



REPPER

International Exchange Network for Programs and Projects for
Street Children

Bulletin No. 1

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WHY CREATE "REPPER"? ...AND HOW?

REPPER is not intended to be a confining federation, but a network stemming from the expressed wish of the associations which met in Rufisque (Senegal) on several occasions in the past few years. It concerns several types of organizations:

1. those that already exist and have proved their validity in the field,
2. those which have the local objective of resolving the problems of street children by helping them reintegrate into mainstream society,
3. those which adhere to the Charter of Rufisque (see the last page of this bulletin).

REPPER's goal is to create links between organizations helping street children and between these organizations and associations, as well as individuals, in the West which are concerned by this problem. In an effort to attain this goal, REPPER will publish a bulletin to facilitate the exchange of information and direct contact between these organizations.

Decidedly not a collection of articles written by members of some committee, **the bulletin will be a medium placed at the disposal of network members**, who are invited to express their ideas, ask questions, and give accounts of their solutions. We'd like it to be a kind of "spokesperson" used to create a solidarity allowing us all to validate our actions, engage in negotiations and publicize campaigns more effectively by the clout attributed to sheer numbers.

REPPER will be composed of:

1. **Full members**, who will need to
 - a) make a written request (which will be considered by a group of people who were founding members),
 - b) accept the terms of the Rufisque Charter,
 - c) agree to send a report of their activities and their bulletin at least once a year,
 - d) obtain the agreement of the REPPER office before using REPPER as a reference.
2. **Associate members**, who will not be permitted to use REPPER as a reference, but who will receive a copy of the REPPER bulletin on request.

REPPER activities and office work will be carried out by the CONSTRUIRE organization, which has assumed the expenses involved in setting it up.

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An Example of a Program for Little Girl Prostitutes in Guatemala

(Condensed from an article from the Association "Les Trois Quarts du Monde")

We work with three local partners:

- 1) SODIFAG is the largest. It organizes literacy tutorials for street children, using itinerant teachers. It is "preventive education," so that working children who are maltreated will not have to flee to the streets.
- 2) CEDIC has programs set up for boys who have left their families and are living the the streets.
- 3) SOLO PARA MUJERES ("SPM" or "Only For Women") takes care of street girls who have become prostitutes. The problems of these girls are similar to those of street boys, except that they also face the problems of pregnancies.

SPM first tried approaching the girls in the places where they congregate. These initial contacts were disappointing because the girls asserted that they didn't need anything because they were earning their living. But these refusals didn't affect the case workers who decided on a step-by-step plan of action.

Preliminary stage: Six days a week, a field worker and a doctor go to talk with the girls prostitutes either in the streets or in hotel rooms where they end their nights. The doctor treats them and makes sure they have not overdosed on drugs, in which case the girl is taken to the hospital.

First stage of care: the day center. These girl - women, who are very young since the most sought after are between 9 and 11 years old, come in to spend the day here, from nine a.m. to five p.m. This is the first step in getting them out of the street. They can have breakfast until exactly 11 a.m. (to encourage them to be conscious of time limits). They eat lunch together, each having the responsibility of preparing the meal in turn. They are told that the center belongs to them, so they should respect it, as well as avoid breaking windows, violent behavior and taking drugs.

They can sleep on mats, can wash themselves and their clothes, play, draw, be treated by the doctor, and care for their baby, when the case arises. Two-thirds of them have been torn apart by the lives they have led, and, since none have completed primary school, they think and reason on a very basic level. Therefore, SPM plans many opportunities for the girls to talk with the doctor, the directress, the psychologist and the case workers, either individually or in groups. After some time, each girl progresses to the point she can fix her own objectives (for example, to stay a certain number of days without taking any drugs). When they feel ready to give up drugs and prostitution, they can go live in a stable environment at a SPM home.

Second stage: the "immediate rescue" home. Since this home was conceived as a provisional stage, the girls are not supposed to stay more then 30 days. This period proved to be too short in certain cases, and so it varies according to the requests and needs.

The aim of these stays is to analyze the girl / adolescent' s situation, to fix short-term objectives, to suggest activities which will validate the girl and help her prepare her future, when she is ready to take the leap: either a return to her family, or a placement in an appropriate institution, or placement in another SPM institution (a home for unwed mothers, a home for minors who have recently ended up in the street, or a home reserved for minors who have serious behavioral problems).

In these homes, the girls have the choice of attending school and/or learning a trade. They may attend a public school or, if they are older, take accelerated, remedial classes in a private school.

In order to support these girls, the entire SPM staff receives special training, even the cook, secretaries, etc.:

The results are encouraging, if not miraculous, because these girls have obtained diplomas, learned professions (as secretaries, hairdressers, beauticians, paramedics, printing assistants, etc.) and created their own stable families.

ANNE PASCAL

To obtain the complete report, write: L'Association "Les Trois Quart du Monde"
36, rue Blomet
75015 - Paris, France

The Role of the Psychologist in Dealing with Street Children: Gimmick or Necessity?

All the centers I have known seem to me to share common goals: a return to the family whenever possible, stabilization, integration, literacy, training, apprenticeships, and a placement in (or a return to) school. Each center endeavors to provide a minimum level of comfort, identical to that in their families, which are usually impoverished; in general, the surroundings correspond to the basic physical needs of the child: to be safe, to sleep, to wash oneself and one's clothes, to receive medical treatment, in some cases, to be fed, and in others, to earn some money.

But what about the child's emotional and psychological needs?

Whether the child is still in the street or at a center, the case worker invariably remarks that "listening" is the key to gaining his/her trust.

What is the meaning of this word "LISTEN," which, given its frequent usage, sounds like a magic rite? Is it simply collecting information, using what the child confides about his/her life to help the adult guide the child, exploring with the child possible paths for the future? Or is it also using what the child says as a springboard to start the dialogue?

"Man does not live from bread alone." The child needs to be understood, to feel someone cares. The child needs a positive self-image, whatever failures, weaknesses or shortcomings there may be. Escaping by taking drugs, delinquency, or repeated running away is an indication of the child's inner void and/or revolt. Is anyone taking advantage of the child's stay, however brief, in a center to say a few words which are meaningful, to allow the child to talk, to help create a memory and a sense of continuity in the child's life? How do we take in the grievance of a child whose mother is a prostitute or beggar or dead or disappeared, the grievance of a child who has been assaulted by peers, passersby, adults whom he/she thought was worthy of respect? And, above all, how do we respond?

Therefore, the presence of clinical psychologists as members of the staff seems necessary to me for several reasons:

1. To help the case workers sharpen their listening skills, to help them risk the adventure of a close encounter, to invent a personal language (taking into account the child's sensitivity, family history, and culture) and to find the words to really communicate with the child,
2. To set up and facilitate meetings for all those adults who are dealing with the different aspects of the child's life,
3. To share during the various meetings all the information which a psychologist has learned about the child and the adolescent, their stages of development, their needs, etc., within the specific context of what the case workers have to say about the particular child and keeping in mind the difficulties of the real situation, as opposed to a merely theoretical approach,
4. To take charge of the therapeutics for the child (incontinence, depression, suicidal tendencies, insomnia, etc.) who may not find the way alone to free him/herself from the multiple traumas which the child has been subjected to and thus finds him/herself prisoner of the past and incapable of inventing a future.

Françoise Bompard
Psychologist

Mission in Senegal in October 1995.

The full report is available from CONSTRUIRE.

Who is "a street child"?

Since the meetings in Rufisque, we realize that how difficult it is to find a precise definition. The term "child" means under the age of fifteen. A street child almost always lives in the streets, having broken completely away from his/her family. A child beggar who lives with his/her parents is not a street child. However, a child who spends every day in the street, going home only very late at night to parents who don't care about the child, may be one. Ultimately, perhaps the best definition of a street child is one recognized as such by other street children.

Fortunately, there are associations which are concerned about poor children who are not in the street, about youths and adults who live in the street, and about taking preventive measures. Their programs are very useful, but they don't cover the population which concerns us. We believe that to succeed in the humanitarian realm, goals have to be realistic, narrow and precise. Other structures should be invented for other action.

THE CHARTER OF RUFISQUE

The following text is a proposal made by Father François Lefort, who is keen to receive your comments, modifications and suggestions.

1. A street child must be considered as a child, not as a delinquent, a misfit, or as sick.
2. Before speaking, an adult must listen to the child and take his/her wishes into account. The role of the adult is to help the child distinguish dreams from reality.
3. It must be the child who decides what is going to happen, both individually and collectively. The child should decide whether to leave (or return to) the street. In the family-style home where the child lives, decisions should be taken jointly with the child.
4. The adult makes a simple contract with the child, and it must be scrupulously respected. It's very important never to lie to a child.
5. Whenever possible, priority should be given to the child returning to his/her family, provided the situation is stable and durable.
6. If a child is placed in a home or host family, the child should live without luxuries, in the same conditions he/she will face as an adult.
7. Large institutions and orphanages are not adapted to the needs of street children.
8. It's important for the child to be encouraged to keep certain values learned in the street, such as determination, resourcefulness, initiative, and solidarity with other children.
9. A child will be raised in the same religion as the parents. Attempts at conversion must be forbidden.
10. A child must have the certainty of knowing that once he/she has met us, there will never be any risk of being abandoned by us.

"If you are good, we'll love you, and if you are not, we'll love you anyway."

APPLICATION TO BECOME A MEMBER OF REPPER

° Full member OR ° Associate member

FULL NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:

FAX:

NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF YOUR ASSOCIATION:

Please indicate the names of the main programs for street children in which you participate or support:

PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO **CONSTRUIRE, 16 rue de la Glacière, 75013-Paris, FRANCE**

REQUESTS FOR HELP

Excerpt taken from a letter from **Ousmane Ben Fana Traoré**. Mopti. "For some time, our "Listening Center" in Mopti is "packed" with children in difficult circumstances. On average, 21 children spend the night here regularly. We have more and more problems in getting medication and clothes." Many similar appeals have been received from Benin and Senegal.

INFORMATION

Jean-Jacques Combier (Post Box 1726, Bamako, MALI) mentions that thanks to the gift from some friends, he introduced LEGO materials in the homes which he and his wife, Annie, are in charge of and they have been very surprised by the meticulous and inventive use of them by the enthused children.

CONSTRUIRE has an agreement with Partnairs International to obtain "open" airplane tickets at rates which can be worthwhile. Checking into the validity of the request and issuing the ticket may take 2 to 3 weeks, except in the case of emergencies.

ABOUT REPPER

Jean-Jacques Combier. In a letter to CONSTRUIRE, he expresses his wish that REPPER remain, at least for the time being, a small network providing a n exchange of information for small and medium-sized associations. He believes it's important to find a way to make the REPPER network very lively for those responsible for projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America, since the difficulties in communicating represent a considerable obstacle for most of them.

REPPER cannot reply to all the questions that may arise, but will endeavor to put you in contact with the NGO or other organization which seems best suited to do so.

Father Lefort proposes launching a Worldwide Week for Street Children. At the end of every year, a campaign would be organized by the associations belonging to the REPPER network on the theme: "It's not Christmastime for everybody. Some children will be alone and in the street on Christmas. How can we help them?" In Western countries, the associations would create activities to help. In the field, on the other hand, special festivities could be held for all the children. Creating such an event attracts the media. Several newspapers are already interested... **What do you think? Do let us know!**

THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE BASED ON CONTRIBUTIONS -- ARTICLES, EXCERPTS FROM REPORTS, COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS -- FROM OUR READERS: **SO PLEASE DO WRITE US!**