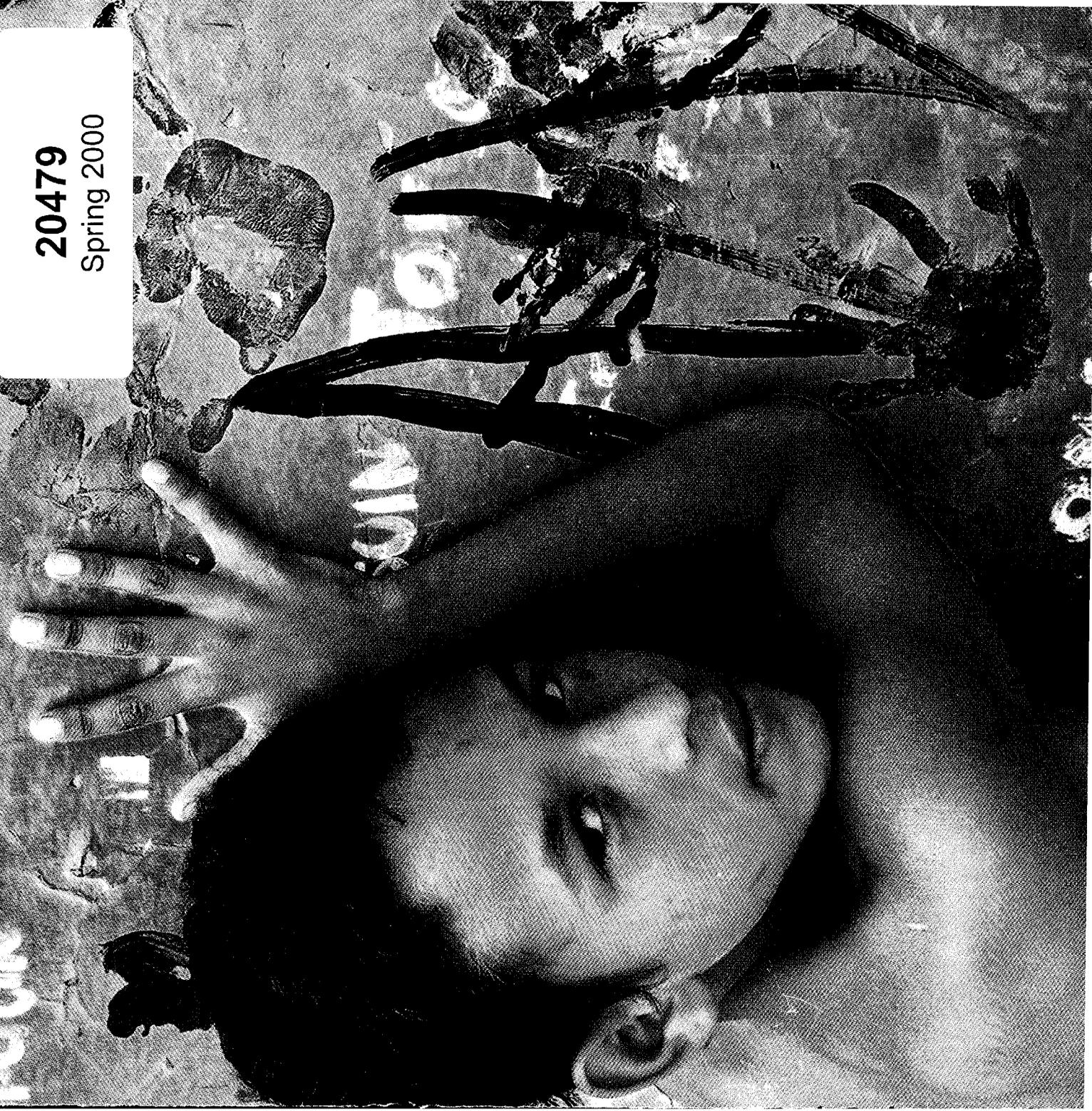


Who Cares?

A Special Report on Street Children

20479

Spring 2000



The Street Children Initiative (SCI) of the World Bank aims to identify promising policies and techniques that are being developed in NGO programs for street children in 10 countries in East and Central Europe.

The project is a partnership with the King Baudouin and Soros Foundations, which are working to upgrade national and NGO programs in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic. The SCI has also commissioned comparative studies in Colombia and Brazil, and work is underway in Russia and Ukraine.

The outcome of the SCI will :

- Inform national strategies and programs to improve existing services and improve local capacity
- Develop an effective awareness campaign
- Strengthen NGOs, governments and other international organizations
- Improve the Bank's knowledge base on the issue of street children in these regions

For further information please visit our website: www.worldbank/html/fpd/urbanchild.htm

Or contact Tim Campbell, Project Team Leader, tcampbell@worldbank.org; Kate Schecter, Task Manager, kschecter@worldbank.org; or Catalina Villamizar, Project Coordinator, cvillamzar@worldbank.org.

This special report is supported in part by a grant from the Children and Youth Network Program of the Open Society Institute.

Too Old, Too Soon

BY KATE SCHECTER

BY ALL RIGHTS, STREET URCHINS, bleak orphanages and abused children should long ago have been relegated to the Dickensian world of the 19th century. Yet many young people still live and beg on the streets of the world's cities. This sad phenomenon, which lies at the heart of the disparities in our urbanized world, has in fact become a common and growing part of life in many areas of the world. The official response is often to ignore street children or, at best, to warehouse them in orphanages and detention centers; in the worst cases, they are simply killed. The urgency of issues surrounding street children cannot be exaggerated or ignored. These children are the labor force, adults and parents of the future.

Although few countries record or publish reliable statistics, some studies indicate that the number of street children in the major cities of the developing world represent as much as 3 percent of the population. These children either spend their days barely surviving on the streets or, if picked up by the authorities, they are held in sometimes massive detention centers and channeled through systems that have little idea what to do with them. In the predominantly urban world of tomorrow, they will remain a worrisome social and policy issue as they fall prey to the vices of the street while struggling to keep themselves and, often, their families alive. While the international community is beginning to draw attention to the related human and economic costs, deep-seated sustainable change must ultimately come from within.

The collapse of communism has brought new dimensions to the problem. Street children in the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe emerged as a wide-scale phenomenon only in the 1990s. The social contract between the state and its citizens during the Soviet era claimed to provide free health care, housing, education, child care facilities, guaranteed employment and state retirement pensions. Many citizens came to see state institutions as better arenas for child-rearing than individual families.

The economies of many of these countries have

faltered, welfare benefits have disappeared, and many people have suffered, especially women, children and the elderly. Parents continue to bring their children to orphanages and boarding schools in the hope they will be provided with food and shelter. State-run institutions are unable to accommodate the growing demand and many children are turning to a life on the streets—begging, prostituting, and using drugs.

Because civil society in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is undergoing such major changes, wholesale obliteration of existing systems is unrealistic and unwise. A first step toward reform will be to remove the incentives that currently exist to perpetuate the institutionalization system. A mixed model of programs for children—including partial residential care and outreach for those who have some connection with their families—appears to be the solution for the post-Soviet world.



In other areas of the world, the problem is older but no less intractable. Hundreds of NGOs have emerged to deal with the problem, although in countries where civil society is less prevalent, these organizations are only just emerging. Governments and police agencies are concerned about the seriousness of the social problems, but child protection laws are a new concept in many of these countries. The issue of protecting vagrant homeless children is often low on the governments' priority lists. The international donor community is also active in addressing child welfare concerns, specifically street children. Methods and approaches differ widely, but common goals include prevention by working with families and aiming to link children with biological or foster families.

Everywhere, institutionalization or imprisonment of children is far more expensive than preventative outreach programs. Encouraging governments to invest in preventative measures, such as programs to support families and keep them intact, legislation to protect children's rights and street children programs that aim to reintegrate children into society, will not only have long-term implications for the well-being of individual children, but it will also strengthen the over-all economies of these nations and the world. [E]

Kate Schecter is task manager for the World Bank's Street Children Initiative.

Stationary Lives

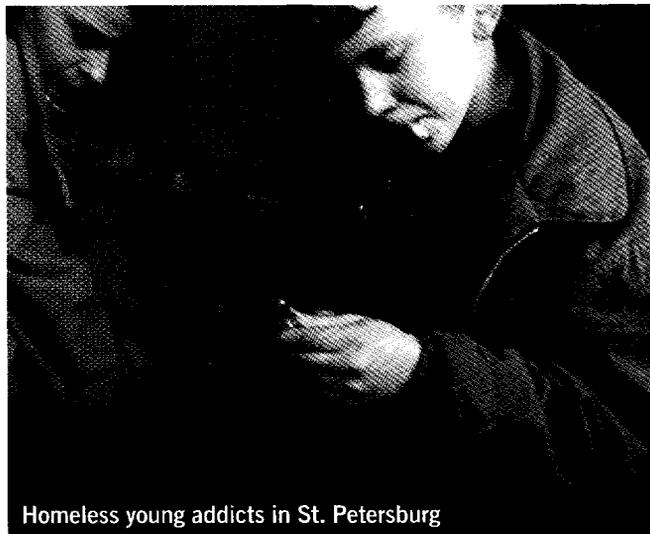
Street children, once unheard of, are an increasingly common presence in Russia's cities.

BY JACQUELINE MIA FOSTER

THE MOSKOVSKY TRAIN STATION in St. Petersburg is home to Igor and 12 other youths who share money and food, and try to keep each other safe. "At night, the ladies who work here let us go up to the second floor and sleep" says Igor, who at 14 is one of oldest in the group. He has been living in the station for nine years. His parents are alcoholics, and he says he has no idea whether they are alive or dead.

According to Doctors of the World (DOW), the boys are part of an estimated 30,000 homeless children in St. Petersburg, and members of a growing population across Russia. Dina Bologova, a police officer who works at Moscow's Center for the Temporary Isolation of Minors, calls the situation "terrible," and says it got worse after the country's current economic crisis began. "More kids from Ukraine and Moldova started coming to Moscow because the economy there crashed even harder than Russia's."

Even working-class Russian families are under new stresses. According to the United Nations, 4 out of 10 Russian children live in poverty. Factories that employed the parents have shut down and the



Homeless young addicts in St. Petersburg

state that supported them is bankrupt. As a result, many parents seek solace in alcohol. "Society is not protected," says Bologova.

In St. Petersburg, DOW/France now has three drop-in centers. "We are seeing not only physical problems, but a lot of psychological ones as well," explains psychologist Marina (continued next page)



ARTISTIC LICENSE

TWICE A WEEK, 17 young boys from the Center for the Temporary Isolation of Minors (CTIM) in Moscow are escorted by armed police into Yelena Nikiforevna's art room. Here the lights are bright and soft music plays in the background while the teacher sets out pencils, paper and books for each class. For two hours twice a week, the children who choose to be part of her class are no longer criminals,

but simply children free to explore their inner worlds on paper.

State institutions such as CTIM are prohibited under a 1999 law from housing under-18 youths unless they have been accused of a criminal offense. As a result 240 of the 300 beds in the CTIM are empty this February, while Moscow's homeless children seek shelter in train stations and underground walkways. Children in the Center are separated by sex and sleep in rooms of 20. Under constant surveillance by officers of the Russian Interior Ministry, they follow a strict daily schedule of classes and meals. "For many it is the first time they have been to school, and for these kids it is especially difficult. Some don't know how to use sheets and a blanket, (continued next page)



JACQUELINE MIA FOSTER & C. WILLAMIZER



An "exercise break" in a Russian detention center

Demaltovskaya. "These kids aren't loved enough. Their problems are becoming more complex. The other day I had to tell a young girl, only 15, that she was HIV-positive. This was the hardest thing I've had to do."

In addition to the drop-in centers, St. Petersburg hosts the ALMUS Shelter, which could serve as a model for the rest of Russia. One of the few state-run shelters that doesn't feel like a prison, it is run by Mikhail Ilyinkov, who has worked with orphans, homeless youth and families in crisis for 15 years. Children can live at the shelter for a

year while attending neighborhood schools. Located in a former kindergarten, ALMUS has space for 31 children and sleeps no more than three in each of its carpeted rooms. Ilyinkov is working with DOW/US to implement a foster family system. He believes that if he can integrate orphanage programs with what in Russia are known as "family care groups," he "can eliminate or at least greatly reduce the need for orphanages within 5 to 10 years." Since last spring, DOW/US has placed 53 children from shelters into private homes that were approved as family care groups.

In Moscow, however, promises to build shelters for homeless children have yet to be realized. While children from outside the city are sent back to their home towns, homeless young Muscovites are left to roam the streets. As the country plunges deeper into economic bankruptcy, the number of homeless children increases daily. [F]

Jacqueline Mia Foster is a freelance photojournalist, based in Moscow since 1995.

JACQUELINE MIA FOSTER & CATALINA VILLAMIZAR

ARTISTIC LICENSE



or the tap," says Dina Bologova, a police officer who has worked at the Center for six years. Although it is not a prison, the windows are barred and the children are under constant supervision. In Nikiforevna's art room, the children's grim reality becomes more distant. "I tell them, I want the wheels in your head to roll," she says. They create images that often reveal their private worlds. Some children need urging, getting inspiration from books that Nikiforevna provides. One 15-year-old, Albert, chooses an anatomy book. His sketch replicates the skeletal structure of a face. The face, however, is entangled in barbed wire. Sasha, 13, sketches the Earth 450 years in the future, a vision based on his scientific readings. He is accused of murdering a homeless man.

Now retired, Nikiforevna, formerly belonged to the Soviet Artist's Union and worked for the state, painting Lenin portraits and the visions of the Communist dream. In June 1998, she con-

tacted the Center's director, Yuri Lapshin, after seeing it on a television program. "I came here with two suitcases filled with paper, pencils and paints," she recalls, and "went from room to room." In January 1999, she was given a classroom. The Salvation Army and the Red Cross donated paint, paper and pencils. She gets the rest of her supplies from friends and occasional corporate sponsors. As she circles the desks, she hovers lovingly over each child, speaking softly about this line or that horizon. She stresses the importance of helping the children create and achieve goals. "This gives them a self-confidence and they realize what it is to be respected."

At the end of class, the table is covered with drawings of mountains, dinosaurs, wolves, a futuristic landscape, Moscow apartment blocks and an embankment lined with willow trees. The boys gather at the door and file out, two by two, into the cold, dimly lit hallway. It is silent in the classroom, save for the whispered count-off by one of the three officers who will escort Nikiforevna's students to their rooms for the night.

—Jacqueline Mia Foster



Red Tape

In Russia, a bureaucratic mentality and centralized government control mean that smaller NGOs serving children must struggle to survive.

BY BEN ARIS

MOSCOW'S FIRST YOUTH CENTER, just off the six-lane Leninsky Prospekt on the city's southern side, is run by the Russian charity No to Alcohol and Narcotics (NAN). The Leninsky Youth Center is in a small two-story house. Cartoons are daubed on the walls and in one room a group of teenage boys plays ball with a bean-filled sock. In another room, a youth worker interviews younger children pretending to be international sports stars on a TV show.

The center is a pilot scheme that has been running for two years. There are other youth projects in Moscow, but NAN remains one of the most successful. Not only does it provide a place of refuge for children, but its 50 outreach workers also address the problem of alcoholic parents by visiting the children's homes. Unfortunately, its record of success is not common across Russia.

An enormous number of NGOs are registered in the country, but their growth and effectiveness has been stunted by the legacy of the Soviet bureaucracy and the lack of concerted efforts by local governments. The history goes back to the 1917 revolution, when all NGOs were taken firmly under state control. The thinking then was that there was no need for charity, since the workers' needs were met by the Communist Party. It wasn't until Perestroika in the 1980s that the Party began to acknowledge that social problems had not been eradicated. Charities were permitted, but they remained in the hands of the Party and were heavily bureaucratized.

While Party control has disappeared, the bureaucratic mentality remains. Only a handful of the largest international charities have the political clout to wade through the red tape. Most small and medium charities fail to thrive. And, although two thirds of the existing NGOs are dedicated to children's needs, many are groups of as few as three people—perhaps a parent with a child who suffers from a problem and the parent's two closest friends. Street children, abandoned by their parents, tend to be under-represented among Russian charities.

These difficulties have meant that large international charities such as Oxfam and Save the Children have not opened offices in Russia at all. Individual supporters have also become disillusioned. In 1991, private donations made up 90 percent of charities' funds. By the mid-90s, private contributions were less than half that level.

Scandals and even criminal involvement in charities have muddied the picture even further. Import and export tax exemptions enjoyed by charities proved attractive to mafia groups that overran some organizations. In May 1996, two top executives of the Russian hockey federation were shot dead in a fight for control over exemptions that allowed sports organizations to import billions of dollars

of cigarettes and alcohol, tax-free. In the wake of the assassinations, the exemptions were repealed.

Legitimate charities now face a regulatory nightmare. All charities must obtain a charities passport. In Moscow, there is a special committee that sits just twice a month to consider applicants. Small organizations with little political clout find the registration process almost impossible.

The customs service is also extremely wary of imported "humanitarian aid" and reluctant to let it through. Among the organizations that have fallen afoul of the rules are the Salvation Army, which reported that 3,000 sleeping bags were trapped in customs for more than a year and a half, and the Red Cross, which said that a consignment of toys destined for orphans was burnt by customs because "toys" did not appear on the list of goods designated as humanitarian aid.

Progress often depends entirely on the support of local governments. Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov appears uninterested in the problem, and so the city has no shelters and few facilities for street kids. Yet in Samara, the local governor, Viktor Titov, is committed to tackling the problem. Samara's facilities are so far ahead of the rest of the country that other regions now send their social work staff there for training. At the national level, the institutions that remain are very passive. "The problem is that the state specialists—doctors, pediatricians and psychologists—sit in their offices waiting for kids to come to them and ask for support. Some do come of course, but most stay in the metro and railway stations. There is a gap between the two realities," says UNICEF's Vera Gavrilova.

There is little dialogue or coordination among the NGOs themselves or the various government agencies that affect their operations. UNICEF sees one of its future roles as providing a forum for these groups to meet and share resources. "The issue of coordination is the most vulnerable and sensitive," says Gavrilova. "Not only with the problem of street kids, but with all the issues. Everything is divided between dozens of committees, NGOs, government bodies, etc. It's a headache, a nightmare." [E]

Ben Aris is a freelance journalist based in Moscow.

Children Of War

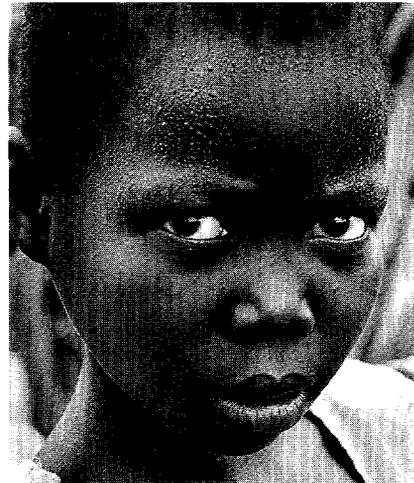
During Mozambique's civil war, many children were used as soldiers and slaves. Healing the children and their families is the aim of Rebuilding Hope, a local NGO.

BY ADELE SULCAS

FROM 1977 TO 1992, warring armies in Mozambique took some 25,000 boys from their homes to use as combat soldiers and forced thousands of girls to serve as concubines and slaves on military bases. The war, between the ruling socialist government of Frelimo (Frente de Libertacao Nacional) and the counter-insurgency forces Renamo (Resistencia Nacional de Mocambique), killed nearly 1 million Mozambicans, including 450,000 children under the age of 15. For those who survived, the physical and psychological scars may take a lifetime, if ever, to heal.

For Boia Efraime, a German-trained Mozambican psychotherapist working with the NGO Rebuilding Hope, one of the most horrifying stories concerns Nelson, a boy who was abducted and forced to kill his own father by Renamo rebels during a night raid when he was 10 or 11. Nelson's father was placed among the Frelimo supporters since, as a teacher and effectively in the service of the government, he was assumed to be "doing propaganda." Since Nelson, in the rebels' estimation, was "too young to be a communist" (Frelimo was supported by the Eastern socialist-bloc), he was told he would have a chance to remain alive if he killed his father.

"I did not want to and I started to cry," Nelson said later in his account of the incident. "My father asked me to kill him, because at least I would survive. I cried and with my eyes closed I plunged the



bayonet in my father's stomach. I turned around and ran. A soldier caught me."

During his five years with the rebels, he did not want to flee "because fleeing implied that you had a place to go," Nelson explained. Having been forced to kill his father in the center of his village, in front of family and neighbors, all Nelson's links to his past life had been severed.

Efraime, himself only 25 years old in 1986 when he decided to study psychotherapy, was motivated by his experiences at that time. As a schoolteacher on the island of Josina Machel, 130 kilometers north of Maputo, the usual response to questions about absent students was "he's been kidnaped by the rebels."

The children of Josina Machel first became involved in the war in 1987, when the island found itself situated between two of Renamo's largest military bases. Since 1984, Josina Machel had been subjected to night raids by Renamo troops who burned down homes, stole food and terrorized the population. By 1987, the raids included kidnappings. The captured were taken to the bases and forced into combat or used as sex slaves and agricultural labor.

A peace accord was signed in 1992, and in 1996 Efraime founded Rebuilding Hope, a group of four psychologists, one psychiatrist and two play-therapists from the Mozambican Association for Public Health. The aim was to offer psychotherapeutic and psycho-social assistance to child victims of the war, one objective being to reintegrate children back into family and community.

Its creation was inspired by an international congress called "Children, War and Persecution: Rebuilding Hope." The first time it convened in Africa was in Mozambique in 1996. UNICEF and Save the Children had been involved in reuniting former child soldiers with their families and communities, and



Children in a play therapy session at Rebuilding Hope.

ELKE WENTZER

helped Rebuilding Hope to identify areas that had concentrations of such children, especially ones receiving little outside assistance with reintegration.

The Red Cross informed them that about 300 children had been returned to a community called Zimpeto on Josina Machel, and some of the Maputo-based therapists moved to the island.

The therapists quickly discovered that a purely western psychotherapeutic model would not work. There is no word in Changane, the local language, for psychologist, and the community's initial response was that they were not in need of psychological or therapeutic assistance, Efraime says.

In the cultures of southern Mozambique, he explains, *curandeiros*—traditional healers—are the agents of cure for psychic as well as physical disturbances. “When we went to the village we thought people would come to see us because they knew we were psychologists,” Efraime explains. “People didn’t come. They considered that the curandeiros are the professionals for helping.”

That led to a complex process of forging alliances with the curandeiros. Though their point of view differs—they see their own form of therapy as an act while the psychotherapists, “Africans by birth, Westerners by training,” as Efraime puts it, see theirs as a process—they recognized that the therapists’ work was different from their own and could acknowledge its usefulness.

But the Western model of “pure” psychotherapy still would not translate to that setting. “We wanted only to do psychotherapy but people kept asking for material aid,” Efraime said. The villages were without running water or electricity, and the infrastructure was destroyed. It became clear, Efraime says, that their material concerns were intimately tied to ongoing psychological disturbances. “Material assistance was in this sense a form of psychotherapeutic intervention.”

While reassembling lives is a traumatic and slow process, Efraime confirms, things are changing. An example of a typically tenuous success: after seeing one particularly disaffected boy three times a week for nine months, he heard that the boy would like to have a family. This indicated to Efraime that the boy could project himself into the future, something he had previously rejected for fear that it could be easily taken away from him. He now lives in Johannesburg and, for the moment, appears to be well integrated, Efraime says. “If he finds a job in a structured environment he will work well; no one will realize that he has problems. But if he gets into a situation that is difficult, the possibility that he will try and solve his problems using violence is very high.”

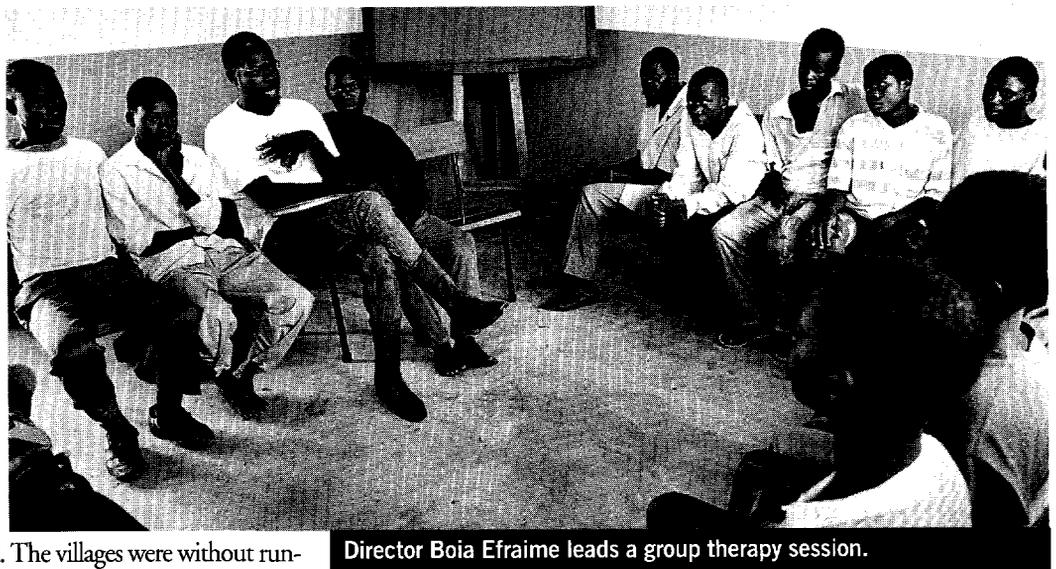
Just as difficult is the reintegration of girls who were raped and adopted as concubines to soldiers. In addition to the trauma, the girls who return to their communities cannot speak of their ordeal for fear of ostracism.

It was only last year, Efraime says, that he and his colleagues became aware of this deeply hidden agony. “Because we were looking for girls who had used guns [military training] we didn’t see that

thousands of girls had been kidnaped and taken to military bases. They were then sexually available for all the soldiers and had to pretend they got pleasure from it so that a rapist would take her as a wife. A lot of them died in the process.” Of those who survived, many had babies as a result of the wartime rapes, and did not return to their villages for fear their children would be rejected as symbols of the shame they’d brought on their families. Many became prostitutes in Maputo.

“Of the ones who were lucky and didn’t have kids, some tried to come back but the parents don’t want to hear about anything. They would say, ‘be happy you survived,’” Efraime says, describing also the parents’ trauma at having been unable to protect their child from such horror, coupled with the community stigma about “second-hand product” which lowers the *lobola* [bride price].

“So they’re not allowed to be known, which means they’re not going to look for help,” Efraime says. “We worked until last year



Director Boia Efraime leads a group therapy session.

without seeing these girls, and only now that we are closing most of the cases we had with the boys are we seeing that the girls cannot come to terms with their experience.” Group therapy involving girls with other problems is starting to attract some of these survivors, who are beginning to come forward on their own.

One mistake the therapists made, Efraime says, was thinking that the children’s own ways of coping could be completely supplanted by therapy. “Even people who have suffered severe trauma have their own resources,” he explains. “It’s very important to find out what they are, how they are trying to deal with their problem, and if they did or didn’t succeed.”

He cites an example of a young girl who would dispel her fears before entering her hut by circling the hut twice and clapping her hands. A therapist told her to stop, but once she stopped performing her ritual she began to have free-floating anxiety. “The therapist was losing her—she was going into a psychosis and having hallucinations,” Efraime says.

“We realize,” he concludes, that “we’re not dealing only with psychological problems, but also with political, cultural and moral problems.” □

Adele Sulcas is a journalist for *The Sunday Independent*, Johannesburg.

Street Talk

SINCE THE LATE 1940s, a civil war in Colombia has devastated the lives of its citizens, particularly the children. Violence has recently escalated in some areas of the country and the number of internal migrants is reaching alarming levels. According to a report by Codhes (Consultants for Human Rights and Displacement) and UNICEF, over 1.1 million children have been displaced in Colombia over the past 15 years. Many are forced to flee with their families to cities like Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla. In Medellín's downtown and slum areas, also known as misery belts, a long-running NGO program provides individual care to orphaned and abandoned children, many of whom are migrants.

In the initial stages of the program, children are drawn directly off the streets to El Patio del Gamin (The Street Child Yard), where they are gradually introduced to a welcoming and caring environment. Once inside this courtyard-like space, they are introduced to basic rules such as leaving weapons outside, abstaining from drug use while inside and partaking in daily chores in return for meals and showers. For many, the shelter is the first place they have ever been exposed to adults whose intentions are simply to care for their well-being. These are the voices of the children in the program.

Catelina Villamizar is the project coordinator with the Street Children Initiative at the World Bank.

ISOLATING CHILDREN: THE SOLUTION?

BY ELIANA CARDOSO

AS JUVENILE CRIME INCREASES, some Brazilian authorities are acknowledging the need for a more humane treatment of minors.

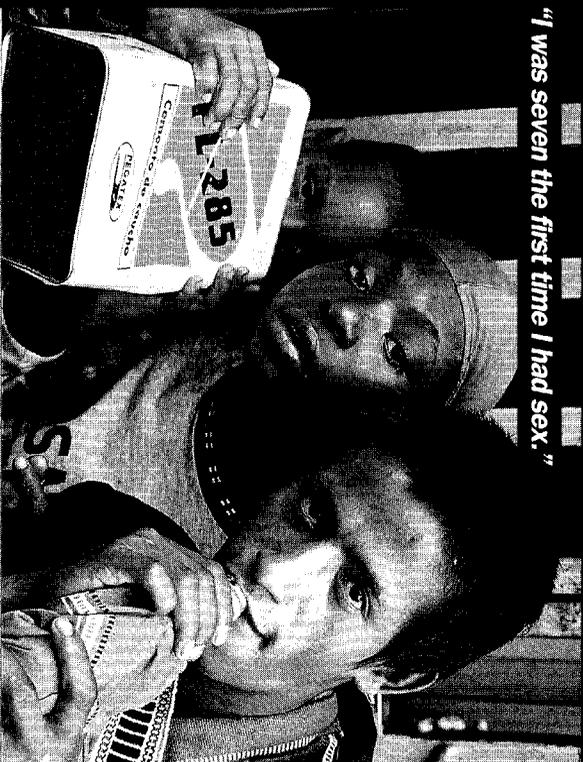
The number of violent crimes committed by teenagers in Brazil is growing. In 1997, the number of teenagers brought to court in Rio—5,128—was twice the number of 1991. Even in the rich and industrialized state of São Paulo, the number of incarcer-

ated teenagers jumped from 2,133 to 4,020 in only three years, from 1996 to 1999.

In an effort to address the problem, the Brazilian Congress passed the Child and Adolescent Statute in 1990. Until it was passed, the law for minors did not question violence and ill treatment of children by police and institutions. In fact, the state could withdraw guardianship from a child's family with little notification and without due process. Street children were considered delinquent unless proven otherwise.

The statute introduced rights for children and promotes developmental support for them, requiring that measures such as assisted freedom and community services be used more often to help reeducate children. Internment is called a punishment of last resort.

Implementation has been uneven, however, reflecting regional differences in public administration and resources. At the Foundation for the Well-Being of Minors in São Paulo, for example, almost a quarter of the minors who arrive are sentenced to full internment. Some internment units hold hundreds of ado-



"I was seven the first time I had sex."

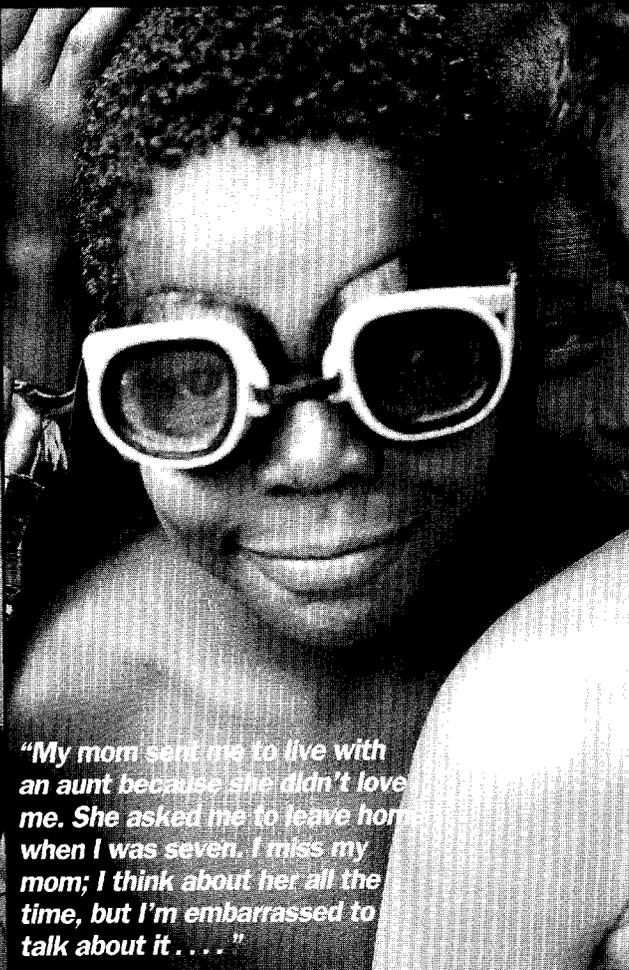
"We sometimes hold people up and take their money... when I do perico (cocaine), it makes me want to steal."

"I want to be with my parents when I die... in a year or so... I hope."



"We have what we call parches—it's like a group of friends and we all have nicknames... we take care of each other and do drugs."

"When we get into fights, we use broken bottles, we poke each other with metal bars so we bleed inside and we stab each other with knives... I stabbed a boy once because he picked a fight with me."

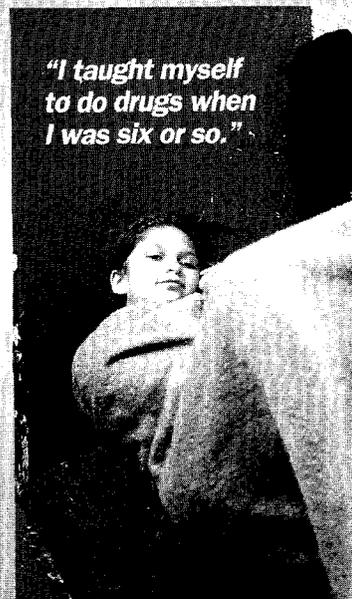


"My mom sent me to live with an aunt because she didn't love me. She asked me to leave home when I was seven. I miss my mom; I think about her all the time, but I'm embarrassed to talk about it...."

"There's a man who walks around on crutches and he pays us to do things to him... I know many boys who do it for the money."

"My mom and I live kind of far from here... I haven't been home in five days because I lost my shoes and I can't walk all the way home without them."

"I taught myself to do drugs when I was six or so."



"I used to sell cookies on the street and one day two men followed me and took me to a motel....."



lescents, although the law asserts that units should house no more than 40. The children lack schools and suffer from inadequate hygiene and unsanitary conditions. Some may sit for long hours in empty patios without being allowed to talk, play or exercise. Torture and physical punishment are common.

In November of 1999, Mário Covas, São Paulo's governor, announced a new plan to deal with juvenile offenders. Seven regional groups of municipalities in the state of São Paulo will each house an internment facility with four 12-bed rooms and space for sports

and cultural activities. Family participation, considered essential to reeducating young offenders, is also integral to the plan. Almost 75 percent of the teenagers confined in São Paulo and Rio have families. Many are eligible to receive help from programs such as Bolsa Escola, a poverty-targeted social assistance program that provides cash grants to poor families with school-age children. Grants are given on the condition that children attend at least 90 percent of the required number of school hours. By the end of 1998 there were more than 60 such pro-

grams in operation in Brazil.

Detention and isolation from the community will not solve the problem of juvenile crime. Even advocates of get-tough policies cannot ignore the fact. As Brazil addresses the growing number of juvenile offenders, it has also begun to ask more fundamental questions about why these children have gone off track, and what can be done to redirect their lives.

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Eliana Cardoso is an economist at the World Bank. Daniela Kresch also contributed to this article.

The True Cost Of Market Collapse

BY KAREN EMMONS

In Thailand, abandoned and orphaned street children are one of the many consequences of the economic collapse in 1997. The Thai family, known for its resilience and discipline, is now rallying to address the problems of its younger community.

A NEWBORN GIRL, biting ants crawling over her thin blanket, was found one recent evening under a tree only yards from the office of Supachai Sathearasilapin, director of Thailand's Child Welfare Protection Division. In theory it was a safe place to leave her. Behind his Bangkok office there is an emergency home, where the girl now lives, that shelters abandoned babies and unmarried pregnant women. In fact, the baby girl faces a very uncertain life that was made only marginally better by her parents' desperate choice of location.

Supachai has become accustomed to parents bringing their babies into government homes for "temporary" care or abandoning them at the hospital after birth. He contends that an average of eight babies a day are abandoned in Thailand. Social Welfare Office records show an average of three to four babies abandoned at government centers a day; non-governmental agencies take in the rest.

To many observers, the abandoned children are an indication of a much broader tragedy affecting children, from infants to teenagers, in Thailand. The number of children in the country's 21 orphanages, long stable, increased in 1998, a year after the country's economic boom collapsed. The rate of infants abandoned in 40 government

hospitals also remained fairly constant between 1994 and 1997, but jumped in 1998. The economic crisis is blamed for many changes, including the continued unraveling of Thai moral standards, family cohesion, community cooperation and values of self-reliance. Economic difficulties may have only exacerbated existing trends, but there are certainly "disturbing correlations," as pointed out by an analysis by the World Bank, UNICEF, the Social Research Institute of Chulalongkorn and The Institute for Population and Social Research of Mahidol University.

The report, titled "Thailand Social Monitor on Social Capital and The Crisis," speaks of the positive power of Thailand's social capital—for some people it has "remained intact or even increased during the crisis. Families have become more disciplined and resilient, and Thai communities have been stimulated to expand cooperative and mutual support during the crisis." Noting that it "is impossible to assign definitive 'causes' to the adverse social outcomes in the areas of child care, suicides, mental health, crime and drug use—whether due to short-term economic downturn or the continuation of long-term trends tied to social transformation and economic development," the report nonetheless states that since the onset of the crisis, social problems have been intensifying in Thailand. Divorce is on the increase, as is juvenile crime, drug abuse and the incidence of orphaned, abandoned and street children.

Historically, Thai society centered on the family. Extended families acted as safety nets when individuals experienced difficulties. The strong relationship among the family, the community and the Buddhist temple also has been a pillar of support. Even before the economic crisis, there were signs that the relationship was fragmenting. Rapid urbanization pulled thousands of farmers into cities, especially Bangkok. Some men left their families in the provinces and sent money home. Others moved their families. The heavy migration tore apart traditional communities and created new ones.

Then the economic crisis slammed on the brakes. Dramatic declines in average in-



This mother and daughter live in an abandoned warehouse at the train station in Bangkok, where a few families and many single people live.



Twelve-year-old "Beer" came from Ayuthaya province in central Thailand two years ago because his mother and a series of three step-fathers had put him into an Emergency Home three times. He lives in an abandoned wooden railroad cargo building with a few other boys and an older man.

comes and high unemployment resulted. Doomsayers predicted an onslaught of school dropouts, increases in child labor and other consequences that never materialized. What did appear was confirmation that the government was unprepared to take care of the most vulnerable members of its population.

Studies funded by the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF show how Thai families and schools acted to prevent school dropouts. Many families resorted to borrowing, working multiple odd jobs or putting the children to work part-time. Others, however, "are overwhelmed," says Father Joseph Maier, an American Roman Catholic priest who has worked nearly two decades in one of Bangkok's largest slum areas. Many kids, Father Maier believes, are turning up on the streets as a result.

A recent sampling of students revealed that 12 percent admitted some experience with drugs. At the same time, recent legislation set stricter penalties for children caught with drugs. In 1998, there were 7,726 drug cases involving children under age 18—in contrast to only 119 cases in 1995. More than 300 girls have been remanded to a center in Bangkok that was built for 60 inhabitants. As the Social Monitor notes, there are many Thais who think the crisis "compelled poor Thai families to do things they would not otherwise have done, such as turning to crime, putting their children to work as messengers for drug traffickers, turning to prostitution and drugs."

Thailand is also estimated to have more than half a million children affected by AIDS. The government recently initiated aggressive public awareness campaigns and medical programs after a period of denial. Now the greatest problem it faces are AIDS orphans. By 2005, the number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to reach 225,000.

Social and health problems such as these have forced many children to live on the streets. Estimates go as high as 10,000, though there is little reliable data. Twelve-year-old "Beer" is perhaps typical.

He came to Bangkok's streets two years ago. His mother put him into a provincial emergency home three times for "bad behavior." Beer and his friends beg money to buy their food and claim to have no interest in going home. They like the freedom of the streets. Though Chana, 14, is so thin his bones point outward, he says he has more to eat now than in his village farm. He came to Bangkok three months ago with his father, but they were separated after the first month. The local public welfare division sends social workers around to "home school" them. Beer says he wants to stay in Bangkok for that. "I get to learn here," he says. At home, he would not be able to go to school.

More Thai children are in school now than ever before, according to Simon Baker of Child Workers in Asia. And fewer children are working. Though there were predictions that those gains might reverse because of the crisis, national statistics indicate it hasn't happened. Between 1988 and 1996, there was a major decline in child labor among 13-to-14-year-olds, Baker notes, citing the drop from 40 percent to 9 percent in agriculture and urban areas combined. Despite increasing inequalities, Thailand's fast-growing economy before the crisis meant the incidence of poverty was decreasing and poor families in rural areas were able to educate their

children. At the same time, demographics changed. Thai women stopped having four to six children, giving birth to only one or two.

Although Baker believes that, in historical terms, "Thai children have never had it so easy," Baker says that the situation still isn't great. The number of children in the workforce, estimated at 8 percent, is far too high, as are the dropout rates among children in secondary school (after only three years) and vocational schools.

Baker says that stricter regulation of child labor laws have made children unattractive to big factories. That opens up the informal sector, which is unregulated and can accommodate abusive employers. Of the children he has talked with, Baker finds that many have migrated from hard and tedious labor on farms to these conditions by choice, and stay because the situation is better than what they had previously known.

Even the abandoned orphans have some hope, provided authorities take action. Many are placed in foster homes and, while government orphanages house more than 4,500 children, there is a waiting list for adoption. "The abandoned babies give us such a problem," says Supachai. "We have to trace the parents to get them to give us legal authority to adopt the babies out. That takes a long time, and sometimes we can't find them."

"Abandoned" is a "frustrating and terrifying" word to Father Maier. Babies are left at a hospital because mothers "just can't do it," he explains. Parents are dying from AIDS and grandmothers or aunts "can't handle it." The mother is in jail because the husband left or is a drunk and she started selling drugs." The mother "can't make" the tuition for grade six. There is nothing to eat in the villages so children are sent to Bangkok. "There are more kids on the street, more kids in prison," and that, he concludes, "is real abandonment—to force them to stop being kids." [E]

Karen Emmons is a freelance writer in Bangkok.

Recognizing Rights

In Guatemala, the battle to gain recognition for the basic rights of children—particularly street children—is being waged in the international courts, the national legislature, and in the cities and towns. After more than a decade, the outcome is still unclear.

BY CRAIG MAURO

BOTH SYMBOLIC AND SYMPTOMATIC of society's unwillingness to deal with children's rights is the 10-year journey through Guatemala's legislature of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Though the code does not exclusively address street children, activists call it a necessary first step. With its enactment, the state would for the first time officially recognize the child as a "subject with rights," due special and differential treatment within the justice system.

Guatemala was the sixth country to ratify the convention, in January 1990, but the debate over implementing it seemed to strike a nationalistic nerve. Opposition groups denounced it as a threat to Guatemala's sovereignty and the rights of families. Congress approved what critics called a watered down version of the law in 1996, but its enactment was postponed three times, then suspended indefinitely. The Guatemalan Republican Front, a conservative party that controls the legislative and executive branches, says it plans instead to address children's rights by establishing a Family Institute to combine efforts of the state, the church and families. Details have yet to emerge.

Nearly every person working with street children points to a pervasive social and governmental indifference as the major factor hindering their progress. "At the state level a serious policy of attention to street kids does not exist. Not in the area of education, health, labor training, anything," laments Arturo Echeverría, national director for Casa Alianza, one of the largest NGOs working on the issue in Guatemala. His remarks are echoed by Onelia Roca, director of the Forum on Protection of Street Children and Youth.

Casa Alianza, founded in Guatemala in 1981 and now working also in Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua, has led the charge on several fronts, from setting up protective homes to spearheading legal actions against those who have violated the rights of the "street population." It now works with over 4,000 street children, offering protection and care, rehabilitating them, and working to eventually "reintegrate" them with their families (if a pattern of abuse did not exist before) and society.

A degree of political willingness to address the issue appeared at the end of 1996, when President Álvaro Arzú's government drew up an ambitious action plan with the help of several NGOs to address the "callejización" (street-ification) of children. The detailed scheme outlined eight priorities in areas of prevention, attention and awareness raising, including new laws and regulations. But only the first step was completed—a census of the "street population." The report estimated that some 6,000 children live on the streets,

mostly in Guatemala City, though the phenomenon has also grown in smaller cities.

With the plan's implementation stalled, Roca's Forum perseveres as the sole body coordinating action to address the problem. Financed by the German Technical Mission, the Forum brings together groups such as Casa Alianza, the local branch

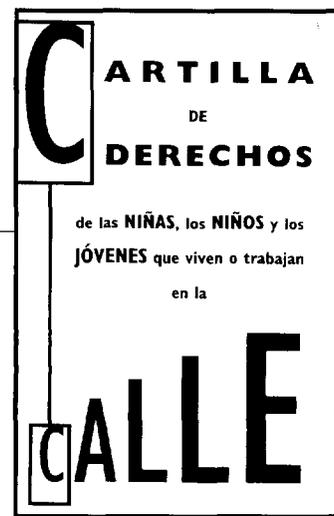
of Doctors Without Borders, several local NGOs and government institutions. Roca proudly describes a plan the Forum helped design recently that coordinated the national police, the national disaster relief agency, the Red Cross and several others, to protect the street population during the winter, when temperatures can dip below freezing at night in Guatemala's highlands.

Efforts by Forum members are complemented by Casa Alianza's legal aid program, which tries to prosecute human rights abuses against street children. Casa Alianza has filed almost 400 cases since 1990 in Guatemalan courts, many documenting abuses by police authorities. Bruce Harris, executive director, notes however, that "we've gotten a day in court, so to speak, only 17 times. Significantly, the courts ruled in our favor in 15 of those." In most of the cases, according to Casa Alianza, investigations are minimal, files are lost or witnesses do not show up to testify. In some cases, they are murdered.

Casa Alianza has also taken its case to international courts, a strategy that recently paid off with a precedent-setting decision by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in Costa Rica. On December 2, 1999, in its first ruling ever involving children, the Court condemned Guatemala for violating the American Convention on Human Rights when uniformed police officers murdered five street children in Guatemala City in 1990. The Court is expected to award damages to the victims' families. Casa Alianza has nine pending cases involving abuses in Guatemala and Honduras.

"While nothing will bring back the children," remarked Harris after the verdict, "we hope this sentence sends a message to the Guatemalan state that they can no longer get away with the bloody murder of street children, something which they have done for far too long." [E]

Craig Mauro is editor of *The Siglo News*, an English-language newspaper in Guatemala City.



Casa Alianza hands out this booklet to street children, educating them about their rights.

Vox Populi

BY GER PHILPOTT

The Pavarotti Music Centre in Mostar was founded as a therapeutic initiative for the children of Bosnia affected by the war.

WHILE ON ASSIGNMENT FOR THE BBC to film war-torn Croatia in 1993, David Wilson and Bill Leeson were deeply moved by observing a landscape where thousands of Croats had been killed and many others forced to flee their homes. Particularly touching was the effect of the war on children. Doing anything concrete about the huge and severe damage seemed impossible, however, until a chance meeting with Nigel Osborne of Edinburgh University's music department at a bakery in Mostar.

Osborne had already conducted a number of music workshops in the region—offered as therapy for those who had experienced the trauma of war and dislocation. Wilson and Leeson immediately recognized the potential of the initiative for the children of the area, and once they were back in London they decided to seek help from their friends in the music industry. The result was creation of the War Child charity.

Bono, lead singer for the group U2, was one of the first to come on board. Others joined in the effort, and in 1995 the first of two Pavarotti and Friends concerts was held in Modena, Italy as support for War Child. Alongside Bono and Luciano Pavarotti were some of the world's biggest pop stars including Elton John and Eric Clapton. The aim was to raise money for the creative and therapeutic use of music to benefit the children of Bosnia.

The concerts were a huge success, raising enough money to build The Pavarotti Music Centre (PMC) on the site of a former primary school in East Mostar. The PMC was one of the first post-war rebuilding projects in the area. Wilson, who believes that music in itself is a form of reconciliation describes the PMC as, "a neutral space where children and young people of all ethnic groups can come together to play and listen to music and attend workshops in a peaceful environment. It's also a symbol of hope on everyone's part that life will go on."

Wilson was PMC director during its first two years, and is now writing a book about his experiences. The PMC was designed by Bosnian and British architects with four primary purposes in mind—music education, music therapy and workshops, recording studios and performance areas. The center opened in December 1997, with many of those who had performed at the Modena concerts attending the opening event.

It is difficult to calculate precisely the number of children who have benefitted from the PMC's work, although Wilson explains that, "with all the outreach work in hospitals, kindergartens and work



Internationally famous music stars Bono and Luciano Pavarotti contributed their time and talents to helping the children of Bosnia

at the center itself, thousands of children have benefitted."

The center employs a number of trained music therapists, some with medical training, who work on a one-to-one basis with disturbed children. The therapists also conduct group sessions in special schools. In addition to the work of the center's music therapy department, PMC operates diskjockey training courses, and two professional

studios are devoted to the development of professional music throughout the Balkans. Other work includes dance and drama classes, guitar classes and a children's choir.

"Before PMC, there was little for young people to do in East Mostar" says Wilson. "Recently I saw 60 young people, on a Sunday morning, drumming." He adds that the young drummers, some of whom were among the biggest troublemakers in the area, were taught their new skills by Eugene Skeef, who once acted as driver to the late South African civil rights activist Steve Biko.

In addition to the work of the PMC, there are plans by War Child to link the center with other projects throughout the world, specifically the Children's Village in Monrovia, Liberia. There are also plans for a children's center in Guatemala. The grand vision of War Child is to develop the music, cultural and psycho-social dimensions of all of these projects, bringing them closer together to help improve the lives of all of the child victims of the world's war zones. [E]

Ger Philpott is a freelance journalist based in Dublin, Ireland.

Innocents Abused

Acknowledging the existence of child abuse, and dealing with its effects, has been a long and difficult societal challenge in many emerging economies.

BY DEBBIE MESCE

PRIOR TO THE COLLAPSE of the Soviet Union in 1991, most Communist governments did not legally acknowledge child abuse and neglect. The recent decision by a court in Croatia to send a father to jail for 14 years for sexually abusing his daughter was not only the longest punishment ever meted out for such an offense in that country, but a reminder that a decade earlier such abuse of children was not officially recognized. This legacy of denial colors what mental health experts see as a growing wave of maltreatment across the former Soviet Union, fostered by pressures of the transition to a market economy, unemployment, lower wages and increased alcohol consumption.

When New York child psychiatrist Owen Lewis began assessing the situation in 1995, the region did not have even a skeleton service available to prevent and treat child abuse. "The starting point was really almost nothing," says Lewis, who later that year co-founded the Children's Mental Health Alliance Foundation (CMHAF). In 1996, the Open Society Institute and CMHAF developed, in coordination with the National Soros Foundations, the Child Abuse and Child Mental Health Program. Their strategy envisioned a systematic approach that began with educating and training mental health professionals, social workers, pediatricians, police, teachers, journalists, prosecutors and judges.

Attitudes in some countries were a formidable barrier. "It is in some ways a political issue," says Maria Keller Hamela, a child psychologist who works with Nobody's Children Foundation in Warsaw. "Catholics and the right wing see the sanctity of the family and believe we shouldn't intervene, that parents have the right to raise their own children. When you talk about child abuse, some say this is creating the problem."

Another issue was establishing what actually constitutes child abuse, outside obvious physical beating or sexual abuse. Often, parents defend treatment of their children as discipline. "Public opinion is not clear. There's still not one opinion about what is abuse and what is not," says Ausra Kuriene, a clinical psychologist at Children's Support Center in Vilnius, Lithuania.

But attitudes are changing as the issues are discussed publicly. "In five years, there's been a tremendous change," Kuriene says. "More and more, all the newspapers, magazines and TV are talking about it." Although many experts in the region criticize the news media's coverage, in some cases the publicity has helped. In the fall of 1999, Lat-

vian media swarmed over a prostitution scandal allegedly involving government officials and adolescent boys, which is still being investigated. The coverage led to a fund-raiser to start another center for abused children in Riga, and improvements to other centers.

Awareness has been raised in Albania, as well. A 1997 survey showed that 73 percent of the 1,252 people polled believe child maltreatment is a very important and serious problem for Albanian society. This recognition will help drive the work that lies ahead, including legal reform, says Ditika Shehi, a program coordinator with Albania's Child Abuse Prevention team. Albania has laws protecting children, but lacks tools such as family courts to implement them.

War has slowed progress in some nations. The system in Yugoslavia is overwhelmed, says Nevenka Zegarac, a social worker in Belgrade. "We've been in an emergency situation for 10 years, and the result is that we have a lot of refugees here." She adds: "We don't have a stable economy and probably won't for the next few years. It's very hard to do prevention work and family preservation because everyone is at risk in a way. It's hard to talk about parental skills when you don't have the money to feed the kids."

Programs in some countries are focusing on preserving the family—fighting the long-standing practice of removing children from troubled families and putting them in orphanages and institutions. In the Czech Republic, an NGO called STREP (the Czech acronym for the Center for Assistance to Children and Families) has been working since 1997 to strengthen families and keep them intact when possible.

Child abuse programs are increasingly able to assist victims and their families, due in part to governmental support. With the possible exception of Yugoslavia, the child abuse programs in these countries are slowly being integrated into local and national institutions. In Latvia, the government provides reimbursement for treatment services, and in Lithuania funding is available to train social workers. The Czech government is developing policies and laws for standards of care and support for families. And in Poland, it is now mandatory that law students at the University of Warsaw attend a seminar on child abuse and neglect issues.

"Ten years is not a long time for everybody to understand that child abuse is a problem, and that you need to have help," says Ruth Soonets, who helped start the Tartu Child Support Center in Estonia. While her center is seeing a growing number of children clients—399 last year—she continues to be amazed at the progress that has been made in those few years. [E]

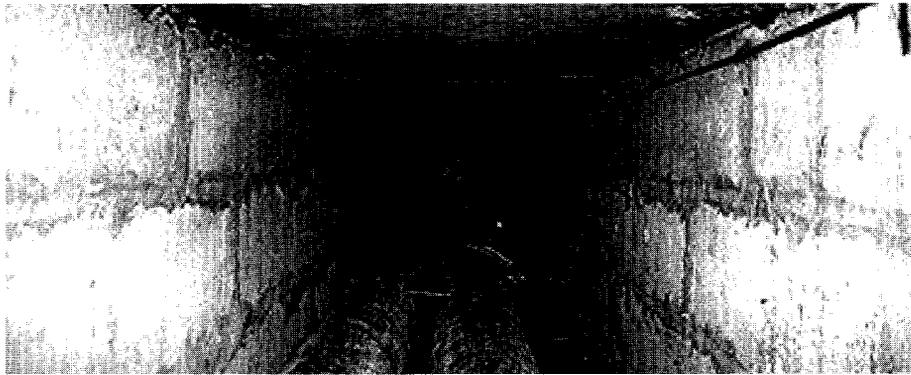
Debbie Mesce is a freelance journalist based in Washington.



Subterranean Blues

Mongolia's street children need help, certainly. But the emphasis should be placed on keeping families together.

BY DOMINIC ZIEGLER



NOT MUCH SEPARATES the plight of homeless children in Ulan Bator from those in Rio de Janeiro or Manila, except that winter temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees centigrade in this Mongolian capital force the city's 3,000 street children to seek shelter in the city's underground sewers and heating systems. The fetid squalor in which these children live—eating, sleeping, defecating and having sex in these underground tubes—tugs at one's heartstrings.

For a long time after 1990, when social welfare subsidies disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Mongolian government pretended that street children didn't really exist. According to officials, there were just 300 street children in 1992. This year their number is expected to exceed 4,000, this in a country whose total population is only 2.5 million.

Anti-poverty groups in Ulan Bator, mostly Western, now tackle the problem through 20-odd "shelters" that offer services ranging from a simple *ger*—the traditional felt tent adapted to serve as a halfway house—to larger homes with scores of children. Every Wednesday night Father Gilbert, a Filipino priest who runs a home for 140 children who were once on the street, delivers mutton pancakes and hot tea to subterranean colonies of children. He has learned that tracking down children, including new arrivals, requires knowing every open manhole cover in the capital; in winter he must visit them at night, when their occupants are sure to be huddling there.

He first stops at the manholes a few paces west of the Ulan Bator Hotel, where eight children live. Last year, one child stabbed another to death here; he is now in the adult prison. A second child died in an alcoholic coma. On a recent night, only one child came up the ladder to greet Father Gilbert. The others, the 14-year-old said with a grin as he took the pancakes, had passed out.

Wednesday night is also soup-kitchen night for the homeless, young and old, who are able to trudge to Father Gilbert's children's home. This makes the street outside the home the natural place for the mobile medical clinic that belongs to the Christina Noble Children's Foundation. In the back, Damian Kenny, a young Irish pediatrician, sets up shop. Outside, a line forms made up of people seeking treatment for the usual street ailments: scabs, tuberculosis, urinary infections and sexually transmitted diseases.

One girl of 16 approaches the vehicle with sideways suspicion, holding her three younger siblings. Then she changes her mind, and with a sharp order takes her brood off. The boys, aged 11 and seven,

walk with the stiff and bow-legged gait of rickets victims. The bone deformity, caused by deficiency in vitamin D, is exacerbated by a lack of sunlight.

The girl's reluctance to seek aid highlights a problem for people who want to help. If found young enough, children can be taken in, but older children may prove unwilling to accept offers of shelter. For many, the streets are where their friends are, where they have independence and, often, where reasonably good, if illicit, money can be made.

The government's National Centre for Children's goal is to sponsor 4,000 of Mongolia's poorest families. The support, equal to \$20 a month, would do much to keep families together and children at school in a country where the annual household income is less than \$400. The state earmarked sponsorship for 400 families last year, but the funds dried up after two months. As for the Centre, its annual \$100,000 budget covers only staff costs and heating. Of the 4,000 targeted families, only 30 are getting any money.

Family support, poverty alleviation and income generation are becoming the focus of some NGOs. In addition to running its *ger* village, the Christina Noble Children's Foundation sponsors individual children; part of the deal is that the whole family gets access to health care.

Save the Children Fund runs half-a-dozen shelters that attempt to integrate children back into society. It also pays for mobile kindergartens that go where the herders go. In the countryside, it has started to encourage mini-farms for former homeless children, growing vegetables and the like. About 25 children who received training last year subsequently earned about \$350 each.

Now, says the Fund's Ariuntungalag Tsendiin, there needs to be more emphasis on placing social workers in schools. In Mongolia they have proven to be more effective than teachers in spotting problems, perhaps because of the history of quasi-social workers who organized Young Pioneers under the Communist system. In time, says Ariuntungalag, shelters could be taken over by local government, leaving NGOs to focus on income generation and family support.

Mongolians may soon be able to agree that they have stanchd the flood of children coming to the streets. But bringing their numbers down to their Communist-era levels will take painstakingly longer. [E]

Dominic Ziegler is the China and Mongolia correspondent for *The Economist* magazine.



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