

Cycle Africa

Faye, Robbie and Tom help to kick start an epic trip to Cape Town, South Africa.

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UNHRC Resolution on Street Children

What is it and how will it affect Street Children today?

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Umthombo Successes!

One MBE, one Royal visit and the beginning of the end of police beatings in South Africa.

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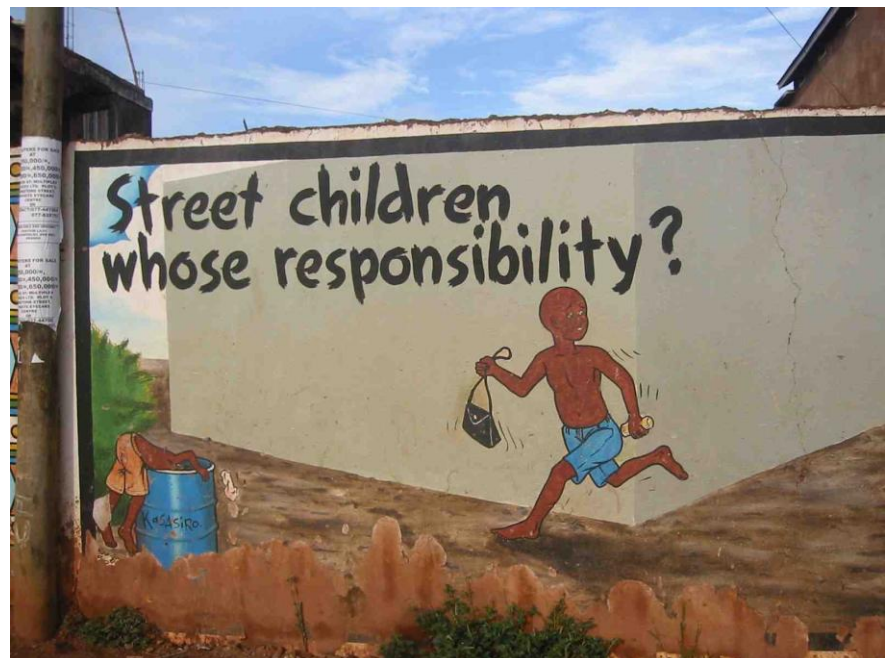
SSSK was founded in 1998, with two aims:

- to raise awareness about the potential of the millions of children all over the world who have to live and work on the streets, struggling to survive, extremely vulnerable, and missing out on happy and safe childhoods;

- to raise funds for charities working with street children internationally that SSSK has committed to support financially.

These projects are chosen because members of SSSK have worked directly with them.

Registered Charity Nos. 1070646 (England and Wales) SC041706 (Scotland)



Cycle Africa

By Faye Melly

London to Brighton on a bike?! I signed up enthusiastically to an email sent from Tom Stephens, (SSSK trustee, knowing it was far enough in the future for me not to have to worry about the finer details (spectacularly unfit and not owning a bike being the two primary concerns.)



Student Supporting Street Kids had teamed up with Cycle Africa to ride the London to Brighton, the first leg of their epic journey onto Cape Town - a 12,000 mile journey, through nearly 30 countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Their journey would take one year to complete, with the aim is to raise awareness and funds for street children projects working with incredibly vulnerable children in Africa. My challenge would be slightly easier to accompany them from a wonderful start point at SOAS down to beachfront finish in Brighton.

With a week before the ride I still however had not sourced a bike and Tom told me he “had is covered”. He arrived at my workplace on a tandem bike a couple of days later. There are a couple of things I swiftly learnt about a tandem during my one practice run down Oxford Street in the rain including that if you sit at the back you have about 10% visibility and as we learnt turning down Great Portland Street.... bends require good communication!

It was a great atmosphere of over 100 cyclists (including one other tandem) that set off and we soon started counting down the miles, reapplying the sun cream and ditching the power gels for the

marsh bars. On the beautiful summer’s day, amidst the laughter and chatter of the group I had to ensure I made time to reflect on why we were all doing this. In a 2005 report UNICEF stated that the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but that the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. On average, it costs just £200 to take a child off the street and support them and get them back into school, reconnect them with their family or new carers, provide them with vocational training so they can make a living.

Tom and I made it into Brighton six hours after we left London...still talking after a couple of hairpin bends and fairly exhausted. I wish the Cycle Africa team all the luck over the next year. They have an incredible journey in front of them...my saddle sore after one leg was enough...let alone the challenges that face them on the road over the next year! Tom and I were overwhelmed by the support that friends gave in sponsorship to us for participating in such a small part of that journey – no doubt in part amused by the thought of us on a tandem, but far more so pleased to be able to support such a worthwhile charity.

Follow @Cycle Africa on Twitter or at www.cycleafrica.org

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Resolution on Street Children

On 25th March this year, the UNHRC passed a resolution unanimously, which specifically addresses the policy issues, which affect street children. The event was immensely important, since the last time a street children specific resolution had been passed was in the early 1990s. It puts street child issues “on the agenda” of the member states, and raises their profile immeasurably. The council has 20 members, and there are already 43 co-sponsors, including the UK. The USA is also said to have been a co-sponsor, which is ground-breaking as they rarely co-sponsor child rights focused resolutions, and haven’t ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In UN terms, getting this statement of intent is of enormous importance. It facilitates the inclusion of “children working and/or living on the street” in all kinds of policy documents, which will encourage governments to address the relevant issues and to take appropriate.

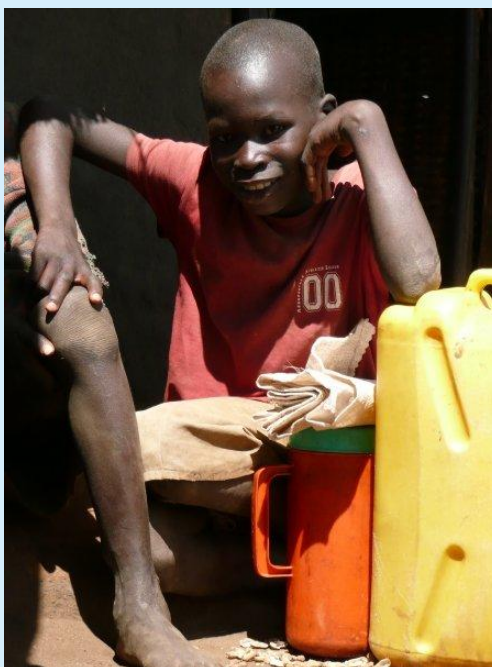
There are links on the website both to the full document (written in UN legalese) and to a very helpful commentary on it by the Consortium for Street Children which clarifies and simplifies.

The full details can be found at:

http://www.ssk.org.uk/PDF/UN_2011_Resolution_HRC16_Rights_of_the_Child.pdf

Peter is the eldest son of a family in Kitgum in northern Uganda. He has brought up his younger brothers and sisters by himself.

How do you think the latest UNHRC resolution will support him?



Following the amazingly successful Street Child World Cup (SCWC) in Durban, for which Umthombo were the host, have had experiences which Tom Hewitt described to me as being “the best of times and the worst of times”. The immense and intense effort needed in March 2010 to welcome seven other soccer teams from all over the world, and to coordinate all the different activities, resulted in complete exhaustion and near bankruptcy. Tom said that the grants given by SSSK were a godsend, both in 2010, and this year as well, and he asked me to thank all our branches and students, for the fundraising they are involved with. Umthombo has been through a really difficult period for many months as the staff weren’t even sure that they were going to be paid. They didn’t, however, let this interfere with the work for the children, but it’s been a very challenging situation.

Umthombo’s recent achievements have been enormously important:

- in particular the “round-ups” of street children, by Durban’s Metro police have stopped; the opening of their SafeSpace drop-in centre 24/7, so it is always available as a welcoming place where children can start to re-connect
- engagement programmes such as surfing, soccer, art, drama, music, kayaking and other activities
- therapeutic social working programmes including individual and group counselling;
- offering an alternative to street life - ideally family/community re-integration
- aftercare - which involves follow-up work with children who are living out positive alternatives to street life
- Youth Job Creation programme, out of LifeSpace, where the older children are encouraged to develop a Life Plan e.g .lifeguards, diving instructors; surfboard repairers and makers and restaurant workers

A Street Child World Cup success story - Umthombo, Durban South Africa

“The best of times and the worst of times” - Tom Hewitt

Umthombo’s reputation was greatly boosted when Princess Anne came to visit in July to present Tom with his MBE. They have been invited to the UN to share their insights as a model, which others might learn from.

Bulelwa Hewitt (Tom’s wife, and co-founder of Umthombo) wants in particular to highlight that Umthombo believes that street children themselves and former street children are a crucial resource in the developing of appropriate strategies for empowerment. Listening to the realities of the street child experience has to be the starting point for any intervention. She also stressed that street children internalise the message that society tells them that they are “rubbish” and Umthombo has borrowed from Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness thinking and Paulo Freire’s conscientisation ideas, to develop what is termed Street-child Consciousness. This is a philosophy that empowers street children and former street children to overcome the false message from society, and re-envision themselves as full human beings. Instead of seeing themselves as rubbish, they learn to see themselves as survivors and people with knowledge and an ability to change things both for themselves, for other children who are still on the street.



Fundraising ideas from the branches

Teaming up with the Comedy Society - £2 on the door and don't forget to have flyers about SSSK on every table!

SSSK's very own version of eBay...a Bring and Buy to clear out student flats at the end of term.

Fancy dress sponsored walk.

And of course...

RENDEZVOUS!

Volunteer Eloise Haylor visited SEED, Howrah (nr Kolkata, India) in November 2010. Here she describes her visit.

We were kindly met that evening at the airport by Mr Alan, Bijoy and 'mother Mehta' who warmly welcomed us with addictively sweet masala chai. We drove across the river away from Kolkata to it's poorer twin city Howrah, through streets lined with rickshaws parked up on one side and on the other many, many head-height homes slotted together.

We stayed at their Boys' Home for a week, where 40 boys form what feels like a huge family. When young children, separated from their parents (sometimes purposefully but often just accidentally) find themselves stranded at the end of the line, in the chaos of Howrah station, they fall prey to the gangs of older street children who live on the station. They are initially harboured, given some stability and 'protection' by the group in a dangerous environment, but quickly become hooked on solvents and find themselves indebted to the gang. Due to the backgrounds that these boys may be escaping from or even just the experiences since their arrival on the station, SEED workers find that gaining their trust takes a lot of time, experience and skill. SEED has a station base (at the time of visit, apparently in risk of closure), where they invite children just to wander in, and play or talk or just sit, no commitment asked for but affection shown. Some of these boys only come once; some take many months before they are willing to say a word. Some eventually agree to go to the Boys' Home.

At the Boys' Home, they are embraced into an astonishingly supportive group, looked after by the respected 'Chatterji', their younger role model Bijoy and to a great extent the older boys who can truly empathise with them. The boys all eat, play and cook together. Older boys effectively diffuse skirmishes amongst the little ones, while the colossal amount of energy generated by 40 growing boys is given its due outlet primarily on the football pitch. These boys were some of the most charming and cheeriest I've met, despite their pasts, often involving drugs, abuse and a sense of abandonment at a vulnerably young age. Great credit is due to Chatterji and Bijoy who give so much time and love, and who have simply brought them up so well.

SEED has a number of different branches – a girls' home, a station centre and teaching programs in slum areas. The teaching programs focus on not just basic literacy and numeracy but on a more holistic approach where their in an emphasis on regular meetings with parents about their child's welfare. For example, if a child has worms then they will treat the whole family. He made it sound so casual, such a standard procedure. One teacher told me that the hardest part of his job was not teaching the English alphabet or maths, but teaching manners, and how to dress, and confidence - all of which, he said, were totally lacking at home.

It was a fascinating visit that was both eye opening and humbling. SEED is an interesting organization doing some valuable work with some of the most vulnerable children in India.

Hope Village, Egypt:

A 3-minute interview with Sophie Wood



1. How did you get involved in working with Hope Village?

I heard about Hope Village from SSSK and wanted to get involved as soon as I arrived Cairo. Street children are clearly an issue in Egypt but one people find difficult to handle. On the one hand there is great compassion for those less fortunate and there are, for example, days in the year when everyone visits and donates to orphanages. On the other there has only recently been a change in the law so that illegitimate children can be registered and can therefore go to school and get health care from government hospitals. Street children are not always illegitimate, but they often are.

2. What kind of work do they do?

Hope village work with all different groups of street children, from the very young, to teenage boys. I worked on a specific project run by a volunteer (rather than hope village itself) for young mothers. The project began with the simple aim of giving the girls something to do and to help them bring up their children. But whilst baking one day with the girls, the founder of the project decided to concentrate on one area. With us volunteers, she baked at least once a week with them, selling the produce to give them some independent income and teaching them how to set up a small business.

3. How were they affected by the revolution in early 2011?

Before the revolution, many of our friends and teachers wanted to buy the produce of the project, but didn't want to get involved with the girls. People were nervous about mixing with members of society who may be morally reprehensible in their eyes. But immediately after the revolution there was a sudden, overwhelming wave of desire to make the country better. People felt empowered. The results ranged from painting the streets, to forming organisations that ran volunteering projects. So those who had been nervous suddenly wanted to visit Hope Village, because it was thought that building a better country is about helping those who struggle.

But on the more challenging side, Egypt is less safe than before the revolution. And this means less safe for those who live or spend time on the streets. I've now left Egypt, but I imagine the girls who flit to and from the houses that Hope Village provide are now even more vulnerable.

4. What did you learn from the project?

The baking project was very inspiring. It was not too ambitious and grew slowly over 3/4 years and it is still developing and changing. There were two houses that we baked in- a residential home and a drop-in centre. It was remarkable to see the difference in the girls' behaviour in the two. After having been trained over a few years, you could see that the girls had become more responsible, cleaner, calmer and more helpful to each other. The girls at the drop-in centre were a lot more volatile. But it was clear that the girls, who often have very low self-esteem, had a great sense of achievement when they produced delicious smelling cakes and cookies, packed beautifully, which could then be sold to posh hotels and individuals in Cairo. It took a long time to build up trust with the often quite abused girls, but it was very rewarding to see them then boss you around because they knew better how to make a perfect chocolate muffin!