

EDITO...

In our last newsletter on the subject of training welfare workers, emphasis was put on the need to professionalize this "job unlike others". The idea being that the welfare worker was not only a "charitable person" whose devotion to work replied to the immediate needs of the child. Certainly giving food and offering care is indispensable; but instruction, education and bringing-up a child cannot be improvised. Good intentions are not sufficient, tested methods must be learnt by experience even if sometimes, in an emergency, it's necessary to improvise.

The tasks of a welfare worker are many and varied. No individual can alone reply to all the needs. One street-worker said so wisely "one can't be good at everything". Nothing replaces team-work where each member contributes according to his particular competence, where the relay of help comes at the moment it's required, where the supporting smile of a colleague gives the encouragement needed in times of difficulty and helps to avoid an error otherwise probable.

For it is true that sometimes, unconsciously, risks are taken endangering the child, or the street-worker, or both. One such risk, and a grave risk indeed it is, is not to keep a certain distance between teacher and child in order to avoid all possibility of misinterpretation of the relationship between them. Favouritism, or what may appear to be favouritism, can ruin the relationships between worker and child, or amongst the children themselves. Bitterness, resentment and jealousy

come quickly to youngsters in need of affection. Lies and rumours come from who-knows-where, and sometimes imply slander and even suspicion of pedophilia. Several street-workers have had to face such accusations, from which, one never recovers completely.

Caught-up in other priorities, few are those institutions which warn street-workers of these dangers and establish the rules to avoid them. Amongst these rules: forbidding the invitation of a child to ones home, to interfere in his private life, to offer presents or money or travel. It seems that the best cover from these risks lies in working in teams where children are in contact with several teachers at any one time and who share the tasks together.

Martine BERGE.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE !

Below are some suggestions for themes of thought for our future Newsletters:

- Children and schooling, various solutions, advantages and disadvantages of each.
- Sponsorship, a source of finance not without inconvenience.
- Building a network: its uses and difficulties in the start-up stage.
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Your reactions please!

Some thoughts on the above article:

Testimony of Dominique Lemay, Virilanie, Manila, Philippines, "

(.....) You must be frank in dealings with children, have that relationship with them that a father or mother has. A parental love relationship. It is this relationship which needs to be cultivated.

My fear now-a-days (with all the numerous accusations of pedophilia and child abuse, true or untrue) is that we will be afraid even to touch a child, to give him (or her) a hug and a kiss, to play with them. Street-children in particular need to be loved; love recognised by the gestures of affection which make up its structure.

At Virilanie, voluntary workers are never alone with the children....they play with them, surround them with love, and give lessons within the home where they live in a group of some 20 in number.

Testimony of Deborah CORTHAY, Salvador of Bahia, Brazil

"(...) I've been working with street-children for the past ten years. One can recognise them because they are dirty and afraid of adults. They are excluded from society. For example during the carnival, which is a great festival, they are unwelcome and are herded up and put in lorries to be released in the countryside some 50 kilometres from town.

Police and passers-by look on them as outcasts. The community considers them as valueless and to help in their disappearance is appreciated, they can even be killed without punishment. Shop-keepers unite to get rid of a thief, paying the police or a hired killer. 4 or 5 years ago a police captain promised to "clean-up" an area in Salvador by killing one youngster per week, and he did it. His boasts glorified him to winning the position of a member of parliament. The actual killer was expelled from the police force, but to-day is the owner of a private company in the security business.

The children are thus free to run the streets but at the same time they feel that they are hunted. They are not necessarily unhappy, they just live in a world where some days are good and others are bad, often unaware of their misery and misfortune; they are "somewhere else". Their greatest need is a roof over their heads and a little love and consideration.

We do not take them from their streets, but we meet them where they are; we treat them as equal human-beings, we chat with them and see if they really wish to change their way of life. If the answer is "Yes", we explain the 4 cardinal rules of our centre. Many come to us recommended by old friends who have stayed the course. To help them, we offer to those selected to live together in a group of only 4 or 5 youngsters, never more, one of who will be at least 18 years old. We find them board in their neighbourhood and pay the rent, together with a small amount for household expenses. They organise their own lives, work to pay for food and clothing and we supervise the instruction of their leader.

We suggest that they define their aims in life and we discuss these with them. They are the masters of their own future. We check up on those who have left the hostel because the State does nothing to help them and would even prefer that they disappear.

They have our respect and we want them to be accepted as fellow citizens. They need our love in order to regain their self-respect, to have hope in their lives, to study and choose a trade, assume their sexuality, plan their future, cope with problems and integrate into the community; that means not being treated as outcasts. Nearly all become impoverished citizens living in difficult conditions. Once they said to me "we are street-children but we have our dignity".

Help is only effective if the child is loved and never deserted, in spite of all that may happen. Efficiency is then 100%. If he goes to an institution where he is just a number amongst others, with professional care by those who are above-all civil servants a child with a good disposition can make it, but the majority will never acquire what they need to succeed in adult life.

People, locally and internationally, have little knowledge of the plight of these children. I myself, before I got deeply involved in their world, was prejudiced and rather afraid of contact with them. Over 10 years there's been a change, which is not necessarily an improvement – they now make head-lines in the newspapers and television. Those in power are made aware of the hardships sustained; television emotionalises their plight, but always in the aspect of "what can be done" and never in the aspect of "what does justice require".

Many countries have agreed the Charter for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, but this charter says little or nothing concerning their obligations. This reinforces voluntary help rather than a real education. Why not mention their obligations? The situation has recently been aggravated by the International Employment Office which seeks to restrict child-labour. The intention is good to put an end to the exploitation of children for hard labour with little pay. In Brazil children help their parents to cut large quantities of sugar-cane for very little pay. Not only are children exploited but often they suffer accidents, at the sisal press, or picking cotton, or collecting coffee, when making bricks or breaking-up stones.

Street-children are chased for selling peanuts, sweets and ice-cream, when they clean shoes, carry a ladies shopping at the market, or clean cars. Those who once tried to earn an honest living by doing odd-jobs give in to the obligation of stealing and hiding. Isn't it necessary that children learn how to work? Work is it not part of education? If there is no other way to survive surely the way out is to earn something by one's work."

NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

REEJER (Réseau des Educateurs des Enfants et Jeunes de la Rue) in Kinshasa, RDC, continues its work of co-ordination and information for associations helping street children. In Mai it organised, together with UNICEF, a 4-day session for child leaders and street-children concerning their rights. In June, for the burgomasters and directors of CIAT, 2 days were given over to a synopsis of the Convention on Child Rights and the question of how to protect children during the elections in RDC. E-mail: reejer_cg@ic.cd

The OCED in Kinshasa, recovering from serious financial difficulties, has temporally abandoned its help to the poorest of school children. Its membership of the Network of Voluntary helpers of the United Nations in the Congo has facilitated the help (food and games) it gives three times a week to some 30 children, aged from 6 to 8 yrs old. E-mail: oced1996@yahoo.fr

The Canoa in Iquitos, Peru over the past 3 years has helped to retrieve some 28 children working in the streets and put them into schools. Particular attention is paid to developments in the child's psychology, progress in school, and artistic means of expression which favour character formation. Ties are maintained with parents, and a "parent's school" has opened. More details can be found on www.lacanoasinfronteras@hotmail.com.

The Centre Père Ceyrac in Guinea reports that schooling is supplied by both public and private schools. It is very important to make parents aware of the need to educate their children – especially concerning their girls, and their regular and sustained attendance. Girls need constant motivation to attend, especially those from rural areas. "Human mobilisation without motivation is not easy to achieve, life here is expensive and access to free schooling is not available to everyone here in Guinea."

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CHANDRODAYA, Kathmandu, Nepal has opened a new centre in Narayanghat some four hours drive from Kathmandu. There are 300 to 350 children, some very young, who live there without help from benevolent organisations. Everything is yet to be done. The new centre in Narayanghat has been planned to become a "connectional centre" for a series of small units of local "prevention". The rapid growth at Chandrodaya is quite astonishing, but Joshi, - Jean Christophe Ryckmans, manager and founder member-, reminds us that "time in the streets is fast" and this has to be taken into account. This new structure with its numerous new activities, has led to changing our name: Chandrodaya becomes CPCS, Child Protection Centers and Services, and Chandrodaya International becomes CPCS International. E-mail: international@cpcs-nepal.org

COSAME, in Paris, France, has supplied an impressive list of artisans and craftsmen "sans frontières" who have already spread out over the world to teach their trades to young people. Bakers, confectioners, foremen, seamstresses, sewing specialists ,... etc. Anyone interested can contact Cosame by
E-mail: cosame@apcm.fr

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