

REPPER

International Exchange Network for Programs and Projects for Street Children

Bulletin No. 3

NOVEMBER 1996

SOME ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN THE LAST BULLETIN

WHAT SANCTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN CASES OF STEALING, VIOLENT BEHAVIOR, RUNNING AWAY, OR TAKING DRUGS?

"Before being admitted to one of our hostels, a child has to agree to our 3 basic principles: not to steal, take drugs or lie about important things. Any violation of one of these principles amounts to a breach of contract, which results in a request to leave the hostel. Naturally, the child could return later if he/she agrees to obey these rules. As far as other mistakes a child may make while living in one of our hostels, for example, behaving violently or disregarding the hostel rules, the punishment is decided by the **children's court**, which is usually held at the beginning of every weekend."
Lo Samba Yéro -- CARITAS -- Mauretania

"When a youth comes to our drop-in center, we try to talk and listen. However, it isn't always easy! In cases of violence, addiction to solvents, or other serious trouble, we ask the child to stay away from the center. We keep track of the child in the street until he wants to stop. In the family-style homes where the youths are practically all attending school, we have now decided on the following sanctions: each child receives money to go to school, and buy drinks or food (5 pesos - or one French franc - for elementary school students, 10 for secondary school or 20 for high school). **Sanctions can be reductions in these stipends or suspending the right to go out or to parties. Adding to duties isn't very effective.**" Dominique Lemay - Fondation Virlanie - Philippines

"In 1876 the founder of **ASHALAYAM**, Don Bosco, labelled the pedagogy we still use today 'the preventive system.' Brutal punishment is out of the question and even mild ones are to be avoided if at all possible. In the hostels, the director and staff live 24 hours a day with the children, share their meals, games, work and sleep in the same dormitory. It's by their constant presence that problems like violence and drugs are avoided. We can see that the majority of children, since they are living with us, stop themselves from smoking and fighting. The ones who have the toughest problems (hard drugs) can go do as they wish outside the hostel, but they know that at the hostel, there are rules to respect. Little by little, since we believe in dialogue, many youths have broken the habit. Don Bosco firmly believed that a child must know he/she is loved and accepted as is, should never be humiliated and should find a friend in the educator who is taking care of him/her. "EDUCATION" comes from the Latin word "educere" meaning to exteriorize or reveal. Therefore, the point isn't to fill the child's head with knowledge or morals, but to **reveal what is latent in the child.**"

Outside the hostel, the child is accepted for who he/she is. We simply want to be a friend to the child, not trying to change the child, and persuade the child to avoid drugs and violence. We can only offer an alternative model, what we believe (**which is different with each educator**) and an alternative to the street. But it's up to child to decide. **Our duty is to propose an alternative for the child who wants to leave the street and appropriate strategies for the child who choses to remain there.**" Frédéric Boisset-Ashalayam-India; houses about 300 children in their hostels and attends to over 1,000 in overnight hostels, educational activities and sidewalk schools.

For children who run away, are violent or caught stealing, we take the following action: **temporary isolation, and extra duties to be done for the community.** The reference points children need can without doubt be acquired by being listened to, understanding and dialogue. But a child's development also requires contact with an **authority** which may sanction the child. In our hostel, the sanctions are defined by a **disciplinary court which includes children and youths.** Every sanction is taken in accordance with our internal regulations."

N. Mbadinga--Father David's Hostel for Minors- Brazzaville

An original approach

The idea for this school arose from the needs expressed by the young men themselves -- to take a professional training course which would take into account their general desire to be respected and integrated into their society.

An innovative system had to be conceived, one that would allow these older students, who could assimilate knowledge more easily, to accelerate their studies. In order to do that, it was clear that **the system should capitalize on the specific skills these youths had acquired as a result of their experience in the street and redirect them toward positive goals.**

Out of sheer necessity, a street child must learn to cope and get him/herself out of scrapes. He is **more receptive and assimilates faster.** For example, to prepare a theft, he watches for a long time and acquires a certain competence (**capacity for observation and a good memory**). So, these skills simply need to be reoriented.

Another example lies in the petty transactions in the street which give him certain basics of arithmetic. Some who have traveled are more openminded and understand **geography**. Street children also have more practice in oral expression and they may even speak several languages (in Mauretania, all are **at least bilingual**). Finally, their strong motivation to learn guarantees a very clear intellectual curiosity. The wealth of all this potential should not permit us to forget that the street remains a very destructive environment if a child stays there long.

Consequently, an educator must adapt the program to this situation very carefully and that means that the training of these teachers and the content of the programs are critical. The support received in the hostels also plays a prime role. Being given room and board in a hostel allows the youth to devote himself completely to learning, and a family atmosphere enables him to use the group reflexes he acquired in the street: solidarity with the other students but also his competitive spirit.

This example of an intelligently-conceived school, which revolves around practical problems related to students' experiences, is obviously interesting in itself. **But it can also provide food for thought about reforming traditional educational systems, which often are far removed from the students' immediate surroundings.**

The entire study, which was completed in July 1995 with support from the French Ministry of International Cooperation and the Center for Pedagogical Studies of Experimental and Consulting Projects ("CEPEC"), can be obtained by writing to: 14, voie romaine, 69290- Craponne, France; or tel: (33) 04 78 44 61 61; or fax : (33) 04 78 44 63 42.

SOME THOUGHTS FROM YVES MARGUERAT (MARJUVIA) regarding the letter from Isabelle Baufumé (Peru) which was published in the last REPPER bulletin:

Should we get the child out of the streets or simply try to help him live better there?

"It seems to me that that's a misleading question, arising from the meaning of words and which children are implied.

At the forum held in 1985 in Grand Bassam (Ivory Coast), a distinction was drawn between children "in" and "of" the street. The former, by far the majority, spend a great deal of their time in the street (but not usually their nights) in order to look for ways to supplement the family's insufficient resources (with the parents' agreement or on their orders). The latter, never very numerous, live permanently in public places not conceived as such; they have broken completely with their families. **It's imperative to know exactly into which category the particular child belongs, if we want to act advisedly -- and when it involves a child, we have no right to mistakes.** When migrations are studied, it is common practice to distinguish between two causes: "repelling" (forced to leave) or "attracting" (the lure of the destination). Why is a child in the street? Has he/she been attracted by the freedom or pleasures or forced to leave home for reasons like poverty, violence, hate, etc.?

The psychological consequences for the child are very different in the two cases. It seems to me that the street is rarely that attractive to the child, and never so for a child who has emotional security at home. Those real street children I've met in Togo and the Ivory Coast, whom I could offer a roof, a return to school, training and friendship, never hesitated for long to leave the street. Of course, there are appealing aspects of street life, but then there are the danger and violence, oppression and fears. Without the balance of a family shelter to return to at night, street life is often Hell. And then there is the problem of drugs, with the drift toward harder drugs, and that spiral is a strong pull...

Another important element is age. François Lefort is right in saying that the smallest children are at highest risk, threatened by the older children who at best protect them in exchange for the lion's share for themselves, or at worst, exploit them."

Leave the street or stay and make a place for oneself there?

"The only legitimate reply is the one given by the children. If they find what they're looking for, fine. Let's bring them our support to help them organize and defend themselves, improve the ways they can work, recreate themselves and take care of themselves. But if, beneath the usual shell of suspicion and sarcasm which keeps them alive, a desire to try to live a 'normal' life can be detected, then we don't have the right not to respond to that appeal or seize the extended hand..."

The entire reply is available from the author at: 8, avenue du Parc, 92290-Chatenay Malabry, France.

.....PROJECTS.....PROGRAMS.....NEWS.....

"UN REFUGE POUR L'ENFANCE" (A REFUGE FOR CHILDHOOD)

Head of project: Gino Fabro

Addr: 11, rue de Bruges, 67000-Strasbourg, France

Tel: (33) 03 88 61 52 15

In **MADAGASCAR** (fourth largest island in the world, with 13 million inhabitants, one-tenth of whom live in the capital), the states of the economy, social welfare and health are disastrous: a subsistence economy, mostly undeclared work, little industry, farming with inadequate means and ecological information, little tourism, and a weak currency (1,000 Madagascan francs = 20 U.S. cents), a minimum monthly salary of about \$30 (but which is rarely the case). In short, the great majority of people have a hard time surviving. So, since many assume that life will be easier in the capital, they end up there without a roof and their children let loose in the streets.

According to various sources (NGO's and Ministries), there are between 2 - 4,000 children living in the street. Street children (those living night and day alone in the streets) are in the majority: the youngest are 4 years old and most are between 6 and 16. Like every other street child, they suffer from indifference, from adults' aggressive behavior toward them, from hunger, fatigue, the cold (the temperature can go down to freezing in Tana and the children are in tatters with no blankets), lack of sanitation (diarrhoea, malaria, dermatoses, respiratory diseases are the main health problems identified so far). Their only source of comfort is friendship and the solidarity they may find in banding together. Fortunately, for the time being, they have been spared from the drug problem. They have very little hope of escaping from their present circumstances: **they know that they'll never go to school because of the cost** (registration, uniform and supplies) and consequently, there's little likelihood they'll be able to learn a trade.

The association which we created to build a hostel is based on careful planning after a 2 and a half month field trip to study the situation. In Tana, the "Centre Energie" (part of NRJ or New Youth Network) took us in. They enabled us to observe the daily running of a welcome and training center. **In exchange, we gave French classes and helped the children create a cartoon about their own lives and the center** (according to the latest news, 1,000 copies were made!)

We contacted the Population Ministry to learn how to set up the organization according to their requirements, to know the association's rights and what programs for children had been set up by the Government. We met the leaders of Social Affairs Division, which trains social workers, and those in charge of district help centers, who are called "fokontany". As we proceeded, many people devoted to street children, such as doctors, teachers, and nurses, told us they were interested in our project and wanted to work with us.

Our plan for our hostel includes: 12 to 15 children; simple living quarters; staff: a married couple who are educators; basic food, hygiene and health care; local school attendance, with remedial classes where necessary; help in setting out on their own (first job, rent, advice, etc.) The complete report for this project is available on request from Gino.

ERE BRASIL

President: Soly Levy 62, boulevard Arago, 75013-Paris, France Tel: (33) 01 45 35 50 83 Fax: (33) 01 43 31 35 97

This humanitarian organization was set up to provide support for the work done by educators working with street children in Rio de Janeiro, since they are the only people capable of linking street children with Brazilian society. Soly Levy, a Brazilian filmmaker, and many volunteers from the French academic world created this French association, which works closely with an advisory council in Brazil.

Street Children in Brazil

In Brazil, over 30 million children live in poverty and 7 million have been totally abandoned. In Rio alone there are about a million, 10,000 of whom live in the street. Beside the difficulties they have to survive, they are considered as a menace and can be the targets of the "Death Squadrons," who are often paid by local shopkeepers or inhabitants of dangerous parts of the city. These "squadrons" usually operate with complete impunity, since they are protected by their contacts and the fear they inspire in the communities. Justice is either paralyzed or in collusion with them.

The Activities of Street Educators

Today there are many projects for street children. The work of street educators consists of establishing a permanent tie with the children in order to help them find a place for themselves in a society where they have to learn the codes. They also try to help the children become closer to their original families, whenever possible. They help the street children with everyday problems such as school registration, formalities in police stations and courts, and seeing hospital doctors. Despite the lack of resources, the 50 educators in Rio (of whom only 15 can actually work in the street) get results when they intervene: reduction in violence, substance abuse and AIDS. **But their work involves taking serious risks:** they are considered as street children's accomplices and run the risk of falling victim to the "Death Squadrons," as did Jorge Do Nascimento in November 1992.

Ere Brasil's Objectives

Backing the street educators is a necessity. The importance and urgency of their work must be recognized by the people of Brazil and world opinion. Their numbers should increase. **The media have a critical role: threats to educators are reduced when the press mentions them.** Therefore, we want to:

- 1) Sensitize media in order to have the educators' work publicized and thus try to decrease the pressure on them;
- 2) Help the educators obtain legal status;
- 3) Find funds to increase the number of street educators to about 250 in the next two years;
- 4) Contribute to the creation of training centers for street educators.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

STREET CHILDREN PROJECT IN MARSEILLE (FRANCE)

The French organization "Médecins du Monde" is working with the Association for Young Runaways and has set up a basic health service for these youths, who are mostly boys and can be as young as 12. The physical health problems (diabetes or even suicide attempts) are easier to deal with than the psychological ones (self-mutilation, emotional problems, fears of abandonment, substance abuse, etc.) Therefore, they must have the opportunity to (1) be listened to, (2) be helped to express their concerns, (3) work on their past and their identity, (4) have their human dignity restored, and, if possible, (5) return to their family or be placed in a family-style home.

To do this, a team of doctors, psychologists, speech therapists, and educators organize WORKSHOPS (writing, working on words, drawing, oral expression) with a maximum of five participating children.

CONTACT: Nicole Mongin, Enfants des rues de Marseille; tel: 04 91 48 65 00.

PERMANENT RESEARCH ON DRUG USAGE IN AFRICA

Dr. Bruté, President of the Institute for Training in the Fight against Drugs ("IFLD," 8 rue Alphonse-Karr, 75019-Paris; tel: 01 40 37 25 44), has asked Yves Marguerat of the Marjovia Association to set up a research project to survey drug usage in Africa. **Yves Marguerat would like to work with all those who work with street children in Africa to gather information, especially information which could be obtained from children.** He has prepared a questionnaire which he will send you and asks that you return the completed form by the end of March 1998. Kindly contact him at 8, avenue du Parc, 92290-Chatenay Malabry, France.

REPORT ON THE CONGRESS IN STOCKHOLM

Monique Lousteau, Director of the French branch of the **Association against Child Prostitution**, writes: 126 countries were represented at this Congress, which took place last August. The facts are horrible, far worse than what we knew: child victims of sexual exploitation for commercial purposes are present in every country and on an unbelievable scale. Some reactions heard during the congress: "I am devastated by the scale of the problem." (Honduras) ... "My feelings are of horror" (Japan) ... "A sordid international business which yields billions" (Ireland)...

Facts: Children often fall victim to the adult who is supposed to protect them; too often the children are treated as criminals. Sexual exploitation of children occurs in prisons, refugee camps, violent behavior toward them can deteriorate into torture or even death. There is a rocketing increase in child pornography.

Recommendations: Appeals that the Stockholm Congress become a social, and not just legal, tool, that there be extradition of tourists guilty of child sexual exploitation and follow-up after their conviction. Not to use the term "rehabilitation" because the child is never guilty, but to learn to treat the victim well. Help a child who is in an illegal situation. Learn about Internet crime. Set up educational programs for judges and the police and a network for experiences concerning prevention.

Youths from Latin America and Asia came and appealed to us all: **"LISTEN TO US, LISTEN TO OUR CALL! We want to be recognized as partners -- we, too, have assets. The courts for children -- and everyone -- should treat us as human beings, hostels should be opened, rescue operations should be set up and protective guards should be created. If you think we are too small to be efficient, you have never been a child in bed with an adult man..."**

A NEW REPPER MEMBER: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT WOMEN OF BENIN

Mrs. Koutimy, the President of this association (CO.NA.F.I.B., BP 232. Cotonou, Benin) wrote us: "Since the mother brings the child into the world, women are the first teachers, and therefore, we are becoming members of REPPER. The mother teaches her child everything: to walk, speak, dress, eat and so on. We feel it is our duty to create a special section of our organization to work with street children, abandoned children, and children freed from prison..."

After working for 17 years in St. Louis, Senegal, Father Armand DUTEIL is leaving for Guinea, where his new address will be: the Catholic Mission of Mongo, B.P. 2016, Conakry, Guinea.

The major French publishing house Hachette has published Marjolaine NONON's book entitled Silence, des enfants nous parlent, which is based on her conversations with children living at the Virlanie Foundation in the Philippines.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE MULUMBA ASSOCIATION

News sent by Françoise Sohm

"Our friends in Angola have created a partner association to ours, called "Mulumba Angola" and it has obtained two plots of land which means we'll be able to attain our objectives for 1996: setting up the Ninho project (two hostels and an education and training center) and a center for agricultural training. The building will include child participants. Beside the training, our objective is to produce fruits and vegetables destined for the children but a portion will be sold. Each teenager of 14 or more (all are war refugees, orphans, and from rural areas) will receive a garden of 100 square meters. The profit each makes will be used to pay for room and board first and then the rest will be kept as savings for the youth's future. The grant which we received, although large, is insufficient and so we are now seeking additional funds."

CONTACT: Robert Méry, President, Mulumba France, 6, domaine d'Estées, 64320 - Idron, France.

SENEGAL

An association called Solidarity against Exclusion and Poverty ("ASEP") has been founded in Dakar.

CONTACT: Mrs. Maimouna Kane, BP 3162, Dakar, Senegal.

REPPER MEETING NEWS

On Saturday, September 28th, 31 REPPER-member associations met on the premises of "Médecins du Monde" for all-day discussions which revolved around four themes:

1. Child labor: Can it be a structure in the development of a child's personality? Under what conditions?
2. Concerning sexual exploitation of a child, what happens to the idea of the child's **rights**? Are there words or methods to convey to a child what constitutes a child's right, and then what each of the rights mean?
3. **The choice and training of educators and animators**
4. The relationships between sponsors and workers in the field. What contract can be made between the two parties? Means of control.

Each commission has produced a summary and they are available to you on request.

COME TO THE NEXT REPPER MEETING!

Saturday, January 11, 1997, from 10 to 6

at the Médecins du Monde building, 62, rue Marcadet, 75018-Paris

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Each of us remembers **apt or funny observations made by children**, whether they be our own children, our friend's, or street children we've met who know so well the humorous side of their lives. Why not jot them down and send them to us? We'll publish them and the laughter will add another dimension to our perspective!

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To contact The REPPER Network:

Write: In care of CONSTRUIRE, 16, rue de la Glacière, 75013 - Paris, France

Or call or fax : (33) 01 47 07 87 14