

# Children Living on the Street

## English Sources Booklet



## Source 1

### Street-Connected Children and Homeless Children – Definitions

Not all children who are homeless end up living in the open on the street. Many end up sleeping in very inappropriate but out of sight places – on the floors of friends or strangers, or sleeping in temporary accommodation like hostels. For example, the homeless charity Shelter estimated in 2018 that as many as 9,500 UK children have spent their Christmas in a hostel or other temporary accommodation, often with one family in a single room, sharing bathrooms and kitchens with other residents who they don't know or trust.

Conversely, not all children who can be described as 'street children' are necessarily homeless. They may work, play or spend their time on the street, but may go back to sleep with their family or parents.

We use the term 'street children' or 'street-connected children' to describe children who:

1. Depend on the streets to live and/or work, either on their own, or with other children or family members; and
2. Have a strong connection to public spaces (e.g. streets, markets, parks, bus or train stations) and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities. This wider group includes children who do not live or work on the street but regularly accompany other children or family members in the streets.

In other words, 'street children' are children who depend on the streets for their survival – whether they live on the streets, work on the streets, have support networks on the streets, or a combination of the three.

### **Why do some children live or work in the street?**

The answer is complex — as many street children as there are in the world there are as many reasons for them being there. Every single child has their own unique story. The reasons for their connection to the streets will vary from country to country, city to city, and from person to person.

These factors will also vary over time, such as poverty, displacement due to natural disasters and conflicts or family breakdown all lead to increases in the numbers of street children in a given area.

Economic **poverty plays a major role**, although other factors are of equally high importance. These can include: **parental deaths, parental neglect** and other social factors such as **violence and abuse** of children at home or within communities.

## Source 2

### Extract from 'Stone Cold'

*by Robert Swindells*

If you think sleeping rough's just a matter of finding a dry spot where the fuzz won't move you on and getting your head down, you're wrong. Not your fault of course - if you've never tried it you've no way of knowing what it's like, so what I thought I'd do was sort of talk you through a typical night. That night in the Vaudeville alcove won't do, because there were two of us and it's worse if you're by yourself.

So you pick your spot. Wherever it is (unless you're in a squat or a derelict house or something) it's going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it's going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too - shop doorways often are. And remember, if it's winter you're going to be half frozen before you even start. Anyway you've got your place, and if you're lucky enough to have a sleeping bag you unroll it and get in. Settled for the night? Well maybe, maybe not. Remember my first night? The Scouser? 'Course you do. He kicked me out of my bedroom and pinched my watch. Well, that sort of thing can happen any night, and there are worse things. You could be peed on by a drunk or a dog. Happens all the time - one man's bedroom is another man's lavatory. You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim. That happens all the time too, and if they get carried away you can end up dead. There are the guys who like young boys, who think because you're a dosser you'll do anything for dosh, and there's the psycho who'll knife you for your pack. So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep.

And don't forget the cold. If you've ever tried dropping off to sleep with cold feet, even in bed, you'll know it's impossible. You've got to warm up those feet, or lie awake. And in January, in a doorway, in wet trainers, it can be quite a struggle. And if you manage it, chances are you'll need to get up for a pee, and then it starts all over again. And those are only some of the hassles. I haven't mentioned stomach cramps from hunger, headaches from the flu, toothache, fleas and lice. I haven't talked about homesickness, depression or despair. I haven't gone into how it feels to want a girlfriend when your circumstances make it virtually impossible for you to get one – how it feels to know you're a social outcast in fact, a non-person to whom every ordinary everyday activity is closed.

So. You lie on your bruises, listening. Trying to warm your feet. You curl up on your side and your hip hurts, so you stretch out on your back so your feet stay cold and the concrete hurts your heels. You force yourself to lie still for a bit, thinking that'll help you drop off, but it doesn't. Your pack feels like a rock under your head and your nose is cold. You wonder what time it is. Can you stop listening now, or could someone still come? Distant chimes. You strain your ears, counting. One o'clock? It can't be only one o'clock, surely?

## Source 3

### Our Stories

#### **Joseph, Sierra Leone**

Joseph's parents were murdered during the civil war when he was only 7 years old. His aunt took him into her care but she passed away the next year. He was left in the care of his uncle, an amputee from the war who was unable to support him. Joseph left to go to the streets because he had no food, no education and knew life wouldn't get any better if he stayed. During his time on the streets he experienced all kinds of abuse. Considered an inconvenience he was kicked, spat at and beaten. He spent his nights sleeping in the lorry park and dreaming of becoming a doctor one day so he could help other people.

*(Case Study provided by Street Child Of Sierra Leone and the Consortium for Street Children)*

#### **Gabriela, Brazil**

Beginning her life as a young girl born into a world of drug-related crime and deprivation, Gabriela had little choice but to turn to the street to make a living begging at traffic lights. Her parents were consumed by drug addiction. Soon Gabriela decided to flee from the violence she was living with at home and found herself alone and homeless in the huge city of Sao Paulo. Gabriela was vulnerable and unable to protect herself from the many dangers that life on the streets poses to a young child. She became caught up in a triangle of violence, drugs and sexual abuse. Falling pregnant at just 12 years old, Gabriela turned to a care centre for help and was looked after through the birth of her child at hospital. At 13, Gabriela now lives in the Menina Mae shelter with her son, Miro, whom she adores. She hopes he will have a better future than her.

*(Fictional case study created by children living on the streets provided by Action for Brazil's Children and the Consortium for Street Children)*

#### **Maryam, Morocco**

Maryam is 11 years old and should be approaching the end of her primary education. In fact, she doesn't go to school and hasn't done so for several years. Maryam describes her father as "a problem". He never does anything for her and her siblings and he sometimes hits her. She lives, along with her 4 siblings, her mother and her mother's colleague, in a small apartment with only two rooms. Her mother works a 12-hour day but, as the sole source of income, still struggles to provide a basic standing of living for her family. The four younger children (between 2 and 8 years) are all looked after by Maryam. She cares for them, prepares their meals and does the household chores. Maryam doesn't know how things will ever change and is thinking about leaving home to live on the street.

*(Case study provided by Moroccan Children's Trust and the Consortium for Street Children)*

#### **Neya, Congo**

Neya is 16 years old. He lived for 3 years on the streets. His mother died of malaria and his father disappeared soon after her death. He was being looked after by his mother's brother in Kasumbelesa. However, his Aunt accused him of being a witch. After a number of degrading episodes when the family attempted to cast demons out of him he left home and gravitated towards the city. He started working and sleeping in the market where he could earn a small amount by emptying sacks of flour off lorries. About a year ago he started attending a charity run day centre. With the support of the charity he is now studying in a local school. He's been learning to paint by a local artist and has exhibited some of his pictures in the Lubumbashi art Gallery.

*(Case study provided Congo's Children Trust and the Consortium for Street Children)*

## Source 4

### I Am Not Street

*Written by children who have lived on the street in Uganda.*

I am not street  
I am not something you walk on  
I am not something to be thrown in the rubbish skip  
I am not a bad smell or torn clothes  
I am not a thief

I am not a stomach empty of food to eat  
I am not worthless  
I am not something for people to box or kick  
I am not the drugs I sniff to help me forget  
I am not invisible

I am here  
Don't pretend not to see me  
I am a child  
I like to play and laugh and learn  
I deserve food to eat

I deserve an education and a warm bed at night  
I deserve to be safe  
I deserve to dream and sleep at night without fear  
I am NOT street  
A street is a place and I am a child  
Who will one day be an adult  
I am the future  
I want the opportunity to make that future great



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