



CATHOLIC ACTION FOR STREET CHILDREN

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GHANA

NEWSLETTER 51

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THE HISTORY POINTS TOWARDS THE FUTURE.



Dear Reader,

Please receive the 51st. newsletter from CAS. Our latest newsletter, the 50th edition showed the history of CAS in various ways. This newsletter also talks about the history, the history of three departments but this history points towards the future we plan to go.

We will explain what took place in the field and how we want to continue working in the field. It explains our ultimate goal, offering children a brighter future and it also explains why we run a House of Refuge for them. Enjoy your reading.

FIELDWORK

Before CAS established a House of Refuge, we roamed the streets of Accra and met the street children. We thought, we could do something for them in the streets, soon we discovered that that was not possible. You can tell a street child, I will meet you again tomorrow in front of that shop, you can be sure you will fail because the child has very little notion of time and place.

We needed a base. After a long search, we found a suitable place for a start in James Town. Most of the street children were in the central part of the city and our fieldworkers could combine fieldwork with other activities at the Refuge.

The population of street children grew and not all of them could find a “job” in the centre of town. Many moved to the suburbs of the city. Accra was a town and became a city. While the population of street children grew, the city also developed. Our workers followed the children. CAS workers as well as S.AID workers had to choose working areas.

MINI REFUGES.

CAS established four mini refuges in some suburbs of the city. The idea was to take care of the children who lived and worked around the mini refuges. This has been a solution for a number of years, but street children being street children they moved. They moved because the city developed and markets as well as lorry stations were re-located. Street children want to be in areas where many people gather so that they can find jobs.



MEETING POINTS.

CAS dismantled the mini refuges and created more “Meeting Points”, i.e. places where street children gather. Meeting places are just places in front of shop or at the market where children gather. There the street corner education could take place.

Very often the workers had to choose new working areas. During the peak period, CAS had 11 fieldworkers in the streets.

DONOR SUPPORT.

Although, CAS has worked for 18 years in the streets, very little could be shown as successes. The reasons are; every day the workers meet different children and only those who attend the teaching periods benefited from it. However, the fact that so many have found the direction to the Refuge proves to us that we are successful. But who is willing to give money to an activity where no results can be shown? Very few donors. The result was that CAS decided to withdraw many workers from the street.

1. The first reason is lack of financial support and the second is
2. The street children population has grown to such an extent that we cannot oversee it anymore.

You might say, this is a contradiction. It should be more children, more workers. How to solve this dilemma?

PLANS.

The time has come that the work of NGOs cannot be effective any longer in the streets. More hands are needed and the approach should be spread. The Department of Social Welfare has 10 district offices in the ten districts of Greater Accra. The workers of the NGOs could assist the social welfare officers in the various districts and work for the children who are in the streets in that particular area. Other NGOs could assist such as Right to Play which educates children by means of games and play.



OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

We now talk about out of school children because in addition to the thousands of street children many urban poor children as well as working children are in the streets. The fieldwork activities have moved from the centre of the city to the suburbs and now to the Greater Accra Region. Everywhere there are children who do not go to school but are in the streets.

PRESENT ACTIVITIES.

The four fieldworkers of CAS are presently practicing what they planned to do in the districts. They work as a group, they gather children and educate them. Social Teaching is the main approach. Teach the children how to behave, speak to an adult and take care of themselves.

The teaching aids CAS developed, are very helpful.



However, they should be improved for some groups. It all depends what kind of children you meet. When you deal with mainly migrants the approach is different as when you deal with working children.

CAS has very little knowledge about working children and we hope to study them better in the coming years.

CAS does not want to lose contact with the streets because it is there that the children live and work. Therefore, we hope to be able to maintain this present approach in the coming years.

SPONSORSHIP

PREPARATION

In 1995 CAS started a sponsorship program for street children. Children who visit the House of Refuge are “prepared” to listen to a teacher or instructor and behave as expected. The length of this preparation period varies from child to child. Some have had a kind of educational background, many start as stark illiterates. Many learn how to behave properly, others need ample time to do that.

INTRODUCTION OF TRADES.

CAS tries to introduce these children in various trades. Children are encouraged to take part in trades demonstrated, other trades are shown on videos or the child gets an opportunity to go on excursion to one of the workshops or factories. In general, it takes time for a child to make up his or her mind to choose a trade to their liking.

CAS introduced trades such as candle-making and ceramics but noticed that many children did not show interest. No interest was shown for agriculture as well although, CAS started with Hopeland farm project during the same year for that purpose.



EVALUATION.

In 2003, on the occasion of CAS' ten years existence as an organization, a survey was conducted on children who benefitted from the sponsorship scheme in the past. About, half of the trained youngsters were located, (all over Ghana) and we were happy that all had found jobs and several were married. However, they had not found a job in the trades they were trained for. In fact, this was logical because unfortunately, there are many unemployed in Ghana.

TRADITIONAL TRADES.

Traditional trades such as carpentry, masonry, hairdressing and sewing are sufficiently taken care of. CAS had to introduce "new" trades such as aluminium fabrication, electronics, sign writing etc.

Doing so also entails that those who are trained can only find jobs in urban centers.

DURATION.

As a technician myself, I know that the training for a trade takes many years. Years of practice and experience. The bases should be good and a training of three years is the barest minimum. However, CAS had no choice because, for the training, financial support is needed. Because of the expenses involved and the number of children who showed interest, CAS chooses for a training of three years. During this three year period the trainee could sit for grade two of NVTI certificate which could be the bases for further training.

SCHOOL

Only a few children of the many who roam the streets are able to go to regular school. The reasons are their behavior, their age and their educational background. Often the children wait until they are 14 or 15 before they decide to follow education.

Children are happy to be free, to play when they want to play. Happy not to have to listen to a teacher and follow the rules. But when they wait until they are 14 or 15 it is too late to start with schooling. At the beginning of the sponsorship scheme, CAS placed children even younger than 14 in regular schools but it was not a success. Teachers stigmatized the children who came from the street and the other children had no mercy on them. CAS now places only one child in one particular school and makes sure that the behavior of the child can be acceptable.

However, CAS had also many successes with children who had dropped out of education and got the opportunity to return.

Several completed Poly-tech and some made it to the university. A number of them received scholarships and are now abroad.

KIND OF CHILDREN.

All this has been possible because many of the children were migrants. They came from the rural areas and were eager to go to school or learn a trade. Presently, CAS tries to educate children from the second generation. Some migrant children are still visiting the House of Refuge, but the majority has been born on the streets. This means, the mother is a street woman herself and tries to survive together with her child. The result is that the child had to find his or her way at a very early age. Many are not brought up in the acceptable way. They do not know how to take care of themselves as far as cleanliness and other aspects of hygiene is concerned. They often do not know how to behave well enough to sit in a classroom or to work as an apprentice.

In addition, it is with pain that we notice that many children do not have the “stamina” to follow a training of three years. Many simply do not have the patience to learn for a long period of time.

SHORTER SPONSORSHIP SCHEME.

What to do with these children? We have started with a shorter sponsorship program, we teach children skills. This is unfortunate, because we know these children who have skills cannot find jobs to support their lives. But it will give them an income to survive.

We teach them skills such as cooking, taking care of babies, sewing, and hairdressing, bead-making, painting, play volleyball or soccer, become a boxer etc.



In order to learn skills, you need to have some kind of talent. We know some children who are very good in drawing and painting, some are talented footballers, and some easily learn how to cook many different kind of dishes. Unfortunately, only a few have these talents.

The result is that children try one skill after another and cannot make up their mind what they like.

For each skill, CAS has written out three stages which the child has to follow either at the House of Refuge or at Hopeland. When the three stages have been past successfully, the child is placed on attachment. This can be for instance in small restaurant or at a training school for sports.

The training in these skills is limited to a period of one or one and a half year. The expenses are limited because most of their training is done at CAS premises.

CONCLUSION

We at CAS are not happy that it has come to these developments. You can learn to make soap, but you can never compete with the experts. You can learn to weave a nice basket, but we hope you can find a market for it. You can dream to become a famous soccer player, but often it remains a dream. No, skill training is not solution. We have to brainstorm again and dialogue with others to find solutions for these children.

When we ask you, what should be done with the many children who roam the streets and do not go to school? And you answer; they all should go to school. Then you have failed with your answer. It is simply not possible.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING.

Some weeks ago, the awareness group of CAS decided to invite people from the neighborhood to the House of Refuge to explain to them what we do as an organization. It was an interesting meeting because, the assembly man and many others attended, they also asked very interesting questions. Unfortunately, the electricity failed when we started and we could not show the power-point presentation which was prepared. A general explanation about CAS was given after which the visitors where divided into smaller groups so that the premises could be toured. After which they re-assembled in the main hall and the power-point presentation could now be shown.



The visitors were given the opportunity to ask questions. Interestingly many questions referred us back in history.

1. Why don't you give all the children uniforms so that the people in the neighborhood can identify them?
2. Why do we not train the children batch by batch? One group progresses and a new intake is done.
3. Why do we not control the children better outside the premises?
4. Why don't we counsel the children better?
5. Why?

These questions show that the people in the neighborhood did not understand what we are trying to achieve. Many thought that we were running a school. Nobody knew that CAS has many children in schools and workshops.

They only saw and heard the children in and around the Refuge. Many did not understand that the children who visit the Refuge are not “our” children.

These questions bring us back in history. I have explained the history of the fieldwork and that of the sponsorship scheme. Now the history of the Refuge could be explained.

HOUSE OF REFUGE.

CAS wants to be available for all the children who are in the streets. Therefore we do not have a particular period for intake. Children are welcome any time. Some come for a period of time, and then disappear. Children are invited to take part in the activities. Every hour a different activity is organized, we do not run a school. A child can take part whenever s(he) wants. Now the skills of social work are tested. Try to interest all children.

In the past, we organized some sleeping places for them, but these were very difficult to control and they were removed. We offered lockers to the children so that they could keep their belongings. Shoeshine boys have hammers and screwdrivers and no locker was safe. We organized baby cots for babies but they became storing places for clothing.

Carpets and curtains were installed to make the Refuge more homely. You can guess what happened with them. Chairs and table do not have to be nice but very strong. In addition we make sure that no one can lock himself in when the Refuge is closed because some try to steal everything.



Some years ago we, managed to obtain a secondhand home-trainer, this could be nice for the children. Within a week all the ball-bearings disappeared. We bought a big dustbin on wheels. Before everybody had seen it the wheels disappeared. In other words, yes we run a home for street children but a home with a difference.

An internal survey conducted some years ago revealed that children were happy to come to the Refuge because they felt free and safe.

Did we not receive the same answer from the women who lived in the mud at Konkomba market who preferred freedom as their main treasure?

If we can provide a safe and free place to the children at the Refuge, then we have done enough. We only hope that the neighbors will understand that as well.

We have invited the neighbors for another time because only when we work together we could do something for all the children who are not in school.

The awareness group has learnt a lot. Our approach has to be explained in detail as if we start our intervention for street children today.

Yours Sincerely,

Bro. Jos van Dinther (Director CAS)