

DISABLED CHILDREN

EDITO...

"The poorest of the poor" writes Dominique Lemay. Derided, bullied, victims of sexual abuse or other perverse practices, rejected by their family, they drag themselves on one leg or limp as best they can. Apart from beggars who capitalise on their misery, they mostly try to go unnoticed to escape from persecution. Very few survive for any length of time in this cruel jungle which is the street, where money earned is only kept through fighting, where food is on a first come first served basis and where you have to run away from the police.

Can anything be done? Here are a few accounts from some of you which prove that there is hope and help is at hand.

Martine BERGE

• **VIRLANIE – Manila, Philippines**

"The scheme for mentally disabled children, designated as "special needs", was started ten years ago. Whilst visiting a childrens' prison one Christmas day, I saw a little kid being beaten up by other kids in their cell. He did not fight back. He was disabled, severely autistic. That day, I realised the distress and abuse these children face, often rejected and abandoned. What is more, they are often sick as well.

Over time, we have sheltered more and more of them because for us, they are the poorest of the poor. Today, about forty of them live in our establishments. They are autistic, suffer from Down's syndrome etc..

Some are severely mentally disabled.

For a few years, they were spread about in the different houses and lived with other children. Some were difficult to look after because of their severe disability. We had to set up a specialised team with extra staff to help their progress.

We set up "Jade House" which today welcomes around twenty children and young adults. The house has just been relocated to the surrounding area about an hour from Manila, in a new building of 350 m², which we had built on a plot of 1000 m². The 22 children and youngsters who live there have more space for both indoor and outdoor activities, they are really happy there. For the moment, about 20 other disabled children are lodged in the other 11 houses of our charitable foundation.

In addition, with the support of the Mekong Children's Association, we are going to open a new house which will be called "AIME", for around 20 mentally disabled children who at the moment are rotting in prison, abused, humiliated by the other children or the adults. We also welcome mentally disabled children sent to us by the heads of the Social Services in different areas because these abandoned children are not suitable for adoption. There are very few Institutions in the Philippines which will look after mentally disabled street children.

Within our charitable foundation, there is a medical team which comprises a doctor, three nurses one of whom is on secondment to the prison. For the severely disabled children, we work with outside specialists and we have within the foundation therapeutic practitioners, specialist Filipino teachers and volunteers. Some have been trained by the Foundation, others come from outside the organisation.

We know that those children, some of whom will reach adulthood, will stay with us forever. Each one of them has a troubled background (violence, physical and sexual abuse) but even if their disability is severe, we try to help them develop so that they

improve their self-esteem. Some of them whenever possible do paid work for the Foundation and all take part in celebrations and events organised by the Foundation. Every day we share the children's suffering and violence but we also encounter a lot of honesty and love. Through love, we help them to love themselves, to discover their uniqueness and their aspirations. It is most important that one day these children hear the words "You are important to me and I love you". This is the essence of our work."

Dominique LEMAY, founding president of Virlande

Website : www.virlande.org

- **ASMAE - Association Sister Emmanuelle**

In Egypt and Madagascar ASMAE supports local organisations which fight so that disabled children can be accepted and integrated into their community. These children and youngster need specialist support in order to become as independent as possible. Learn to feed themselves, dress themselves, be trained for the workplace... ASMAE sends professional people to train the local personnel, and finances the equipment. For example, for many years ASMAE has been carrying out joint ventures with Egyptian and Lebanese organisations to support disabled children :

"The aim of our organisation is to put in place imaginative solutions compatible with the Arabic culture to alleviate the suffering of the children and their families. In a country where the attitude towards disabled children is very different to that in the Western World, changing attitudes to disability is not an easy task.

A gradual process sensitive to the Arabic culture was essential (...). In 1999, ASMAE supported by SETI, an Egyptian organisation, started by sending over an occupational therapist bilingual in Arabic. For a duration of two years, she trained the Egyptian therapists to implement this new method.

The experience was a success and was followed up by local training of Egyptian professionals in this new discipline. Another occupational therapist then came over to train three teachers so that they too should become specialists in occupational therapy. Training is ongoing with lectures, practical sessions and forums.

In 2003, around 300 disabled children were taken into care. The rehabilitation sessions take place in groups or individually and last an hour. The children are put in classes according to their age or their disability. The work focuses on the needs and ability of the child, through the use of the body but also taking into account the psychological aspect until then neglected in Egypt. These sessions have therefore brought about a very different therapeutic approach.

Interest has spread. In Lebanon, a neighbouring country of a similar culture, the Institute of occupational therapy of Beirut, the only official institute of its kind in the Middle East has shown interest in the new methodology. In 2004, after carrying out an evaluation, the institute recognised and accredited the team trained in Egypt. Since 2005 the representatives of SETI and the project manager of ASMAE regularly visit Lebanon to explore future collaborations opportunities.

This example of cooperation to improve the physical and psychological wellbeing of disabled children and their family illustrates the desire of our organisation to act side by side with its partners until these can

become independent and take over the management of these development projects."

Website : www.asmae.fr

- **KROUSAR THMEY – Cambodia**

Krousar Thmey, founded in 1991, takes full care of over 1000 children and supports another 3500 in its 70 centres across Cambodia. Long term development of these centres relies on the involvement of local representatives.

There are no government provisions to look after disabled children in Cambodia and 2.2% of the population is disabled with 21% of these children. This is why Krousar Thmey decided to launch a scheme for deaf or blind children. To this day, it is the only organisation providing education for such children.

One of the schemes, "schooling support", allowed (in 2004-2005) 2000 children including 679 deaf children and 189 blind children to receive free good quality specialised schooling through the opening of 4 schools for blind children and 4 schools for deaf children. In addition, 32 'integrated' classrooms in provincial state schools welcomed deaf children and one welcomed blind children. Three workshops for the manufacturing of Braille books were also set up.

Krousar Thmey targets primary and pre-school education and has approached the government to encourage it to take charge of young people in secondary schools and colleges. Krousar Thmey launched a campaign to promote the need to provide schooling to disabled children with amongst other things a touring show with disabled pupils acting.

Krousar Thmey has founded specialist schools totally dedicated to deaf or blind children with the necessary tools such as the translation of the code Braille into Khmer, the publication of books in Braille and the manufacturing of specialist teaching equipment.

Blind children are taught to read and write in Braille and through mobility and spatial awareness lessons, they are taught to move about on their own within the classroom and then in the playground. They also learn to memorize a given itinerary and to move in an unknown environment with the help of a white stick.

After the initial training they attend lessons in state schools for half of the day, the other half being spent at Krousar Thmey where they revise and go over the lessons in greater depth with specialist teachers. Because their textbooks are available in Braille, they can sit in the same lessons as their friends. This immersion with the other children makes for better integration and an environment which is suited to their needs. The teachers are specially trained, the children live on the premises and are surrounded by children with similar disabilities. Furthermore, if they wish, they can take up music lessons, English lessons, IT lessons or weaving.

In addition, for deaf children, once they have acquired sign language, they can communicate with others and are no longer cut off from the outside world. They then attend school for half days in the state educational system. A translator from Krousar Thmey helps them during the lessons and will translate important texts. They can reinforce their studies at Krousar Thmey during the other half of the day. They can also take part in traditional dancing lessons because they can feel the vibrations of the music thanks to a specially designed wooden floor and they dance in front of large mirrors to check their movement and coordination.

Specialists in hearing aids come twice a year to examine and fit hearing aids to children under 12. The number of these children is increasing and a speech therapy scheme has been put in place. A French specialist comes to train the keenest teachers in 'auditive' education which allows a child to recognise his or her name, the telephone ring, etc... and also learn to lip read.

The "integrated" classes are specifically for deaf and blind children in the state schools. This allows the child to remain near home and stay within his family. The teacher is employed by the state education system but receives extra funding from Krousar Thmey.

The major benefit of this scheme is that the children are not removed to specialised institutions but on the contrary, are integrated in society from a very young age. This makes all young people aware of disability and helps them accept the differences which can

only help improve attitudes towards the disabled. Finally, it is less expensive than having to build a new school and with the added benefit that the government is more involved.

Website : www.krousar-thmey.org

- **ASSOCIATION LEO – Mali**

It has arranged since 1999 for very young disabled orphans to be looked after in the state crèche of Bamako. There is no provision in Mali for such children. The crèche has agreed to take them in but it does not have sufficient facilities and lacks the expertise and training to look after the disabled. In exchange for looking after the children, the Association Leo finances the salaries of 8 childminders, one occupational therapist, one speech therapist and a physiotherapist who look after around 20 children with physical or mental disability or both. A local mainstream school is happy to receive half of those children and they attend with a childminder.

Half a dozen of the children do riding for the disabled once a week.

The big worry is what their future holds when they become adolescents and adults. Where will they find accommodation and care? How will it be funded? The Association Leo is looking for partner organisations to put in place a new structure for that purpose.

E-mail : leo-asso@worldonline.fr

Website : www.orphelin-handicape.mali.org

- **ASSOCIATION ENFANCE-AVENIR**

Based in France it works in Vietnam to help young blind people who are looking to open a massage institute. The gift of a clothes washing machine was most appreciated!

E-mail : enfance-avenir@dng.vnn.vn



**Government decisions will benefit the children
but are still unsatisfactory**

The rights of children are improving here and there but not without trial and error. Goodwill is not enough and it must be accompanied by practical suggestions.

VIRLANIE in Philippines tell us that a new law has increased the age at which a child can be imprisoned from 9 to 15 years old. This is a big step for children's rights. But what to do with the 1500 prisoners under 15 who are currently in prison in the Philippines? Virlanie together with the Home Office, UNICEF and other associations is researching ways in which they could be sent back into the community. For example: information and help for the families looking after their newly released children, the setting up of a home to house children without families to help their return into the community.

Website : www.virlanie.org

NANBAN in India inform us that as of the 10th October 2006, it will be illegal to employ children under the age of 14, whether they are domestic staff in private homes or in the hotel trade or waiting in restaurants, tea rooms or sandwich shops on the side of the road. These new laws are meant to protect children from excessive physical work, but also to protect their physical and mental health in the face of psychological trauma or sexual abuse. It is important to realise however that by losing their job, these children don't only forgo their income, they also often lose their accommodation. They are in fact thrown out into the street. There are over 500 000 under age children currently working and nothing has been planned for their wellbeing. Nanban suggested that NGOs and other organisations involved in the welfare of those children should get together to draw up a plan to safeguard the rights of those children. How can we ensure that children benefit from this new legislation?

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Website : www.nanbanindia.org

- **ATD QUART MONDE in Pierrelay, France** write :
"Please may we draw your attention to the "Declaration of solidarity " which aims to condemn poverty across the world. You will find this declaration on the website www.oct17.org/Website/-Declaration-de-solidarite-.html and if you agree with the content, you can of course sign it, either online www.oct17.org/Website/Comptez-sur-moi-aussi.html, or by sending it back by email to forum permanent : forum.permanent@atd-quartmonde.org.
- **COSAME in Paris, France** remind us that their missions "Artisans without borders" provide initial training and technical help for children and youngsters in trouble. The training lasts from one month to a year, on request from NGOs based in the South.
E-mail : cosame@la-guilde.org
- **FONDATION SOLIDARITÉ DES HOMMES in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo** is carrying out a major initiative to dismantle a network of pimps. The arrest of the two most notorious pimps in town, followed by their immediate release, confirms the corruption of some of the police force who always seem to

manage to release the prisoners before their case comes to court. Through its activities, FSH is raising the alarm amongst local and international opinion, hoping to convince people of the need to impose punitive measures on the culprits.

E-mail : fshbkv@hotmail.com

- **FRANCE HAÏTI PARTAGE** in Haiti, have put in place many projects to help street children. Those children are particularly vulnerable to violence perpetrated by criminal gangs who impose a reign of terror in some areas of the capital. The children's hostels are situated in between the 'red' districts which are very dangerous. UNICEF and UNESCO staff have been told to keep out of these areas.

35 to 40 youngsters are housed in rooms rented by the association. Two leaders, one of whom is an ex-street child are there to help children in the street. 10 youngsters are being given professional training (carpentry, electricity, sewing, ironwork). One centre provides 70 girls from the street with training in beauty therapy and sewing. Their babies, around 20 of cared for in the crèche. Medical care is available (wound dressing, x-rays, blood tests for tuberculosis, renal and cardiac diseases.) Legal aid is available to apply for identity cards and in case of arrest or imprisonment.

E-mail : assoc.fhp@wanadoo.fr

- **RESO (AIDS network)** at Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso is setting up a national network to provide schooling for AIDS orphans. Contact is currently being made with families who have taken in these orphans. A national workshop on the problems of schooling for children orphaned by AIDS is under evaluation for implementation in April 2007.

E-mail : resosida@yahoo.fr

- **VOIX LIBRES (free speech) in Geneva, Switzerland** has just finished the building of a school in Potasi in Bolivia, for children working in the mines. A new orphanage school is planned at Choqui which will prevent the children having to walk for 3 hours to get to their nearest school.

E-mail : voixlibres@voixlibres.org

- **Pakistan : Child development bank (CDB)**

A bank for working children, mainly those who have been exploited, was founded in August 2004, by the most deprived children. The bank is administered by the children themselves.

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LAMENT by Jorran

(a youngster living with AMAR, in Salvador de Bahia in Brazil)

We are street kids

That's how it is

I see children in the street selling sweets, savoury biscuits, lemons, fish, washing cars
and even stealing to survive

At night, they have nowhere to sleep, no food, no peace

Like these children, I too am looking for a roof over my head, food, work and especially peace.

To get where I am I have been through a lot: I have lied, stolen, but then I gave back all I had taken.

I gave it all back because I had enough of living with things that did not belong to me.

I had enough of so much poverty, so little goodwill in man, so much injustice

It disgusts me to see people in bars leaving food on their plates "out of good manners ". And to 'teach people a lesson', let others go hungry, it would be too much to ask for them to treat us to a meal. We watched them laugh whilst they ate, and when we came nearer, they stopped eating, and sometimes gave us the leftovers.

But now it's our turn. We can eat and smile,

maybe not as much as others but the worst is over and we don't want to go back.

Now we want to study, become somebody,

Have a roof over our heads, a family, be part of society, like people,
upright citizens with the right to speak up, the right to vote for a president.

This country is ours as well, we are the street children, we are proud of it,
we live in this cruel and miserable world.

If my country cannot help me I shall continue to exist.

Jorran

REPPER

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