

# **GLOBAL MAPAID STREET CHILDREN PILOT-SURVEY**

**Port Elizabeth, South Africa**

**August 2008**

**Dedicated to**

**The Royal Families of Dubai and Jordan**

**‘Thank you - all of you - for your contribution to world peace by your promotion of economic empowerment and justice for the very poor.’**

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## **Survey Aim:-**

The aim of this pilot-survey is to map and record the daily movement and activity of a selected group of street children, over a seven day period, in the City of Port Elizabeth (South Africa).

Little is known about these children, however, it is a logical starting point to define as clearly as possible how, where, and why they live, for two reasons:-

- a) it will promote a better informed discussion and actions to help them by local aid agencies and
- b) it will help promote their needs to donors, of all sorts, near and far

The survey displays its results on a map. This is not a new technique, yet it is phenomenally effective.

In 1889 Charles Booth a socially minded capitalist created a London poverty map, which showed the social condition of every street. His map grabbed the attention of politicians of all parties so that much better attention was then focused on actions to reduce poverty, for the reasons mentioned above.

## **Final Conclusions:-**

The group mostly stays intact for much of the day and its entire spatial activity pattern hardly ever exceeds a spatial extent of more than 1km<sup>2</sup>. This limited space in other words mostly represents the group's 'world'. Sometimes however its members tend to spread out over a small area (when they 'work' for example) and from time-to-time some individuals may even leave the group and venture beyond its usual spatial activity pattern. When it was for such reasons not possible to follow and observe the group as a whole, one particular group member named Sabta, was randomly chosen for this purpose and consistently followed.

In summary, the activities of these children represent a colossal 'feat of survival' with corresponding qualities of ingenuity and entrepreneurship. For these same qualities they are sometimes perceived as a nuisance.

## **Methodology:-**

Mapped activity attributes in the case of the selected group include the following, namely:-

- places where children sleep or spend the night;
- places where children receive assistance from concerned institutions in society (such assistance include mostly food from two local church groups);
- places where children 'work' for an income (such work is informal in nature and mostly involves street children working as parking attendants and/or car guards);
- places that children visit for sanitary purposes (public toilets); and
- places where children relax and/or socialize with friends from other groups.

The last-mentioned activity attributes represent the entire daily activity scope of the selected group of street children.

## **Pre-Survey Activity:-**

Numerous groups of children and homeless persons roam the streets of Port Elizabeth. A single group was eventually identified between Kings Beach and Hobie Beach in the suburb of Humewood (See the photo-map). This is an area that is known for the many children and homeless persons that carve out a living on its streets and open spaces.

The street child phenomenon in Port Elizabeth is well-acknowledged but it remains relatively un-surveyed. Little is therefore known and even less is documented regarding their day-to-day activity. Given this informational void, the selection of the last-mentioned group was preceded by a preparation process in which institutions with a known interest in street children and homeless persons were consulted – including the Humewood office of the South African Police Services (SAPS) and two local churches (Humewood Methodist and the Corpus Christi Catholic Church). All three institutions provided valuable assistance in identifying local groups of street children; the places where their members tend to congregate; and, naturally, which groups to avoid for security reasons. Known demographic information was also made available. For example:-

- The majority of street children and homeless persons in the Humewood area are male;

- their ages range between 9 and 38 years;
- most of them have little or no education whatsoever;
- they are mostly of African ethnicity and predominantly speak two languages, namely Afrikaans and isi-Xhosa; and
- almost the entire population of an estimated 30 street children and homeless persons in Humewood's Kings Beach area originates from the city's deprived northern and former segregated African township areas.

### **The Survey Group:-**

The identified group of street children was randomly selected from the larger collection of groups identified by the above-mentioned institutions. This group was approached by the researcher and the aim of the survey thoroughly explained to its members. Several days were subsequently spent winning the trust of the children while informally observing their daily activities in order to get a general idea of how and where they spend their time.

Winning the group's trust was initially complicated by the fact that most of the younger street children in the Humewood area were recently deported back to their homes and families by the South African Police Services. As usual, they simply returned to the streets within days. However, as a result of their deportation, outsiders (such as the researcher in the case of this survey) tend to be viewed with a degree of suspicion. Two measures proved successful in establishing a relationship of trust between the street children in the selected group and the researcher:-

- The first measure involves time – the researcher simply had to spend enough time with the children so that they could get used to his presence and modus operandi, and realize that the survey does not present any threat to their daily existence at all.
- The second measure involves food – the researcher supplied the group members, only at the onset of the survey, with a limited supply of bread. Food in the case of the Humewood children (and possibly street children elsewhere in the city) represents the 'currency of the street' and was provided to them as a negotiated symbol of goodwill.

The identified group consists of four male members between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Their names, ages and reasons for being on the streets follow:-

- Sabata (the group member that is mostly followed by the researcher) at 18 years of age is the oldest individual of the group. He is originally from Zwide Township (Port Elizabeth) and lives on the streets because of 'family problems' back home.
- Mandontsa is 16 years old. He is originally from Kwazakhele Township (Port Elizabeth) and was forced to make a living on the streets by the death of both parents and no support network at home.
- Mfundo is 15 years old. He is originally from Kwazakhele Township (Port Elizabeth) and lives on the streets because 'there is no income back home'.
- Vukile Mfundo is 15 years old. He is originally from Greenbushes (Port Elizabeth) and was forced to leave his home by his parents. Being unable to secure employment anywhere, he ended up as a street child.

### **The Survey:-**

The survey was conducted over a period of seven days. Each day's observation commenced early in the morning (as children were waking up) at the place where the group had spent the previous night. Children were then followed throughout the day, their activities observed and the absolute location thereof recorded by means of a Global Positioning System (GPS). Descriptive notes of the group's activity were furthermore made and accompany the GPS readings. The photo-map which visually depicts the group's daily activity and movement was eventually produced by means of this information.

### **Detailed Conclusions:-**

Although street children and homeless persons in the Humewood area predominately organize themselves and operate in different groups, much interaction takes place between them. Throughout the course of the survey, the researcher therefore had the opportunity to engage with several other street children and homeless persons. The following notes result from and are a synthesis of many enquiring conversations with such individuals.

- Street children in the Humewood area generally tend not cover relatively large distances and mostly keep to the Humewood beach front area. However, many are aware of the exact location of other groups across the city.
- For security reasons, street children in the Humewood area sleep in groups of more-or-less five individuals. Such sleeping arrangements also represent certain age cohorts. For example, children between the ages of 10 and 17 years tend to sleep together for protection against older children and homeless persons. Younger children, younger than 10 years for example, may even resort to sleeping during the day and roaming the streets at night in order to avoid sexual predation by older children.
- Food is obviously an essential commodity for all street children. Meals in the Humewood area are provided by the Corpus Christi Catholic Church and the Humewood Methodist Church on a regular basis – mainly bread and soup or beans. Alternatively, food is begged from other people or scavenged in refuse bins.
- Street children in the Humewood area have the beach front public toilets as main sanitary source. This facility is however not used regularly.
- Life on the street in the Humewood area also means regular exposure and easy access to alcohol and drugs. Most of the street children use alcohol and/or drugs, therefore for security reasons, care should perhaps be exercised in future surveys when groups are observed after 4pm. It was discovered that alcohol and drug abuse amongst the street children tend to spike after this time in the afternoon.
- Detailed reasons why children end up on the streets show considerable inter-personal variation. Domestic problems back home however (very few of the street children are orphans) – ranging from severe parental abuse and neglect to abject poverty and deprivation – is the common thread running through the majority of stories.
- Apart from two local churches, street children in the Humewood area have few societal allies. Humewood residents and businesses complain that street children contribute to criminal activity and that they generally add a degree of blight to the area.

#### **Recommendations:-**

- i) No copyright is attached to this case study - its wide dissemination is encouraged.
- ii) GMA is would like to accomplish similar studies with aid agencies working with street children in other places and welcomes exploratory approaches from them.