



Children at Risk

FOCUS ON STREET CHILDREN

An Activity
Guide For
Lions



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Section One

An Overview of the Problem

“The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference towards one assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.”

Mother Teresa
1979 Nobel Peace Prize winner

“Worldwide, it is estimated that millions of children are forced to live by their wits in the alleys and avenues of faceless cities. They have no access to education, basic services or family affection and support. They are an underclass with poor chances of a decent future. Condemned to live by deceit, stealing, prostitution or violence, they are all old before their time. They change from trusting innocents to embittered survivors, respecting little but the code of the streets, its violence and limitations.”

Leo Kartini Ganapathy
Sekolah Menengah Assunta
Petaling Jaya Leo Club, Malaysia

Whether they are alone by fate or by choice, 100 million¹ children sleep in the streets every night. Some are toddlers whose parents have died in war; others are runaways, victims of domestic abuse.

Lions clubs can help. By forming local partnerships Lions can identify local problems affecting street children. Acting as coordinators, clubs can seek solutions. They can help children complete their education, obtain training and gain employment.²



The Role of Lions Youth Outreach Chairmen

The mission of Lions Youth Outreach: Changing Tomorrow Today is “to help and challenge youth to learn, to achieve and to serve.” Lions Youth Outreach chairmen can motivate clubs to reach out to children at risk.

By providing food, shelter, clothing and medical care, the world’s 1.4 million Lions can help. They can also help by caring. As humanitarians, Lions are experts in the area of caring. They can often overcome seemingly insurmountable odds when advocating on behalf of children.

Defining Street Children

The reasons why children become homeless include poverty, war, natural disasters, disease, earthquakes, famine, illegitimacy, neglect, and child abuse.

The magnitude of the problem requires a multilevel explanation. According to the editors of Global Child Health News and Review³, the three major categories of street children are:

■ **Children on the Street** – By far the largest category, children on the street include shoe shiners, ragpickers, and vendors. These children return to their families at night.

■ **Children of the Street** – These children have chosen the street as their home. It is here that they seek companionship, livelihood and shelter. Occasionally, they contact their families.

■ ***Abandoned and Destitute Children*** - These children have severed all ties with their families. They live on the streets entirely on their own. These children are vulnerable and need material and psychological assistance to survive.

Eliminating street children requires solving complex socioeconomic issues. Governments cannot accomplish this alone. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must offer their assistance. The elimination of street children was a United Nations (UN) goal for the 1990s.

A United Nations Goal

The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children⁴ signed in New York on September 30, 1990, included the commitment to:

“...work to ameliorate the plight of millions of children who live under especially difficult circumstances – as victims of apartheid and foreign occupation; orphans and street children and children of migrant workers; the displaced children and victims of natural and manmade disasters; the disabled and the abused, the socially disadvantaged and the exploited.”

Improving the protection of “children in especially difficult circumstances” is a major UN goal. In 1989, the UN adopted The Convention on the Rights of the Child. This landmark legislation is an international agreement that establishes standards for better legal and social protection for children. It is the most widely ratified (191 countries as of November 2000) of all United Nations human rights conventions.



Section Two

“Street children are open to abuse of every kind. Sleeping on sidewalks, parking lots, under food stalls, they are each day confronted with a frightening array of challenges and violence. Without food, they are forced to beg, scavenge or pick through garbage for scraps. Undernourished, with respiratory infections or sexually transmitted diseases. They are frequently turned away from health centers. Resented as a nuisance by local authorities and society generally, they are beaten, harassed by police and occasionally jailed.”

First Call for Children⁵

Without parental protection, street children often become victims of abuse and disease. The countries of Viet Nam and the Philippines each report 50,000 homeless children. In war-torn Rwanda, 114,000 children have been separated from their families. Of these, 12,000 children now reside in 20 centers operated by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

In China, there are 200,000 street children. In the United States, there are one million children living on the streets.

Underlying Causes

Poverty is the most common cause of homelessness among children. Parents who are poor, unskilled or unemployed often cannot provide adequate food and shelter for their children. Economic sparsity creates a cycle of poverty-related con-

cerns including the lack of nutrition, healthcare, and employment. Often, the parents are involved with drugs and crime.

Children born into poverty often find it difficult to break out of this cycle. Living on the street has removed them from mainstream society.

Lack of Education hampers the poor from breaking this cycle of poverty. A formal education can introduce street children to opportunities for advancement.

In many countries, public education systems are not free. The cost of education often impedes poor parents from sending their children to school. Some families can afford to send only one child, often the oldest boy in the family. The girls and remaining boys often become street vendors or beggars.

Gender Disparities have existed in almost every society. Discrimination against females affects education, food, nutrition, healthcare and employment opportunities.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All established education for women and girls as a priority. It is also a UN priority for Children and Development.

“Universal access to basic education, and achievement of primary education by at least 80% of primary school-age children through formal schooling or non-formal education of comparable learning standard, with emphasis on reducing the current disparities between boys and girls.”⁶

In 1990, over 100 million children lacked access to primary schooling; 60 million of these children were girls. The education received by a female affects the health and welfare of her family.



Dangers Faced by Street Children

AIDS

By the end of 1999, 34 million people were HIV-positive. Of these, 1.3 million were children, according to the UN. Some of these children were born HIV-positive while others contracted the virus that results in AIDS through blood transfusions or sexual abuse.

AIDS affects street children in two ways. First, AIDS kills parents thereby creating AIDS orphans. At the end of 1999, the UN estimated that there were 13.2 million AIDS orphans under the age of 15. Ninety percent of these children live in Africa.

“In Kenya, (there is) a home for orphaned AIDS babies. Relatives of family members often bring the children to the home after a parent or guardian has died of AIDS. Many persons fear contracting the virus from the infant and therefore turn the child over. It takes 18-24 months for the mother's antibodies to clear the baby's bloodstream before testing the child for HIV can take place.”

WHO/UNICEF Action for Children Affected by AIDS⁷

Many societies reject AIDS orphans. Both family members and orphanages refuse to accept these stigmatized children out of fear of contracting the virus. All alone, these parentless children end up living on the streets.

If AIDS orphans are HIV-negative, their chances of contracting the virus increase when living on the streets. Intravenous drug use and sexual exploitation are common among street children.



Drug Addiction

Among children living on the streets of Brazil, 55% are drug addicted according to the UN International Drug Control Programme⁸. As of March 1993, Brazil registered 35,704 AIDS cases (the third highest in the world). Of Brazil's 425,000 HIV-positive residents, most are adolescents or young adults.

“Street youth all over the world share a culture which is characterized by economic marginalization, the formation of youth gangs in the face of family breakdowns and the misery of slum life, and mistrust of authorities. They value friendship, courage and ingenuity. They also place primary value on the ability to take care of oneself. This may include the choice of taking drugs to feel good and to exchange sex for money, shelter or drugs.”

Christopher Lowry, Director of Communications
Programmes for Street Kids International⁹

Drug dealers often introduce street children to drugs. These dealers provide street children with a way to earn money. It is common to use children in the production and marketing of drugs since juveniles usually receive lesser judicial sentences than adults.

“The (street children) pandemic is also pushing increasing numbers of orphans onto the street with no other way to survive than to work, beg or steal.”

*WHO/UNICEF Action for Children
Affected by AIDS¹⁰*

Sexual Exploitation

It is common for adults to sexually exploit both male and female street children. For many children, sexual abuse was the reason they left home.

Most street girls prostitute themselves to survive. Rehabilitating these girls is difficult according to the *WHO/UNICEF Action for Children Affected by AIDS* report. The stigma of prostitution lingers and most girls find it difficult to marry.

Some street girls contract the AIDS virus; others become pregnant. The children of prostitutes often become societal outcasts. The cycle of poverty continues.

Death

Survival on the streets means learning to live among terrorists, pimps and drug dealers. These persons are present in almost all societies.

Children are unprotected prey on the streets. Terrorists and criminal organizations exploit children and recruit them to implement subversive activities.

“The (UN) Committee (Members on the Convention on the Rights of the Child) expresses its concern over the life-threatening situation faced by an alarming number of children in Colombia, particularly those who, in order to survive, are working and/or living on the streets. Many of those children are victims of ‘social cleansing’ campaigns and subject to arbitrary arrest and torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment by authorities. They are also subject to coercion, disappearance, trafficking and murder by criminal groups.”

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Report ¹¹

Many children watched their parents or loved ones die in earthquakes, floods or war. Others witnessed their parents’ death from death squads, drugs or AIDS. Many street children commit suicide.

Section Three

The Worldwide Situation of Children

Some nations provide children with rights and opportunities for growth and nourishment while others neglect childhood.

Before signing The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every country filed a report on their human rights record regarding children. These reports indicate great variances in the treatment of children.

One country reports that 52% of its nation’s children work in the street. Another country reports that their average daily child murder rate is six. Another country reports a 70% illegitimacy rate.



Lions should learn about their local situation regarding street children and act to meet those needs. For information about the UN Information Center in your country, contact your local UNICEF or World Health Organization (WHO) Office or the International Activities and Program Development Division of Lions Clubs International.

Opportunities to Aid Street Children

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are frequently the first to respond to the urgent needs of street and working children, according to a UN report¹². These organizations continually demonstrate their commitment and effectiveness in protecting children.

NGOs are an important government and international resource. They can offer their experience in developing innovative community-based approaches to advocating and protecting street children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment.

The world's largest service organization, Lions Clubs International, is an NGO. Its members can make a difference in the lives of the world’s street children.

The problems facing street children are socioeconomic, political and cultural. Some of these problems are outside the realm of Lions’ expertise, although others are not.

Immediate Needs

Food and water are the most basic of human needs. NGOs routinely provide these basic needs for street children.

- In the Caribbean, the St. Vincent, Kingston, Jamaica, and Bridgetown, Barbados Leo clubs routinely provide meals for local street children.
- In Kenya, the Nairobi City Leos routinely feed local street children. They also arranged for a Lion doctor to perform eye examinations on the children.
- The large hotels in Nepal created a feeding program for street children. They later expanded the program to include carpentry and cooking classes for the children.
- A new method of feeding street children in Colombia involves food vouchers. The campaign, "Don't give a street child money, give him a voucher," is a success.
- Clothing is another necessity. Street children need clothing, blankets and protective outerwear to survive cold nights on the streets.
- Lions frequently donate new or used clothing to homeless children.
- The Hubbard Area Leo Club, Canada, shipped 50 bags of donated clothing to children in Somalia.
- The Zvishavane Leo Club, Zimbabwe, and the Istanbul Suadiye Sahil Leo Club, Turkey, made large clothing donations to local street children.



Shelter is another basic necessity for survival. With proper planning, NGOs can work together to create shelters for homeless children.

- SOS Kinderdorf International is an organization that creates children's villages. Financed by either local or international interests, each SOS Village includes housing, an administrator and foster mothers to care for the children.

The Istanbul, Turkey, Lions established a Children's Village in Bullaca. The Beirut West End, Lebanon, Leos adopted 14 orphaned children at the SOS Children's Village in Bhersaf. The Ikeja, Nigeria, Leos donated funds to the SOS Children's Village in Isolo, Lagos, Nigeria.

- Undugu is the name of a Kenyan drop-in shelter for street children. Created by a Dutch missionary in 1973, the facility provides youth with food, shelter, vocational training and safety from police harassment. There are 130,000 children who live or work on the streets of Nairobi.
- Over the past 30 years, the Program Bosconia la Florida has provided food, shelter and schooling to more than 16,000 street children in Colombia. It is one of Bogota's largest and most successful rehabilitation programs.
- Cooperation between the NGOs in Nicaragua created food canteens for street children. The successful program

also includes foster care for street children who are addicted to sniffing glue. Local authorities helped the NGOs arrange for: 83 children to attend school; 275 children to receive meals; and 75 homes to become foster homes.

- Forty NGOs in India maintain six shelters in each of 11 cities. The centers provide food, shelter and vocational training for 300 street children.

Medical Care is also among the urgent needs of street children. Professionally trained Lions can provide this service to street children. Clubs without healthcare providers among their members can finance medical treatment for street children.

- In Brazil, members of the Iguatu Leo Club befriended a boy living on the street and financed his medical care.
- Portugal's "Children's Emergency Service" provides medical and psychological care for child victims of ill-treatment or abandonment.

Intermediate Needs

NGOs can help street children with intermediate needs such as counseling, care for AIDS patients, drug addicts and depression. Lions can contact local agencies and offer to support ongoing programs.

AIDS

- AIDS education is a component of the UNICEF-sponsored programs for street children in Brazil, Haiti and many African countries.



- A 64-page manual entitled, "Resource Pack on Sexual Health and AIDS Prevention for Socially Apart Youth," is available for persons who work with street children. Written by Britain's Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group and Brazil's SOS Crianca, the manual is available in English and Portuguese.

Drug Abuse

- The World Health Organization Programme on Substance Abuse completed the first phase of a project investigating substance abuse among street children. The study included interviews with children in the cities of: Rio de Janeiro, Alexandria, Cairo, Tegucigalpa, Montreal, Toronto, Manila, Bombay, Mexico City and Lusaka.

Suicide Prevention

- In Portugal, a private agency created the "SOS for Children" telephone crisis line. The service provides information and guidance from counselors trained to aid anonymous callers. Ill-treated, sexually abused, abandoned or neglected children often call the service.

Section Four

Long Term Solutions

The killing of street children in Latin America added new urgency to solving the growing problem of homeless children. To protect children from hunger, abuse, kidnaping, and organ trafficking, societal and legislative changes must occur.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child suggests that NGOs begin by sponsoring public education campaigns. These campaigns can sensitize the public about children's rights.

NGOs can further advocate on behalf of children by safeguarding them in courts of law. As court watchers, NGOs can guarantee that children accused of crimes appear before civilian courts only and receive civilian sentences.

NGOs Working Together

By working together, NGOs can help protect street children.

- In Brazil, 400 NGOs formed the UNICEF-assisted Alternative Services for Street Children Project. Founded in 1982, the group includes professionals from universities, professional organizations, parliament, public leaders and members of the Youth Pastorate. The unified effort was a catalyst for the passage of the 1990 Children and Adolescent's Statute, an innovative social legislation for children and their families. The law provides a framework for the promotion and protection of children's rights.



- In the Philippines, the National Project on Street Children includes 200 NGOs that work with local government agencies to aid 25,000 street children living in 17 major cities.
- The country of Yemen lacks social services. It welcomes involvement from NGOs in creating health, social and educational services.
- The Moscow Street Children Project includes the efforts of federal, municipal, social, charitable, religious and commercial organizations.

Federations of Street Children

The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that children defend their own rights as much as possible. Some countries have street children's associations; others have education centers. NGOs are welcome to contribute to these efforts.

- The National Movement for Street Boys and Girls in Brazil champions issues (such as drug abuse) inherent to street children. The local UNICEF office has played a key role in developing this federation. Similar federations exist in Botswana, Mali, and countries in the Caribbean.
- Held in the Philippines, the 1989 Asian conference on street children identified legal protection, health, nutrition and education as priorities for street children.

The conference submitted a position paper to the Congress which led to the adoption of the Special Protection Act of 1992.

Lifestyle Changes

Street children need alternative activities to replace the negative influences in their lives, e.g., drugs, alcohol and prostitution. The *WHO/ UNICEF Action for Children Affected by AIDS* recommends activities, education, empowerment and community development as positive alternatives for street children. Recent activities include the sponsorship of a brick making enterprise, a carpentry workshop, a drop-in center, and the creation of training materials for street educators.

- In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, UNICEF initiated the “Sports for Life” program. The community-based program introduces team sports to youth. Implemented by volunteers, the program includes education, community service and drug abuse information.
- The Romanian National Committee for UNICEF, the Bucharest city council and a group of NGOs supported a University of Bucharest study which attempted to create a psychological profile of street children. The results of the study should enable authorities to establish facilities for families or reintegrate street children into mainstream society.

Education

A formal education can provide street children with a future. A fourth grade education is necessary for attainment of literacy status. The longer a child stays in school, the more knowledge he/she can acquire.



This knowledge includes the areas of nutrition, health care and vocational opportunities.

- School-In-A-Box (“Edukit”) is the joint education program launched by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF. Teachers can use the supplies in the box (or bag) to create mobile classrooms. Edukits are ideal for teaching street children.
- In Dakar, Senegal, UNESCO plans to equip a rehabilitation center for street children with school supplies.
- The KAYO Street Children Project aims to provide tuition, uniforms, and textbooks for 20-30 street children.
- A Nepal shelter provides vocational training for 100 street children.

Recreational Services

- European Scouts and Guides funded 11 three-week recreational camps for homeless children from Zagreb, Croatia. In 1994, over 400 children ages seven to 19 attended the camps.
- Jamaica's overcrowded public schools need playground facilities. After using all available playground space for classrooms, children have no place to play or congregate.

Financial Support

NGOs can provide financial assistance for street children projects.

- Members of the San Fernando Les Efforts Leo Club, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, participated in a walk-a-thon to raise funds for a local facility for abandoned and abused children.

Section Five

Resources

ChildRights International Research Institute
35 West 83rd Street
New York, NY 10024
USA
E-mail: childrights@worldnet.att.net

ChildHope
Lector Court
151 Farrington Road
London EC1 3AD
www.childhopeuk.org

Covenant House
JAF Box 2973
New York, New York 10116-2973
USA
www.covenanthouse.org

Defense for Children International USA
30 Irving Place – Ninth Floor
New York, NY 10003
USA
www.focalpointngo.org

European Youth Parliament (UK)
110A Banbury Road
Oxford OX2-6JU
United Kingdom
www.eyp.org



International Committee
on the Rights of the Child
Centre for Human Rights
United Nations
CH 1211
Geneva 10
Switzerland
www.unhchr.ch

ISPCAN (International Society for the
Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect)
332 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604
USA
www.ipscan.org

Model United Nations Program
UNA-USA Office
485 Fifth Avenue – Second floor
New York, NY 10017-6104
USA
www.unausa.org

Peace Child International
The White House
Buntingford, Herts SG9 9AH
England
www.peacechild.org

SOS Kinderdorf e.V.
Renatastr. 77
80639 Munich
Germany
www.sos-kd.org

Street Kids International
56 The Esplanade – Suite 202
Toronto, Canada
M5E 1A7
www.streetkids.org

UNICEF
Three UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
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www.unicef.org

UNESCO
866 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
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www.unesco.org

World's Children's Day Foundation
4401-A Connecticut Avenue NW
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Washington, D.C. 20008
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