarily between 11 and 15 years of age), with four to six years of formal but unsatisfactory schooling, from violence-ravaged areas" (Chetty 1997, 95). In other words, the sweet and innocent children who appear on the covers of charity fundraising materials, are often not the children who will be found in the streets. The actual children will be street savvy adolescents who are used to earning their own money and ruling themselves. Although many of them have attended some months or years of school, they have probably lost most of their literacy and mathematics skills (except

possibly the simple calculations needed to buy, sell and make change). As a result, it may be necessary for ten, twelve, or fourteen year old children to start over at the first grade level. They will probably grasp the introductory material quickly, and possibly even complete two grades in one year, but they will always be older than the typical child in the same grade. This discrepancy may lead to feelings of self-consciousness and a desire to leave school again.

Should the Street Children be Intermingled with Other Children?

The age question, therefore, brings about the related decision of whether or not to intermingle the street children with other children. There are both compelling reasons to keep them separated and to consider grouping them together. For example, street children have probably had negative experiences with formal education and may feel reluctant to try again. They may also feel intimidated by the other children, especially if the other children tease them for being poor, for being older, for being drop-outs, etc. On the flip side, the street children may try to compensate for their lack of academic training by teaching the other children their "street skills." This could be as harmless as lessons on effectively selling bananas in the marketplace or as serious as instructions on how to buy and sell illegal drugs. Of course, the parents and guardians of typical children will not want this information being passed on to them. They may, in fact, vehemently oppose having their children mixed with street children.

On the other hand, parents may react to having their children in school with street kids simply because they have stereotypical and negative perceptions of who those kids are. Le Roux and Smith write, "Street children are regarded as nuisances by some and criminals by others. Under the legal systems of many countries, carryovers from the colonial period, vagrancy is a punishable offense, and includes street children" (Le Roux and Smith, 1998d, 901-902). They go

on to describe how street children actually provide some valuable services to the public, such as looking after cars, carrying shopping bags or other similar chores, but the public does not tend to show appreciation for receiving these services. To the contrary, they give the children a payment more to get rid of them than to compensate them for a job well done. Some even go so far as to verbally or physically abuse the children in an attempt to permanently get rid of them (Le Roux and Smith, 1998d). As a result, the street children experience almost constant hostility and live under the threat of violence, which in turn makes them more distrustful of adults and more apt to act out. All of these circumstances lead to a disintegrating relationship between street children and the public. Yet, this relationship stands a chance of being repaired if members of the public become personally acquainted with individual street children. This could, for example, start with the selective placement of street kids in programs with other kids. The children would eventually become friends with each other, and then hopefully influence the opinions of their parents. Better understanding of the street children and more positive perceptions of them could only then lead to more effective programs and forms of intervention.

The Route to Self-Sufficiency

Finally, once the children have completed the program, what will they be expected to do? Will they be ready and able to continue into secondary school or other higher levels of education? If so, who will pay the requisite fees or provide them with essentials such as clothes and shoes? Will they have acquired a marketable skill so that they can support themselves? If so, will the program give or loan them start-up capital or tools such as farm implements, sewing machines, carpentry equipment, etc? These and numerous other questions will inevitably arise and will have to be answered. The staff who manage a street children's program often take on the

role of surrogate parents and probably will have developed a deep relationship with the children by the time they are ready to move on. Just as parents do, this staff will have to plan how to wean the children off of their support in a way that is safe and secure for the children, yet still accords them room to grow and mature.

Final Thoughts and Conclusions

Intervening in people's lives, even with the best of intentions, is always a complex, tricky and highly sensitive business. In certain cases, such as in the case of street children, intervention can be charged with emotion, fraught with moral imperatives and egged on by calls to human rights. However, street children are individuals who have specific life stories and experiences. They cannot simply be lumped into one big category and expected to respond in unison to a certain type of program or policy. Rather, the programs and policies must be intentionally designed to meet the needs of a certain group of children, within a certain set of circumstances, in the context of a culture and a country. Of course, it is critical for practitioners to learn from the successes and failures that have occurred in other places and to understand the techniques that have been proven to help children recover from past abuse and neglect. At the same time, they must also have the courage to try out new ideas and to honestly and continuously assess whether these new tactics have succeeded or failed.

It seems obvious that the world will have street children as long as the underlying causes of the unmanageable burden of debt, the AIDS pandemic and the extreme economic inequalities between the rich and the poor remain inadequately addressed. How to help individual street children and the families from which they come is a much more immediate and provoking question, and one that will probably have to be answered on a day-to-day basis by the

practitioners in the field. Although the whole problem may at times seem impossible, insurmountable and not even worth attempting to solve, numerous forms of successful intervention already exist. Many more could be imagined with a bit of creativity, flexibility and hope. People like Moses Zulu at The Children's Town in Zambia realized long ago that these qualities, which are so critical to designing projects for street kids, are also the ones needed in the daily work with the street kids. Instead of giving up, he chose to forge ahead through all of the seemingly overwhelming obstacles and pitfalls. Every January he receives his reward when former street children pass the highly competitive national examinations and proceed to grade 8 or grade 10, move towards economic self-sufficiency by starting a small rural enterprise, or join some other program or venture. With the appropriate care and support, all street children could share in these achievements.

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