

DIOCESE OF KAKAMEGA
SFA PROJECT
7TH JUNE 2012

A BRIEF REPORT ON OUR VISIT TO THE STREET CHILDREN of Kakamega, Kenya.

Written for Suitcases for Africa, in reference to the Bedmats Project 2012.

INTRODUCTION:

Visiting street children was one of the activities Wendy and Charlotte left for us to accomplish in May 2012 after the end of their visit. Though the Diocese of Kakamega does not work with street children, there was need to reach them through an organization that works with street children. Networking and collaboration is Key in community Based programs since as an individual civil organization, you cannot reach all and address the needs of vulnerable persons 100%. Street children are among the Most at risk populations (MARPS) that need special attention and special care. Most of us have overlooked the needs and issues affecting street children and hence the number is increasing day by day and magnitude is rampant.

THE AIM OF VISITING THE STREET CHILDREN ON 24TH MAY 2012.

Our aim of visiting the children was :

1. To establish a scenario where by we are able to interact and share experiences with the children.
2. Distribute to the children plastic mats donated by SFA and other SFA partners in Canada.
3. Establish issues affecting children that end up leading them to street life.
4. Come up with ways and means on how to strengthen collaboration with WEAEP.

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The Story

When we wanted to reach these children, we had to identify an organization in our region that has already established a working relationship with the children. In normal circumstances, street children are unapproachable since they are always under the influence of hard drugs. They sniff glue, petrol, smoke and opium if they find it. This makes them drowsy most of the time and hence communication becomes a problem. Because we have a good working relationship with WESTERN EDUCATION ADVOCACY AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (WEAEP) it was easy for us to reach the children. The organization identified 14 street children a number equal to the mats we had. They assembled them at their offices and that is where we met them. During that time, WEAEP was hosting volunteers from UK and when we arrived, the children were already having fun with the volunteers and the WEAEP staff. We joined them and already they were singing that it was a special day for them and they were expecting sweets and eat something at least.

Before we left to the WEAEP offices to meet the children, the staff warned us that punctuality was vital while working with street children. They are always impatient because they should have time to sniff / take drugs and look for food. If you want to keep them longer then you need to cater for their food. This made us buy a few loaves of bread and carry along with us and indeed kept time. For us to establish a good relationship, we asked them to introduce themselves by name, age, their home village / District and give at least 1 or 2 reasons why they left home and chose street life. As we went through the introduction, we learned that,

1. Most children left home while under the age of 12 years.
2. All the children were boys.
3. 2 children were total orphans and their care givers violated them.
4. Almost half of the children left their homes because they could not withstand the harassment, abuses, battering, lack of food and practicing child labor under the care of a step mother as a result of loss of mother by death or separation.
5. The children were drawn from different districts / provinces.

6. They came as far as North Eastern part of Kenya, Nairobi, Kisumu, Kisii etc and few came from around.
7. 2 of the children acknowledged that it was their own ill behavior that made it difficult for them to cope with family members and these 2 had their both parents alive. They said that they were rude to their parents and practiced theft from their parents.
8. One boy was very big about 20 years and he wanted somebody who could reconcile him with his father. He quit home after stealing his father's 1000 shillings.

We were surprised that the boys were so cooperative and willing to share all about themselves and their past. We developed a discussion scenario that was friendly and they said it all. Out of the 14 boys their only 2 who were not drug users. And because they were always sober, they looked frustrated and appeared as if they were in a wrong place. One boy whom we cannot mention his name came from the furthest place (Kitui in North Eastern part of Kenya) touched everybody when he narrated his past to us. The volunteers could not hold their tears and emotion touched everybody. Kitui is known to be a hardship area where water and food is a problem. The people in this region walk for long distances in search of water. You can spend a whole day and come back without water. So, this boy who is a total orphan became a donkey for his distant relative who was now his care giver. The boy narrated all the abuses he went through as the audience was silent. The boy who had reached grade 7 while at home spoke fluent English and he did not need a translator. We were all moved by this boy's sharing and he said that his desire was to go back to school but never return to his home region. When we asked him how he reached Western part of Kenya in Kakamega he said, he hanged underneath of a trailer that and he even did not know where the trailer was heading. But after he arrived, and decided to settle there, then he realized it was Kakamega. This was really a terrible encounter in my life and I felt like taking the boy.

Most of the boys said that they were willing to go back home because street life is not the best. They are exposed to diseases, abuse and drugs. They do not enjoy all the rights of a child including education and sense of belonging to a family. WEAP was intending to look for resources that could enable them to initiate rehabilitation strategies and placement strategies. We eventually distributed the mats and served them with bread for their lunch. They were very patient because they had seen as with loaves of bread in a paper bag continued.....

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. Most mats were too short (more ideal for the babies in the prison) they should be longer.
2. Because they have no blankets, the boys said they wanted mats that were like sleeping bags. One sided mat is not ideal for them. Perhaps a blanket can be attached?
3. They have other needs like food, medical care, shelter and education.
4. Those who not under drugs looked depressed and anxious to find a conducive environment.
5. They wanted a ball to play football on that day and because we did not know that it was a need, we did not carry one. Because of their desire to play football, we are planning to visit them again and have fun with them.
6. The children become free if you show a caring attitude, listen to them and sing together.
7. If resources were available, we could partner with WEAEP and address the needs of these children.

We thank WEAEP to have made this day a success. The volunteers from the UK joined us and made the day to more lively.

Attached please find photos taken on the material day. One was captured sniffing petrol.

Susan.





Meeting the group to share some time with them and learn their stories and their needs.



Mama Susan, handing out 12 of the waterproof bed mats to the street children.



Trying out the bed mats.



Esther and a young street boy.



Playing games with the young street children, wishing they had a soccer ball.



A street boy sniffing glue, a downward spiral.