

EDITO...

News from the four corners of the world puts REPPER in the position of being a kind of observatory for the member institutions working in the field. Situations change as events occur and operational principles and practices evolve. Below we comment on are some observations.

Martine BERGE

METHODS EVOLVE

Only a few years back, the education, board and lodging put in place by the pioneers of our work resembled that of European orphanages (compulsory uniforms, dormitories for dozens of children, meals in silence in a common dining-room, lessons provided in-house). Some institutions still maintain these methods but they have become a lot less frequent.

Now-a-days most have a more decentralised organisation, consisting of:

- A group of welfare workers who contact and supply children working or simply existing on streets.
- A meeting hall or temporary shelter in a disused building where children can sleep, sometimes wash and hand in their savings, other valuables, or tools of trade (ex. shoe-shine box) for safe-keeping.
- A hostel where a child can live and make friends. Here he learns to understand who he is, to stop stealing and to give up drugs. If he has no family to which he can return the institution will try to find him a place in a local school or get him an apprenticeship.

The thought process, linked to a new approach to civilisations and cultures, has profoundly modified the behaviour patterns of many westerners. Respect for, the study and the understanding of different ways of life, their beliefs and philosophy, have convinced welfare workers of the need to **adapt their theories on education to comply with the local culture.**

Over the same period of time, many welfare workers have been convinced through their work and the study of child psychology that the best place for a child to live is still with his family, provided of course that their whereabouts are known and both child and parents agree. It's his natural place. With the child's agreement, the welfare worker contacts the family, to act as a go-between in smoothing-out any difficulties before re-insertion in the family. Regular visits follow to ensure the continued integration of child with family to avoid him running away from home. If it is within the capacity of the Institution some financial help may be given or some paid work will be sought to help the family. Sometimes the child will be sent back to the streets by the family because he is just another mouth to be fed, or in order to beg, or to become a prostitute.

To illustrate these new methods several examples can be given.

The **NANBAN FOUNDATION in Mandurai, India** founded in 1990 has had experience of 15000 children and 65% have returned to their families. NANBAN enlists the help it can find in the neighbourhood and particularly from its' women-folk. NANBAN has helped them to form clubs where they discuss the local problems. Solutions are found, solidarity grows between members and responsibilities are established. An example: the concern as to how to find work for their children led to the suggestion to build a bakery school and a production unit for bread, tarts and cakes. This is now in active production and some mothers have volunteered to be depositaries for the products sold in return for a small, but much appreciated, percentage making a contribution to family's budget. Children who cannot be returned to their families are cared for either in a hostel or on the farm, here all the many religions of India are present. Currently some 350 children are in care. The children are taught in schools and technical colleges. Dance, singing and traditional theatre lessons form the artistic disciplines and contribute to a group therapy.

Since 1985, the **VIRLANIE FOUNDATION in the Philippines** has decentralised its action by giving the care of it's children to foster-families. A couple with their own child or children, will thus welcome these "adopted" children to their family circle. Virlanie supervises the progress with regular visits, teaching being given in the schools nearby. Virlanie meet with the local authorities, the police force, the administrators of prisons and courts of justice, in order to keep up to date with the difficulties experienced by street-children.

In **Ethiopia, KINDU ERDATA**, cared for some 80 children in several hostels, but experience proved that this method was not really what the children required and it has been changed in favour of a subsistence payment to the family home of 20 € per month. Some 200 ex-street children, now re-integrated in families, which previously could not afford to pay for the food, currently benefit from such funding. This procedure has made possible considerable economies in the saving of the cost of premises, kitchen-staff salaries and overheads. Moreover the children grow up in their home and not in an artificially created family unit or in a group of difficult youngsters. Monthly visits to the mothers make sure that the money is used correctly for the purchase of food, clothes and schooling. Orphans, sick-children, victims of Aids and the others who nobody wants, are taken care of in a Kindu Erdata hostel.

INCREASING NUMBERS OF STREET CHILDREN

In recent years, in many countries, due to new conditions and events, the number of children on the streets has increased by thousands.

In many regions notably in Africa, tribal warfare, famine and Aids are rampant. This results in many more orphans, children lost during exodus, children in flight of mal-treatment, children chased from their homes believed to bring misfortune or to be "bewitched". There are also those forcibly enlisted children, demobilised and abandoned after having witnessed and participated in all sorts of atrocities. All these and more, live on the streets and form rival gangs. These children are increasingly young, often born of adolescent parents, unknown parents, they are the first generation born on the street.

The number of street-children is astonishing and continues to grow. Neither charitable institutions nor churches know where to turn to next. Governments are dealing with other problems which they consider more important. Children in the streets, like wild cats needing to be tamed and more often than not would simply be exterminated. Some Institutions write to say that not all street-children can be taken into care – the numbers are too great and the centres providing help cannot be perpetually multiplied...

NEW METHODS AND NEW STRUCTURES

And so things must change.

In India, Ashalayam, concentrates on getting the children back to their families and, by frequent visiting, tries to insure that they remain there.

CAS (Catholic Action for Street Children), in Ghana, having noticed that not only were the numbers of street children increasing but that they were also increasingly young and did not have the same behaviour patterns of previous generations, decided to install its activity directly on the streets of Accra. Welfare workers are there day and night, ready to intervene when needed, a van equipped for help, does the round in the streets, school lessons are given on a pavement or under a bridge. Welfare workers, teachers and managerial staff work together to build up information, available to each member of the team, concerning each child, and thus provide a concerted approach to their needs.

ORPER, in Rwanda, Kinshasa, for several years has been researching the ways by which to provide more help to the increasing numbers of street children. For some 80% of these children, due to accusations of witchcraft and to poverty, there is absolutely no possibility of a return to their families. ORPER gets reorganised: up until then the children came to ORPER, now-a-days ORPER goes in search of the children with a project named "Centre Mobile". The idea is to meet children in several areas of town with the help of a small bus in which information can be obtained as to their needs and the difficulties. The principal objective is to ensure, particularly during the night, some protection and reduction in abuse; also it tries to alert children to the risks, provide first aid and treat the emergencies.

NETWORKS

More and more voluntary workers pool their skills and knowledge in networks. With the new means of communication provided by Internet such pooling of resources has been greatly facilitated. **REEJER, in the CONGO**, backed with help from **ORPER** is a network of local institutions recently formed to **organise the pooling of competence**, specialising where necessary by age, sex or activity.

In Burkina Faso, collaboration between the local authorities and **TISSONS** has already proved useful.

The **OPDE in Burundi**, over 15 years has formed two other **OPDE** – one in Rwanda another in the Congo – and also formed 3 associations to treat the orphans of families bereaved by Aids (**APECOS**). All these units **operate with common regulations and administrative procedures**, co-ordinated by Athanase Rwamo, founder of the **OPDE**, which also manages an "Observatory of Children's Rights".

AIDE et ACTION has joined up with **PARMONDE** together with seven other institutions, all have adopted a **common concept and a common deontology** concerning foster parents.

Regretfully, the constant widespread shortage of funds delays implementation of such new methods and the recruiting of extra welfare workers. Fortunately nobody is discouraged. Martine BERGE.

AFRICA

LA BELLE ETOILE, Cameroon, during 2005 took in 73 children of which 27 have been reintegrated with their families and 19 chose to return to the streets. Two couples do the work of supervision, arranging activities, following-up on schooling and apprenticeships. Past apprentices living nearby in a "saré" return to the centre once a week for further tuition and join in the week-end activities. Email : josefina.arbizu@hotmail.com

PORTE OUVERTE, Djibouti, concentrates its' effort on maintaining its workshop crafts which provide children with dignity through work, and also in the defending the needs of both local and foreign origin. Email : porteouverte@yahoo.fr

CAS, Ghana, has drawn up a five-year plan with the main object of its work on the street and in its Centre for help. (see above under "New methods and Structures") "Many of these children were born on the street and before one can give any useful help it is essential to ascertain their needs and have replies to some fundamental questions, such as, "What have I learnt from my life on the street?", "Who are my parents?", "In who can I have confidence?", "Who are my real friends?", "How can I survive?", They only know the way of life on, and the rules of, streets and nothing of the traditional culture. And us! What do we know of the way of life and rules of street living? Many children treasure their freedom and don't accept to be told what to do. They have learnt how to survive. What should we be doing to remain a good supplier of their needs?". Email : ficcas@ighmail.com

OSEPER, Congo, a takes care of 125 children in four hostels and welcomes in two other centres girls and boys from the street. OSEPER looks to their individual needs, tries to get them a return to their families, listens to what they want to say, supplies medical care, hygiene and primary education, all based on the principles adopted by the "Congregation of the Serviteurs de la Charité". For those children over 16 yrs. old an apprenticeship in a workshop is available. Email : matarrese.guido@quanelliani.it

CENTRE DE VIE POUR TOUS (CVT), Congo, cultivates with help from children, in its care, an area of 2.5 hectares which provides them with food and funds from the sale of stock surplus to requirement. A project to sell insects as ornaments or as collectors' items is being considered. Discussions with the children teach them good behaviour and to be honest, alert them to the need for personal hygiene and the risk of transmission of disease by sex. Parents are informed of the dangers their children meet on the streets. Note that CVT has no paid employee, all are voluntary workers – not always an easy way to manage things. Email : cvtcdc@yahoo.fr

FIDESCO-RWANDA has not succeeded in obtaining a licence from the authorities to continue to operate its "bike-taxi" project. Of course the young cyclist drivers are very disappointed. However all hope is not lost as a project of co-operation with UNICEF is underway. During 2005, some 60 children from 80 encountered on the streets came to follow, or repeat, the literacy course. At the end of the year, only 46 of these will enter primary school to join the 123 children already being taught, - 16 in secondary level, 9 at technical college and 1 at University. 74 children have been re-integrated with their families. Overall 277 children have received care from the FIDESCO team. Email : jmsttwambazemunqu@yahoo.fr

LATIN AMERICA

CASA DO MENOR in Brazil has completed its project "Construire la Citoyenneté" in which some 120 families participated. From now on, several craft centres, shops and a bakery are selling their wares. For the youngsters, help with schooling, games and a "capoeira" are supplied. Conferences on subjects such as Aids, Sexual transmission of disease, Child pregnancies, are organised. Classes teaching literacy are provided for adults and children. All the children have progressed and passed the examinations. Other families whose turn will come are encouraged by this success. A Centre for professional training and a garden for children have recently been inaugurated. Email : casamkt@casadomenor.org.br

ASIA

CHILD PROTECTION CENTERS AND SERVICES (CPCS) ex-"Chandrodaya", Nepal, together with CWIN organised a winter camp for street-children for the two months from 20 December to 20 February. Many activities are organised for the hundreds of children who also find temporary shelter from the seasonally cold weather. Moreover they can develop here their own personal talents and capacities. Collaboration with CWIN and other social actors improve the performance and results and could be the way forward for further events.

Email : contact@cpcs-nepal.org

CAMELEON, Philippines, has taken into care during 2005 some 60 girls, of who 30 have returned to their families and 30 remain in care. A second hostel is being built, it will have 15 girls in 2006, and 30 in 2009. Help in schooling has been supplied to 100 children. The aim is, on one hand to put a stop to child labour and to provide them with schooling, and on the other, to help the parents to become responsible for professional training and jobs providing some income. The farm gives work to a few families, covers its cost and provides food for the hostel.

Email : cameleon@philwebinc.com

EUROPE

VOIX LIBRES, Switzerland and France, formed in 1966 works in Bolivia, in the slums, prisons and rubbish dumps of Potosi, Cochamba, Oruro and for the street-children of La Paz. Its main purpose is the education and training of disfavoured children and the eradication of child labour in the mines. Over the past ten years 107 projects have been completed. Most of our helpers are ex street-children who are now trained and qualified. Some 65,000 mini loans have been made to the poorest, particularly those in prison. Further, 15 centres for equitable trade have been formed. Voluntary helpers – 200; Salaried staff – 1. Email : voixlibres@voixlibres.org

LE SILLAGE, France, has stopped sending materials to Haiti and has reorganised its activity: building boats and the making of fishing nets locally is less expensive and provides work where it is much needed.

Email : aj.lefloch@free.fr

AMIS DES ENFANTS DU MONDE (AEM), France, is working mainly in the Philippines in association with ERDA. The philosophy behind its projects is to involve the local population without which no permanent success is possible. ERDA works with some 180 selected partner institutions which it visits and thus extends its help to a greater number of children. A mini-loans scheme has been created which helps to start a small business and facilitate its growth. Email : contact@amisdesenfantsdumonde.org

ATELIERS SANS FRONTIERES, France, back from an assignment in Brazil, organises a fifth assignment between disfavoured children in the Paris area and Ashalayam in Calcutta. On programme is the construction and equipping of a kitchen and the installation of equipment for 2 multi-media centres. The youth from both sides of this project are very keen to co-operate. Email : contact@atelierssansfrontieres.org

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