



REPPER

No.9 September 1999

This issue, No.9, brings to a close the series devoted to the problems raised by girls on the streets. There remains, of course, much to be said on this subject. We hope that the evidence we have provided has given you food for thought. For our part, we are dismayed by the dimension and difficulty of the task those on the ground must accomplish.

We suggest continuing to provide series on various topics, such as, for example:

the child and prison, children and work, handicapped children, etc.

What do you think? Would you prefer other topics? If so, which? We will discuss and choose a topic during Repper's next meeting in October. If you cannot come, please send us your suggestions.
Sincerely, Martine Berge and Christine Fourty.

WE SHOULD LIKE TO REMIND YOU THAT, IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, YOU SHOULD LET US KNOW WHETHER YOU WISH TO CONTINUE RECEIVING THIS BULLETIN. IF NOT, IN THE EVENT THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER INTERESTED, THIS NUMBER WILL BE THE LAST WE SEND YOU.

Letter from Brother S. JAMES of the NANBAN Association,
23 Panagal Road, Shenoy Nagar, MADURAI 625 020, INDIA.

The Nanban Association was created in 1990 by Brother S James. This association, now recognized by the Government, deals principally with girls on the street. In its nine years, around 10,000 children have taken shelter in its refuge. 60% of them have been able to return to their families, 40% have been given professional training and have found permanent work. Around 100 boys and 40 girls, from earliest childhood to marriagable age, live in the refuge where they are given food and shelter. The association manages to operate without too much difficulty thanks to financial help from a few firms in the country and donations from abroad.

"According to Hindu mythology, the God of Gods of the Hindu pantheon, Shiva, gave half his body to his wife, thus establishing the equality of the sexes for the first time. (...) This belief is all the more shocking in the light of the difficult condition of women and girls in India today.

(...) There are at present 45 girls in the centre but this figure changes from month to month. All are victims of negligence, social indifference and ostracism.

The reasons why girls end up on the streets are myriad. Little girls who have left their home on the death of their parents, whose mother has remarried and who leave home because of sexual harassment by their stepfather, whose father has remarried and who are tortured by their stepmother, who leave home because they are ill treated, who do not know who their parents are, who are sold, or thrown out by their parents because of superstitious beliefs or because their parents hate daughters, who are illegitimate, who want to be independent and without constraints, who leave because of the poverty of their families, who leave home because their parents are drug addicts, who suffer, harassment, sexual exploitation and incest by their own fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles or cousins ...

These girls refuse to admit or even accept that they have been victims of sexual violence because of the cultural values of a society that considers chastity as absolutely sacred. That is why they do not want to talk about what has befallen them. Only after frequent personal encounters and much persuasion do these girls begin unveiling, little by little, the truth.

Once they have finally been persuaded to come to the centre, the anti-social elements who exploit them voice their opposition openly, both to the girls and to those looking after them. Once the girls are safely in the centre, old customers, taking the centre for "a house of ill-repute", make repeated visits. As most of the girls are dependent upon these anti-social elements, they do not want any kind of apprenticeship; moreover, since the centre is not equipped to provide basic professional training, they remain under the influence of these people. They are naive to the point that a girl of 14, 8 months pregnant, was unaware of her condition.

At the outset it is very difficult to educate these girls at the centre, for they dislike constraint and are strangers to health and hygiene. They have no idea of saving and spend what they earn immediately. They refuse to sit down and talk to us, even for five minutes. It is difficult for the educators

to understand fully their situation. They can distinguish the approach of each of the educators and react differently to each of them, which does not simplify the task of helping them.

Girls leaving their families for the first time meet on the street girls who have lived there for some time, and who try to lead the new ones into their rebellious life by means of false promises and alluring words. This is why we give priority to returning to the family, as quickly as possible, those young girls who have recently left home. We seek their families and prepare their return.

Once we have discerned the character and aptitudes of those who come regularly to the centre, we try to motivate them to acquire capacities in keeping with their tastes. Training schemes are then suggested. Although apprentices begin by showing great interest in their apprenticeships, some of them give up and fall back into their first vocation. They then return to the centre merely for a night's shelter.

In spite of our advice and counselling, some refuse to give up their old habits, with the result that they fall under the thumb of a scoundrel who abandons them after having illtreated them and made them pregnant. The mother and the child are thus obliged to earn their living on the streets. The young mother becomes responsible not only for her own fate but for that of her child too.

These girls mull over their awful situation, and to bring a little lightness and gaiety into their lives, start chewing betel, smoking, glue sniffing and taking drugs. They end up believing these practices are their reason for living.

(At time of writing, 21 January 1999), the centre has contacted 3,210 girls of whom 1,673 have returned to their families, 137 have gone into other institutions, 727 have learned a trade, 30 are taking courses at schools and 1 has had a university education."

Excerpts from a commentary by Vida ASOMANING, Director of STREET GIRLS AID, F.I.C. Brothers, P.O. Box 709, Madina, ACCRA, GHANA. Telephone: 027 55 27 40.

STREET GIRLS AID (S Aid) is a local NGO operating in the streets of Accra since 1994. The very name of our organization speaks for itself. We work in close collaboration with Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS), sharing with it our experiences, our problems, and the same financial sources, which rationalizes the administration of such a vast and ambitious project.

We feel that, of all the children on the street, the fate of the girls is the worst, and that a pregnant street girl faces even greater peril. It is for them that we work daily in the streets to show them above all that we love them and that they can have confidence in us. Our principal task is thus to be on the street.

In two and a half years we have counted more than 150 "child-mothers". To help and welcome them, we have a refuge to the east of Mamori, behind the Accra state school, near the infamous public toilets.

Our social workers explain to them the pre-natal care required and when they are nearing their term they come to live in the refuge. They give birth in nearby maternity wards and stay in the refuge for 2 or 3 months, until the baby is weaned and means of existence for the future have been found for the young mother and her baby. An enterprise of this kind is extremely difficult and requires a great deal of devotion from our social workers. At present, 19 girls are living in our refuge, 11 have given birth recently, thus our family consists of 30 members. The youngest mother is 13 years old.

"Child-mothers" are extremely numerous, they work in the city and have very young children. They may bring their children to the refuge when they need medical care.

Girls who have been abused or run very great risks on the street (or who are simply tired of being harassed by men) may also seek shelter in the refuge where we give them a solid course in contraception. As to AIDS, we attack the problem globally. We begin by training our social workers so that they may in turn educate the street girls, and not only those who come to the refuge.

We encourage and help the street girls to undertake general or technical studies or to take up apprenticeships. We give them advice and help when they need it, and we help young girls so wishing to become reconciled with their families.

We help them, with the assistance of employers, to improve their qualifications and to find appropriate work. We simplify the setting up or the development of some small activity and bring them into contact with commercial advisers when necessary.

In S Aid, we say that our refuges are prolongations of the street, by which we mean that our real task is to be on the street daily with the girls. If we do not have daily contact with them, no action programme is possible. It is in treading the same areas of the city that we begin to set up solid ties with all the street girls.

**You will find further information on street children at No E mail
Repper Macon:
www.enfants-des-rues.com. www.street-children.com.**

**Any correspondence on this bulletin should be addressed to Construire
(address page 6).**

Excerpts from a talk by Father Patrick SHANAHAN of STREET CHILD AFRICA to the International Monetary Fund in Washington in June 1998.

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(...) Let me tell you of a girl we shall call, for instance, Comfort. She was sleeping on a refuse tip behind one of the markets in Accra. When our social workers found her in 1997, she was 13 years old, extremely anaemic and seven months pregnant.

Like most of the 20,000 children (of whom 6,000 girls) living on the streets of the capital, Comfort had left her village to try to earn money in the city to survive. Her first job, one of the lowest on the ladder, was selling plastic bags full of water in the market. At nightfall, like so many other street girls, she found her "protector", a teenager hardly older than herself. She made love with him so that he would look after her and give her a little money. He made sure that she knew she belonged to him. A year later she was pregnant and her protector had abandoned her.

A week after we found her and she was yet again on the disgusting refuse tip, the first pangs of childbirth began. By chance, an older woman saw one of our social workers and pointed the girl out. Thus Comfort was able to give birth to her child in total security in a clinic near the S Aid refuge. Today, Comfort is back on the street with her baby and struggling with all her might to survive there. It is obvious that this gauche and ignorant child-mother is facing a very hard future.

(...) A year ago, we asked 80 child-mothers like Comfort what they hoped for their children. They all said two things. Firstly, that they should not live like their mothers on the street. Secondly, that they get instruction and education. Comfort has very little hope of ever having a better life but she hopes that her child's life will be different from her own.

Who is responsible for helping Comfort get what she wants for her child? Must we, we who are sociologists, become *agents provocateurs* towards governments, NGOs and multinational development agencies?

OTHER INFORMATION

A birth is announced

We have pleasure in announcing the forthcoming arrival of ESPER (Ensemble pour Soutenir les Programmes en faveur des Enfants dans la rue - Street Children Programme Support Group). On the principle that union gives power, this association seeks to promote assistance and exchanges of all kinds among associations working for street children, whether on the ground, collecting operating funds, or providing know-how in administration, training, health care, etc. This association of associations aims to represent its members collectively wherever necessary, particularly in international and national political bodies. If you are interested, write to Yves Margueret, 8 avenue du Part, 92290 Chatenay Malabry, for further information.

REPPER will share a stand at the Forum d'Agen in October with ACPE (Association contre la prostitution enfantine - Association against child prostitution), and AIMER (Aide et Information pour le Monde des Enfants de la rue - Aid and Information on the Street Children's World).

Did you know?

Consultants du Monde (C.D.M.), created by a group of consultants widely known for their abilities, provides free high quality advice to any associations or NGOs who ask for it.

C.D.M.'s missions are generally short term and carried out on-site in accordance with a simple principle: don't tell people what they should do but help them do it. An outside view serves as a looking glass and leads them to question themselves.

Since its creation, C.D.M. has carried out missions, particularly in the Middle East, in Africa and in Latin America, often at the request of NGOs anxious to achieve better results on the spot.

Contact: Hubert Landier, c/o M.C.S., 11 rue de Laborde, 75009 Paris.
Telephone: 01 44 90 28 18. Email: hlandier@club-internet.fr

BUC-RESSOURCES (School of specialized educators in Versailles) offers training courses, activities and training. To obtain the brochure outlining the various activities on offer, write to BUC RESSOURCES, 1 bis rue Louis Massotte, 78350 BUC. Telephone: 01 39 20 19 94. Fax: 01 39 56 55 89. Email: bucress@club-internet.fr.

This school also has an extremely well supplied documentation centre on all social problems (video, books, reviews, documents, etc.) that may be consulted.

Small ad:

NEPAL, ENFANCE ET LUMIERE (Nepal, childhood and light) which undertakes the education of the poorest girls of Nepal, is looking for extremely motivated young women volunteers to work without remuneration in its children's home in Katmandu. They must be at least 23 years old, in good health, strong nerves and steely determination. Their job will be to help with the homework, see to the schooling and health of the children, to keep in touch with the school and the families, to be the link with the support association in France. The association offers them board and lodging and an extremely enriching humane experience. Length of mission: 5 to 10 months. Please send CVs with photo and handwritten letter to: 54 route de Coulangis 18000 Bourges. Telephone: 02 48 70 94 80.

**THE NEXT REPPER MEETING WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY,
16 OCTOBER, from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m.,
at 2 PLACE HENRI FRENAY, 75012 PARIS, FRANCE
(opposite the Gare de Lyon TVG station
Metro: Gare de Lyon).**

ADDRESS YOUR CORRESPONDENCE TO:

**CONSTRUIRE, 16 rue de la GLACIERE, 75013 PARIS, FRANCE.
Telephone & Fax: 1 47 07 8714.**