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ABSTRACT:

This article examines how former street children experienced going from street life to life within an organization. Through semi-structured interviews with six children and one field worker, the aim has been to identify key points that made these children going all the way while other left, but also to highlight challenges and difficulties along the way. Reports from Ghana and other parts of the world about a low rate of success in working with these children made the subject interesting. Findings suggest that the process of leaving the street is more than just a physical move. The ability of the organizations to motivate and assist the children to change character has shown to be very critical for making the children stay within the program. Also the influence and assistance between the boys themselves has been of uttermost importance.

KEY WORDS: Street children, homelessness, street exit, interventions,

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Introduction

Young people living in the streets without any adult supervision is a common feature of cities in less developed countries (Dybicz, 2005). In Ghana, just as in many other countries in the world, the number of street children has increased sharply the past two decades. Only in Accra, the number of children living in the street was estimated to around 15000 in 1999 (Beauchemin, 1999). A later undated report in 2003 showed an additional 5000 (Orme & Seipel, 2007). The reason for the Ghanaian children to end up in the street differs but the majority are pushed into street life because of neglect, death of their parents, extreme poverty or domestic violence (Baffoe et. al, 2002). The life on the street is dangerous and hazardous and the child exposes himself for various risks (Bibars, 1998; Beauchemin, 1999).

This essay will not touch upon the problem of how to decrease the flow of children coming to the streets of Accra. While a lot of research has been concerned with describing the population of street children and the causes of ending up in the street, there has been a surprising neglect of how children leave the street (Dybicz, 2005). The interventions for these children have been described as first aid as long as the flow continues (Baffoe et al, 2002). This might be true, but it is a first aid that will be necessary for a foreseeable future and it is therefore important that these interventions is done as effective as possible. In order to improve these interventions, the children's own experiences of leaving the street should be seen as a valuable tool.

The study rests upon a couple of assumptions derived from previous literature and also through discussions with professionals in Accra. The first is the assumption that leaving the street is more than a physical move and that children often find this move difficult. The second is that there is a high percent of children who choose not to join an organization to leave the street even if they have the opportunity and finally the assumption that the move could be considered a process. Even though the existence of this process is widely recognized, it is rarely examined from the youth perspective except recent research in Canada, a country where the circumstances can be assumed to be very different from those in Ghana. This study aims to examine the experiences of children who have gone from street life in Accra to a life in a rehabilitation home of a Non-governmental organization (NGO).

Literature review

As mentioned earlier, there is not much written about children getting off the street. While most of the articles reviewed only touch upon the process of leaving the street through discussions about best practices for interventions, only one article solely focus on the youth's experiences of street exit. Street children do not necessarily need assistance from a professional change agent to leave the street. However, change agents can often offer new opportunities that the child would otherwise not have and the street exits examined in this article are only those performed with the help of a professional change agent.

Historically, the change agents for street children were religious organisations (eg churches and mosques) who had this responsibility as a part of their charity mandate (Feeny, 2005; Bibars, 1998). During the 20th century, the street children problem became politicized and the government became responsible with governmental and non-governmental institutions under them. The main purpose did not change and these institutions were still mainly to free the society from the problem and keep these difficult children isolated (Bibars, 1998). The implementation of the United Nations Convention on the right of the child has created a global shift in thinking about children and the last decades have witnessed a change in the intervention approach towards street children and a movement away from the traditional correctional approach towards a voluntary (Dybicz, 2005; Bibars, 1998; Feeny, 2005). The work has therefore to a great extent moved from institutions to become more street based (Bibars, 1998).

Both Dybicz (2005) and Ennew (2003) conclude that all interventions must be voluntary in order to be successful. This movement towards a voluntary approach has also had effects on the interventions. Since the voluntary approach makes it necessary to convince the child to join, more emphasize has been put on how to build trust and get the child interested (Carrizosa, 1992). Munene & Nambi (1996) conclude from their research in Uganda that a successful approach must include four steps; befriending, reclaiming, rehabilitation and resettling. Establishing and maintaining contact with the street children must be the starting point for any interventions. Reclaiming means that the change agent must develop an interest in the child to spend less and less time on the street. Both these steps must be accomplished

before it can be realistic with the rehabilitation that usually includes a permanent move from the street. Ennew (2003) agrees and states that the most successful approach is through phased-in transistional programs, which first work with the child on the street and then facilitates the decision to leave the street. West (2003) also concludes in his research from Asia that an immediate removal from the street may not be in the best interest of the child.

Conticini (2005) concludes in his research from Bangladesh that street children are not passive recipients of interventions. The children have developed strong coping strategies and assets and should therefore not be seen as destitute, an argument Orme and Seipel (2007) agree with from their research in Ghana. Feeny (2005) comes to the same conclusion in his article and stress further that it should not be assumed that these children are in any way desperate for assistance. The awareness of an organization does not by any means guarantee that the child will participate or use the same (WERK, 2002). WERK (2002) found in their study that the main reason for non-participation in organizations was dislike of the degree of discipline including rigid rules and regulations, and the curtailment of their freedom and association. According to Carrizosa (1992), there is often a problem for children to engage in long term programmes when more immediate gratification is available on the street.

Feeny (2005) points out the "up and downs" for the street children and argues that no matter how resilient a child may be, there almost certainly will come a time when he or she consider going home, or at least changing the environment. During this point the child is often more open to other options including seeking help from a change agent. To seek help from an NGO is not the same thing as giving up street life which is usually a much slower process (Feeny, 2005; Baffoe et al, 2002). Even among those children who participate in the activities of an NGO, most of them do not use the NGO to leave the streets even if the option is there. For most street children, the NGO is an integral part of street life, not a way out (Feeny, 2005). Shanahan (2001) agrees and reports from his organization in Accra that only 2 % of their children choose to join the sponsorship programmes that will take them off the street.

Leaving the street expresses both a physical and emotional progress and includes diverse processes with many possible outcomes (West, 2003). Some children have gained a sense of belonging and an emotional and material satisfaction on the street that their homes and communities were not able to provide (Ennew, 2003). Some are used to their freedom and have also developed a habit of having money that they don't want to give up (Feeny, 2005).

Even WERK (2002) experienced some street children defending street life, saying the streets provided them with food, drinks and money. They enjoyed the freedom to move around, do what they want, to smoke and for the boys, to have girlfriends. Some research also claim these children are completely regimented by the "street society" with its own norms and values which is therefore difficult to change (McAlpine, 2007). On the contrary, Orme & Seipel (2007) claim that the norms and values of the street children in Accra do not differ significantly from the norms and values of the society as a whole.

Karabanow (2008) shows from his research in Canada that street exit consists several dimensions including contemplation, motivation to change, securing help, transitioning from the street, changing daily routines, and redefining one's sense of self. He further finds that street exit is a challenging and nonlinear process and a successful street exit was also considered to include an emotional and a spiritual change in addition to the physical move. The motivation for youth to move away from the street rests on a multitude of internal and external factors. The majority of the participants spoke of needing a desire to exit but the external factors such as the personal support system also proved to be important. He also found a positive correlation between the time spent on the street and the difficulties in disconnecting from the street culture. Reintegrating into the mainstream culture introduced these people to a new way of living and a change in most aspects of their daily routines. These changes allowed them to reflect on their past experiences, and for most of the youth this meant perceiving the street as an unhealthy and destructive environment. Most of the participants in this study also had a drug addiction that they also had to deal with in order to leave the street.

Method

This essay examines the experiences of the participants and the method chosen has therefore been qualitative. Individual half-structured interviews have been used in order to create an environment where the participants could feel comfortable to give their story. I have spent three months in the house where the boys stay in order to build trust and create relationships to the participants. The interviews were conducted after I had stayed there for one month.

Six boys participated in the study. All of them had stayed there for at least three years. The children selected were those having a file that mentioned that they for some period had been living mainly on the roadside. Even though all children had occasionally slept in the streets, these boys had all slept mainly on the roadside for some period. All interviews were conducted in English. However, at some occasions they used specific words in their local languages that I have translated after the interview. In addition to the six interviews with the children I also interviewed a field worker as a complement to the other interviews. All of the participants were males since the home where I was based was only for boys. The aim of the study has been to focus on the experiences of the children. As a result, all the issues that have been central in the stories of the children have also been included in the findings. The problem of children saying what they think would benefit them or not saying what could hit back to them had been taken into consideration but the effort to prevent this has been done before the interviews by trying to build trust and also in the beginning of each interview by carefully explain the purpose and confidentiality of the research. Once the interviews were done there has been no attempt to distinguish between true and false in the stories told.

The data-material was sorted in five phases; before meeting the organization, meeting the organization, starting to participate, moving to the organization and finally today. These phases were taken from Munene & Nambi (1996) in their research from Uganda because they fit well with the setup of the organization where the children stay. The findings have then been compared to previous literature treating this subject and this literature has also been the theoretical frame for this essay. The data has been analyzed through content analysis and sorted under the phases.

Background information and definitions

Chance for Children (CFC)
CFC is an NGO created in Ghana by a Ghanaian man and a Swiss lady. It started from individual engagement in the street children issue which later led to the creation of a recognized NGO. The work of CFC can be divided into three steps. The CFC field workers are the first to come into contact with the children in downtown areas of Accra. They always

make sure they find the relatives of the child in order to include them into the process. The first choice is to help to get the child back to the family.

When family reunification is not possible, the second step is the CFC meeting house, situated in central Accra. This house is only available during day time and the children are still going back to their areas to sleep. The third and final step is moving to one of the two residential houses within the organization and start public schooling. The house for the boys is situated in a village just outside Accra. After finishing the education (studies or apprenticeship) which enable them to find an occupation, the organization gradually starts to cut the ties to the youth. Currently, CFC is working with around 50 youths. They are funded through individuals, communities, companies and churches from Switzerland where they spend around two months every year for fundraising.

Definition of street children

The meaning and the definition of the term street children is widely debated (Ennew, 2003) (West,2003). UNICEF classifies "working and street children" according to one single variable, namely the degree of family contact. Cosgrove also include the personal attributes of the child and means that it is both the child's reliance on the family and the norms that the child operates under that has to be considered (Cosgrove, 1990). Schurink has a similar opinion and defines a street child as: *A boy or a girl who is under 18 and who left his/her home environment, part time or permanent and who spends most of his/her time unsupervised on the street as part of a subculture of children who live an unprotected communal life and who depend on themselves and on each other, and not on an adult for the provision of physical and emotional needs such as food, clothing, nurturance, direction and socialization* (Grundling & Grundling, 2005). This study will refer to this definition when the term "street child" is used.

Definition of street life

There is a danger in defining street life as something distinguished from mainstream life. Especially in shanty towns where the difference between the conditions for those living there and the conditions for street children are often vague. Street life is often emphasized wherein basic rights of food, shelter and education are violated. The construction of a separate street world peopled by socially aberrant children and adults both stigmatises the poor who are on

the street and perpetuates their social exclusion (McAlpine, 2007). Nevertheless, the children who are fully participating in street life at a social level also find themselves under different circumstances than the children who don't. Separation from family and being out of school create special settings for these children and street life includes having to provide for themselves and having their street network as their major socialisation agent. In this way, street life differ from mainstream life because street life thrives outside the authority in ways that contravene accepted understandings of what children can and should do (Feeny, 2005). In this study, the meaning of street life refers to the fact of spending most of your time on the streets, not going home regularly and not attending school.

Findings

Life on the street

The children interviewed came to the organization from different areas of central Accra and had stayed in the streets from a few months up to more than four years. Some were mobile and had been roaming around in many different areas. They got money through different kinds of work such as carrying things in the markets and trotro[1] stations, carry rubbish, sweeping outside shops or washing cars. Some also regularly stole some of the goods they carried in the market and sold it to make extra money. All of them stayed in groups of other children. The size of the group varied and also consisted of sub-groups that sometimes joined. The children describe the relationships within the group as very close and that they shared the money they got and always stuck together no matter what happened. None of the children were attending school when they met CFC but most of them had been in school previously for at least some time. They were sleeping in different places such as under kiosks, in verandas or market tents.

Everybody described street life as difficult. Sometimes they didn't get any work to do and had to stay without food for the whole day. Especially if they woke up late, others would already have taken the job. Even if they had earned money, stealing was common and sometimes someone stole their earnings before they had bought food. Harassment from authorities such as police and soldiers was also a big worry since their scattering raids usually ended up in

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[1] Mini vans for public transport

mercilessly beating of some children. During rain the children found it very difficult to find a comfortable place to stay and there were always a lot of mosquitoes around which made them extremely vulnerable for malaria.

Most of the children still maintained some contact with their families and sometimes went home to sleep when the situation on the street became too rough. Like one boy proclaimed: " If I saw I was getting too many problems on the roadside, I ran to my mothers place". Sometimes they also followed a friend to his parents to stay there for a few nights. This homecoming sometimes included seriously beating for these children, in some cases as a punishment for staying on the street and in some cases as a continuation of the cause that led them to the street in the first place. Both the street and the home were seen as two bad alternatives and even though the street usually was considered to be the better one, they sometimes returned home: "I´ve been going home and come back. If I go home they will beat me, if they beat me I will come back to where I lived".

Even though some said they did not think about the future when they were living in the streets, the majority revealed that they thought about at least how to avoid living on the roadside. Many saved money in a zuzu (informal bank), some for short-term purpose to save the money from theft but some also saved to be able to find a kiosk to sleep in or to start a small business in the future. One boy even had a friend who was able to hire a house in Konkomba[2] where the boy also usually could sleep. Another boy was able to save 35 new cedis (about 35US$) from work that he gave to his mother for her to get him back to school. In addition, he even bought a school bag. Except him, no one had any future plans that included education during this time. However, some of the boys revealed that they felt jealous sometimes when they saw other children going to school and when their friends who were still at school talked about it and showed what they had learn.

Half of the children had heard of other organizations offering assistance. The most common was CAS, an organization that is mostly working street based with a centre where children can come during the day. Two also participated in their activities. One boy who usually went to CAS was on his way when he met CFC. He chose to stay while his friends went to CAS. One boy had heard of Osu Children's home and thought that he should go there to make them

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[2] Area in central Accra

pick him. However, this was never done. The rest had never heard of any other organization and did not at all think about the possibility that assistance could be available in this way.

Meeting the organization

CFC went to the streets of some areas in central Accra. They went out to meet the children and to try to make friends with them. The field worker expressed the importance of using "street language" in the beginning so that the child feels that his way of speaking is accepted even with this well dressed man. CFC also focus on showing the children that no matter their past, CFC will accept it and that they are not judging them.

The field worker experienced that most children are interested to listen in the beginning, but at first most of them are expecting promises concerning the immediate reward for listening at that very moment. Even though it is dangerous to promise too much, he felt that it is very important to at least give them food. This is because if you have a meeting and they will have to work before they come, they will be too tired to listen or they will not come at all. However, the field worker also said that they always have to do something for the food so that the food is not just given to them for no reason.

Those not interested

All children had friends that ran away or were not interested when the field worker approached them. The most common reason mentioned was fear and distrust. The social worker pointed out that the children often experienced lies and disappointment in their past and therefore had problems to trust again. Many took the field workers for being connected to the authorities and their past experience of the police and the soldiers made them too afraid to stay. Also, some children said some friends found the proposal a little too good to be true: "How can a person just come and say, come I´m taking you to go and take care of you?". A lot of stories seem to have been going around, more or less true: "Some of them were afraid because they thought they are going to cut off their head". There was also an issue about the white lady who participated in the field work. One child explained that some of the children were afraid of the white lady because they were from far off and had never seen a white lady before. Another child said that there were stories going around about a white lady or man who came and took children from Konkomba and the children never returned. This might just as

well has been an NGO assisting street children. Whether or not, it shows the importance of making sure that the friends remaining on the street will become aware of what happened with those leaving.

While fear was one factor for children not to listen to CFC, some children seems to have missed the opportunity only because of circumstances that day. The first time one boy met them, most of the other boys had already gone to work and therefore missed the opportunity. Another explained that the field worker invited them to play football and while his friends were hungry and left to eat, he liked football too much to leave. In one case, a group of children waited for the field workers to pick them up. However, because the field workers were delayed, some children decided to go to another organization instead that day and therefore missed their chance to join CFC.

The experiences of the children

The children's experiences of meeting the organization were varied. The children could be divided into two groups: those interested and those who followed friends. The first group did not recall that they felt any fear concerning the organization. Some of them thought it to be something else, for example that the field worker was a football coach or that the white lady would take them to Europe. Even though this boy had heard bad stories about white people taking children away he still saw the possibility and wanted to find out himself. Among these boys, there was an attitude that no one could hurt them. The latter group mainly just followed their friends. Some were by this stage afraid of the field worker while one was simply not too interested but had nothing better to do since the others were listening. When the mother of one of the boys heard about their meeting, she simply declared the field workers to be ghosts which made the boy very afraid until his friends calmed him.

Everybody had warnings from their surroundings against the field worker. While some listened to these warnings, some seemed to be unmoved of them. However, the fact that all of the boys interviewed followed the field workers did not by any means meant that they trusted them immediately. By this stage, the direct rewards such as food, chewing sticks and playing football were more important and it also worked to build trust between them.

Starting to participate

After the first meeting, the organization starts to organize programs and activities with the children. They start to give them responsibilities like giving a time and a place when they are supposed to meet them for a program. In this way they start to scan who is ready for a change. During the program they try to take the children away from their area to create a more private situation. Afterwards, some will like to come back while some expected more of the previous meeting and will not come again. Those who stay start to meet regularly. The social worker emphasized the importance of talking about their families so they don't think that CFC wants to just take them as their own children.

The organization also has a house in a downtown area where they have Intensive Formal Education. Even though most of the children have at least some experience from school, they are usually beginners and need to start by learning writing and reading properly. This house is in a crowded area and the rules are not too strict here. The purpose is to not make the first step too big. During this time, the children still live by the roadside. The time for this education varies depending how much education the child needs. The children interviewed went there from one week to one year.

The experiences of the children

"They will take us to places, they will give us dress, they will send us to place to go and eat before they will bring us back to the house". This time is described by everybody as a very good time and it was also a time when those who hesitated started to trust. One boy said that for him it was very important when he saw the house of the field worker, because he never trusted before he saw someone's house. Also, when they met the boys who were already living in house, some of the new boys knew them from the roadside so they saw that people they trusted already was in the program. Some simply declared that because this place was better than the roadside, they wanted to stay there.

During this time, the children also developed an interest in learning which most of them did not have before. Also, the way they were taught made an impact on some of them: "He is teaching like he is teaching his children. He is taking something important into a child". By now some children remember that they saw this as their chance and they believed it was important to take the chance when it came. As one boy put it: "Some people, that's how,

many white men have picked them but they are afraid whether they are going to kill them or send them to where they will not come back". Some of their friends had now changed their mind and wanted to join but could not at this time.

Also during this stage, some people dropped out. Many of them wanted to gain money. "Because they gain some money but in CFC, you are not going to gain some money. Like carrying and looking for metal….Because they like everyday they should keep some money. So they prefer to get more money but CFC is not going to provide it". Or as another boy stated: " Me I´m thinking because of the work. How they manage to get the money. It´s simple, it´s simple for them..you can carry the heavy loads, they give you yam or money, or you can carry refuse…so that is easier for them". Sometimes the children could earn more than enough money. That made some of them reluctant to change their lifestyle as long as the money came in. For some, it was not only the work that was lucrative but they also did not have any desire to go back to school: "Because of the school that some of them came to that place…when they (parents) asked them to go to school, they will just go and roam about..when their parents catch them, they beat them. Then they will start to run to Konkomba". The school had already become a punishment for many of them and they therefore did not want to come back. Some also stole and ran away back to the street or were sacked because of their behaviour.

Moving from the street

All but one of the children considered it to be an easy choice to move to the organization. "Me it was very easy because my parents allow me to come and secondly, me myself, I didn't like that place (Konkomba). I found I will have peace here. And I´ll be educated". The major reason for most of them to join was the education. By now all of them had developed an interest in education and going back to school. Another reason was the friends in the house that they had got from activities together with them during their time in the downtown house. Some of the children did not at all to want see it as their choice but the choice of CFC and their parents. In this sense, they were still connected to the family in such high degree that their parents still decided over them. A boy who had lived on the streets for about four years once told me that his mother was sceptical about him moving because she thought they would take him away from her. He was still seen as part of the household even though he had stayed in the streets for such a long time. Another boy revealed that by this time he didn't have any

clear idea what he came to do in this house. His mind was divided. Even though he wanted to learn and start school he also saw his new home as an opportunity for stealing: "For me, first I make my mind that I came to learn and after learning too, like if I see your things I will steal it". The boy who thought it was a difficult decision said he wasn't sure he could get it like he was getting it in Konkomba with the money and the food. The independence was also a worry. "Because the roadside, no one would come and say oh! Keep this, or keep this money. If you feel to keep your money you keep it".

All children enjoyed their first time in the house. The facilities were one reason. The classroom with lights and fans, sleeping room with enough space and a proper dining room were more than any of the children had had access to before. The compound and all the possibilities for different games were also something they still remember. Another thing that most of them mentioned was the other boys who were there. The way they were welcomed into the group by their new friends made them feel at home quickly. The older boys also worked as advisors for the new ones how they could behave and how they could not behave. For one boy, one of the greatest advantages with the new house was the fact that he was free from his father and stepmother.

When it comes to difficulties, the most common problem they had in the beginning was dealing with the rules. To get up in the morning, to do their duties and accept punishments were things that many struggled with in the beginning. The fact that you have to complete a task whether you liked it or not was described as something new when they were used to have the possibility to just leave if they had a job they didn't like. To take instructions was difficult for many since they had taken care of themselves for quite a long time. Also, some were struggling with the more serious regulations within the organization: "You see, that time stealing and fighting is under my body". This boy had been stealing before he came to the street and he had been stealing during his time in the street and found it very difficult not to take advantages of the opportunities in this new house. He started stealing but were caught and advised to stop. Even if no one else confessed they found it difficult not to fight, many of them said they had problems to control their temper in the beginning. In the street, they never had to control it and fighting was an integral part of conflict solving and respect. The reason they were able to overcome these difficulties were often due to the encouragement they had from their friends and the caretakers. Especially the advises from the boys who had stayed there for a longer time were seen to be valuable for them to adapt.

Today

All of the children said their character was different today from when they lived in the streets. They gave CFC credit for teaching them the benefit of education and how to be a good citizen by knowing what is the right thing to do and what is wrong. For some, the school had given them a confidence they didn't have before. One boy explained that before when his friends spoke English he had to sit quiet. Nowadays, he found great joy in expressing himself and show that he now also could speak English. Even if many had some problems with the rules they admitted that the rules directed them into the right path and that they were beneficial for them and that they now were able to adapt to rules at other places such as the school. In this way, learning to live with the rules in CFC also gave them the ability to live within other communities. For example, if someone insulted them, they would before always answer the provocation while they had now learned that they sometimes would benefit by reporting it to an authority instead. "Now I know that there is important place more than Konkomba". Many of them talked about the new way they have come to look at education and that they now realized the importance of learning.

However, there was also a feeling that the place had changed to the worse since the beginning. Some of the children complained that the rules and the punishments had become stricter now than they were in the beginning. One boy explained that is was difficult because they were first used to fewer rules and were allowed to do more things, and then their freedom had decreased which made them feel like they were too restricted. He made a comparison with money. If you start giving a child 5000 and then decrease to 2000 the child will suffer even if 2000 is enough and more than the child had before. This is because once the child has got 5000 for some time, this is what the child will compare with. There were also of matter of caretakers shouting too much. Some boys had wishes but felt shy to bring them because they felt they would be yelled at and they didn't feel comfortable to say what they wanted. One boy also thought they did not get what they were supposed to get, such as walkman, radio or mobile phone.

It might be true that the rules have become stricter but there can also be another possible explanation. When the boys now consider their lives they do not compare their situation with their former lives but with their current classmates. This was a source of conflict between

caretakers and the children more than one time during my stay in the house. While the caretakers still expect some gratefulness and comparison to the conditions before they met CFC, many children now see it as their right to have the same standard as their classmates.

What they miss

Even if the street life was connected to difficulties, the majority of the children could also recall things they missed with their former life. Most good things remembered from the street was connected to freedom and independence: "What I would say is I do what I like….we dance at any time we want, we eat at any time we want. Because we are on our own and nobody will tell you now go and sleep. Nobody will tell you, you decide what you want". They missed the evenings with their hangout where they could sit and chat and also the girls and girlfriends they had. One boy also said he missed the food because here he had to eat the food that was given while he could choose in the street. Even when it came to leftovers he recalled that there was some food he didn't like and therefore would not eat even if he would find it. It disturbed him nowadays that he sometimes had to go to bed without being satisfied. However, some of the boys could not recall anything good with the streets when comparing it with the life they had now.

Conclusion

All the children experienced leaving the street as a process in the sense of being more than just a physical move. Emotionally they all look upon themselves as different personalities today compared to before they moved away to the house of the organization. When looking back at their previous life they now think that they before lived uneducated and under harsh conditions. This does not mean they experienced their life as such when they were living on the roadside. At that time, most of them did not know any better alternative and saw street life as the best option available.

Especially worth noticing is the interest developed in education. Many told that this interest was first found during their intensive formal education with the organization before they moved out to the house. An interesting question concerning this is why these boys found it worthwhile to reject the short term gains of the street to invest in long term education while some of their friends went back to the life on the street. Most of the children saw it as self

evident that they should follow the path of the organization when it was time to move but several of them were hesitating in the beginning when they met the organization. This shows the importance of the first time with the organization, the phase Munene and Nambi calls reclaiming. This seems to be the time when most things happened with the boys and also the time they remembered as the best.

When time came for moving, all of the boys were more or less motivated for long term educational goal. During this phase the problems experienced were mostly connected to changing their character. So far, they had not needed to change their lifestyle completely. Moving into the new home meant a full time change in routines and rules. Even though the first time in the house involved some difficulties, it was seen as a better time than today. Today was seen as the most troublesome period of their stay in the organization and for many of the children there had been a shift in the degree of expectations what the organization ought to do. All along the process, the other boys in the house were seen as very important for the participant's well-being in the house.

In line with previous literature, this study shows that these children were not desperate for help even though they today look back at their time on the streets with pity. In contrast to Feeny and WERK, this study does not find a strong identity among these children towards the street. As soon as a better alternative was available, they were ready to take the opportunity and did not feel any attachment to their old life. Among their drop-out friends, the central problem seems to have been to make the long term goal replace the short term street-gains.

Even though Karabanow's study about street exits could be a valuable frame, the difficulties to transfer the Canadian conditions to the Ghanaian are obvious. All the participants in Karabanow's study knew about help available and the focus was therefore on their motivation in the beginning. Among the participants in this study, half of them had never heard of any organization offering help and did not even know they existed. Almost all of the street youth participants can also be assumed to know about other conditions than those in their street areas while all of the children interviewed here were raised in a slum environment and therefore had a limited perception of future opportunities. Karabanow's dimensions of street exits seem difficult to use in the Ghanaian context but it could be used as a foundation in describing the dimensions in Accra.

Recommendations

When building trust to street children, this study shows there has to be room for doubting. As obvious in this study, the selection of these children has been by taking those who followed immediately. In these cases, the children were lucky because they followed people with a good purpose but obviously the opposite exists and to follow without doubting may not be a good survival strategy on the street and should therefore not be desired by the change agents. In order to create an environment where children have a longer time to come to their decisions, a drop in centre would be useful. This drop in centre could be open daytime and provide the most basic needs even for those who will not leave the street. This is also planned and CFC will start a drop in centre this year.

Furthermore, it can be discussed how much an organization should provide for the children in order to make them attractive as an alternative. By providing food, trips and many good teachers for these children, CFC make their long term alternative more attractive to the children they meet in the streets than an organization that does not provide these things to the same extent. The problem of an organization like CFC can be assumed to come in the other end, when it is time for the children to leave the organization. The question is what happens when the children have become used to the CFC standard of living, a standard that is much higher than most of the children probably will reach in their adulthood.

Street exits are rarely examined in research and there is a huge gap to fill. There is a great need in investigating the exits through professional change agents in order to make the interventions better. Moreover, there is also a need to examine street exits that do not go through a change agent. More knowledge about those exits would help the change agents to build on existent exits instead of creating new.

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