

FEATURED ARTICLE

Street Children and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

JANUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER

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STREET CHILDREN AND THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

DEC 2015

Amy Dafnis

In the four and a half years since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, over four million refugees have fled to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Over half of those refugees are children, many of whom have lost or become separated from their parents.

Today, as many as 2.7 million Syrian children are estimated to be out of school, a painful contrast to the near-universal rates of education that were achieved in peacetime Syria.

Furthermore, many refugee children end up working or living on the street, and economic poverty among refugee communities means that child labour is becoming increasingly common, and increasingly dangerous. Around 75% of children in the Za'atari refugee

camp in Jordan reported health issues as a result of unsafe working conditions. Young children are expected to take part in heavy manual labour, and in agricultural communities they are often exposed to other dangers, such as high doses of toxic pesticides.

Life is most dangerous for those children who are forced to work on the street. In July 2015, a joint study published by UNICEF and Save the Children reported that 73% of 1,510 children living and working on the streets of Lebanon were refugees from Syria. Over half of these children were between 10 and 14 years old, and one-third of them were girls. The most common type of work was begging, which often began from the age of seven. Furthermore, these street-connected children were extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation, in addition to recruitment by armed forces and groups.

Data from the same study in Lebanon says that 46% of street-connected children reported physical harassment by passers-by. Refugee children from Syria who are forced to live on the streets in host countries not only receive animosity because of their status as street children, but also because of their status as refugees. This is part of an often visible tendency for street-connected children of ethnic minorities to be vulnerable to abuse from a given country's ethnic majority.

Another problem, is the fact that the instigators of violence towards street children are in some cases members of a country's police force. An article from Aljazeera America, which features the stories of several street-connected children in Beirut, quotes a 15-year old Syrian boy who explains how the Lebanese police would often take his shoe shining box before proceeding to physically



beat him. This is a major issue in countries where children are criminalised for working, in spite of the fact that it is often their only means of survival.

In order to improve the lives of these children, and to grant them the rights that they are currently being denied, cooperation on both domestic and international levels is paramount. Alongside finding stable homes for children who need them, there must be a movement to aid the integration of street-connected refugee children into the education system of their host country. This is unfortunately complicated by language barriers, unfamiliar curricula, and in many cases a country-wide shortage of space in schools. Finally, research needs to be undertaken in regards to the most exploitative types of child labour, so that governments and local NGOs can better understand how to rescue vulnerable children, and how to identify and deal with the perpetrators.

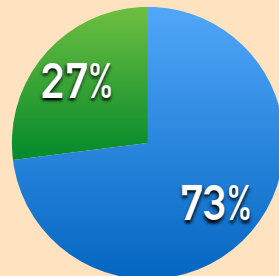
Amy is Editor at the Oxford branch, and has led the development of the January 2016 Newsletter alongside trustee Gordon Couch.

Sources

The majority of the information in this article was sourced from a UNICEF child labour report from July 2015. https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/SCIUnicefChildLabourReport_July2015.pdf

1 <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/7/18/to-be-young-syrianandarefugeeinthestreetsofbeirut.html>, Syrian refugee children in Lebanon

SYRIAN CHILD REFUGEE CRISIS FACT SHEET



● Syrian ● Other

Background of children working on the streets of Lebanon (insert date, location and source of data)

1/2

of these children were between 10 and 14 years of age

1/3

of these children were female

46%

of these street-connected children reported physical harassment by passers-by (same as above)

2.7MILLION

Syrian children estimated to be out of school in 2015



ENCOUNTERS

CAPE
TOWN,
SOUTH
AFRICA

The Red Cross Children's Hospital

Dr John Rocke



Image Source: <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-international-injury-research-unit/news/>

Driving into central Cape Town from the airport on the N2 motorway, the expansive townships of Gugulethu and Khayelitsha spill out onto the hard shoulder. For millions of Cape Town's residents, this is their home.

These shanty-towns are termed "informal settlements" and were formed during the apartheid era to exclude black people from central areas of the city, many of whom were forcibly removed from their family homes. Despite the apartheid era ending many years ago, there is still economical separation as a result of historical oppression. Invariably there is no electricity or clean running water in these shanty towns, unless it has been illegally tapped from the central supply. As you arrive into Cape Town the architecture

changes from ramshackle to palatial. Here the richer residents live with their numerous bathrooms and swimming pools.

I volunteered as a doctor in the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital as part of the Ear, Nose and Throat team during an 8-month stay working in Cape Town. The hospital is the largest public paediatric hospital in Southern Africa and deals with around 260,000 individual patient visits per year. The children are largely from the expansive townships to the north of the city and the majority of our work involved treating the complications of ear infections that were a result of the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions that these children lived in. It has been estimated that the prevalence in the townships of Acute Otitis Media, a common ear infection

that can be treated easily with antibiotic drops, is as high as 60,000 children. We were only able to see 30 patients in our clinic each day, and as such were only able to make a small imprint on that number. Children would often arrive with complications of recurrent ear infections, such as holes in their ear drum, or infections affecting their skull.

Children who had abnormalities of their airway required a tracheostomy, an operation to form a hole in the neck to breathe through, and following the procedure would eventually be managed as an outpatient. One nurse co-ordinated the care of these children in the shanty towns. In fact, she made headlines when one of our patients required an electrically powered unit to help their breathing at night and the

government provided electricity to the whole township as a result of her lobbying. She also demonstrated the importance of educating the parents in regards to caring for their child's new airway and gave the responsibility to them.

On Thursday nights, I would volunteer at an orphanage not far from the Hospital, where I would read bedtime stories and play with a group of children who were housed there. These children had been abandoned often as a result of prostitution or drugs, but I could not help feel that in spite of their extremely sad circumstances, they were the lucky ones. There were many more children with the need for such shelter and care but no provision. On returning home, I read a story online about a boy called Nana. He was paralysed by two bullets which had penetrated his spine whilst he was trying to save his mother from the gunman that had stormed their house. Unfortunately, his mother had died and his older sisters had been left to care for Nana on their own. Fortunately, a charitable hospital has been able to help him and his

sisters and he now finds himself in a much better situation.

Despite these sad aspersions on Cape Town and South Africa, the standard of care in the Red Cross Children's hospital is world class and the health care professionals are extremely inspiring. In fact, I believe they are achieving similar, if not better outcomes, in my experience, to that of the NHS in the United Kingdom but on a shoe string budget. The problem is that the number of sick children in need greatly outweighs the provision of care for them.

I will be back to Cape Town. Not only is it the most stunning place that I have ever visited, but it is also one that offers hope in the face of extreme historic adversity. The city has taught me a huge amount and it has made me hungry to learn more.

Nana's full story can be found here: <http://www.news24.com/MyNews24/Nana-A-very-brave-little-boy-20150528>.

According to a recent UNICEF report on the situation of women

*and children in South Africa, as many as 700,000 children between the ages of 5-17 had left their households and been out of contact with their families for longer than 12 months in 2007. A related investigation concluded that 1 in 5 children in South Africa have lost one or both parents, and 88,600 children were declared to be in need of care by a children's court in 2009/10. Many NGOs, like the ones that John volunteered with, are working on the ground to provide aid and assistance for these children. SSSK provides financial support for one such organisation, **Umthombo Street Children**, which has for the past ten years been providing educational and psycho-social support for children living on the streets in Durban.*

Dr John Rocke is currently training in the UK as an ENT specialist and has worked with street-connected children as a medical professional.

**GET
INVOLVED**

Want to help street children achieve their potential? Welcome to the team.

SSSK enables street children to achieve their potential in two ways:

- 1) By supporting local organisations who know best how to meet local needs (either by way of providing grants or by sending volunteers)
- 2) By raising awareness in the UK about street children and the systems around the world that perpetuate their poverty and prolong their exclusion from society.

There are many ways in which you can get involved to help SSSK.

If you're at university or school, you can join or even start a local branch. For anyone who is interested in starting a branch, all you need to do is get a group of friends together and send an email to info@sssk.org.uk. Our trustees will then be able to provide practical help and advice.

You can also join in:

- our campaigning efforts (which means that you will need to be well informed about street child issues)
- fundraising events (which are vital if we are to provide support for our NGOs), and/or
- visiting and volunteering with street child or other development NGOs

Visit www.sssk.org.uk for more information.

ADVOCACY UPDATE

NOV 2015

International Day for Street Children

Amy Dafnis

The first International Day for Street Children was held on April 12th, 2011, exactly one month after the UN decided to commission a new report on the worldwide situation of street-connected children.

This report was then presented to the Human Rights Council in 2012 and marks an important milestone in the journey to spreading greater awareness of the issues facing street children.

In order to recognise the rights of street children, we first have to respect their own opinions and requests. The difficulty of defining 'street-connected children' is often cited as one of the reasons why these children are neglected in

own stories, that the Consortium for Street Children (CSC) founded the Day in 2011.

The Day also provides a common platform for NGOs from across the world to collaborate in a way that recognises the shared goal that we are all working towards. In 2012, 84 events were held across the world in a total of 38 countries. In 2013, the #homestreethome campaign was launched, and posters were displayed across the UK's major cities. Then, in 2014 and 2015 the #tweetforstreet campaign grabbed public attention. In order to promote the Day, street children were asked the question "If the whole world was listening, what would you say?" and their responses were shared on Twitter.

and greater presence in global policy discussions. This is necessary in order to place pressure on governments and international organisations to address the rights of street-connected children. However, the call to have the day recognised through the UN is still an ongoing project.

UN international days have to be recognised by the UN General Committee, and although there are multiple methods through which the International Day for Street Children can be brought to their attention, the most valuable one is simply the generation of public discourse and support. For the past two years, the CSC has been promoting a petition that will eventually be presented to the UN. Currently, the petition has been signed by almost 9,000 people.

One issue that we at SSSK have to deal with is the fact that people are unlikely to come across this petition unless they are already engaged with the cause of supporting street children. This is where small charities such as ourselves, through awareness and fundraising activities, can make a great contribution to this cause. Our events provide platforms for people to receive education on the plight of street-connected children, and also to find out ways in which they themselves can contribute to helping those children gain the rights and freedoms that they deserve.



policy discussion and human rights discourse. However, it is clear that such complicated issue can never be fully addressed without greater efforts to prioritise the opinions of the children who are themselves affected. It was with the intent to bring attention to the global situation of street children, as narrated through their

In 2013, the CSC also launched a campaign to gain recognition for the day from the United Nations. Having it officially recognised alongside other UN commemorative days, such as World Water Day or World Aids Day, would help give street-connected children a louder voice

BRANCH SPOTLIGHT


 CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge make some noise with successful (re)launch

Olivia Bowman

After a somewhat slow start, SSSK has had a very successful first term.

We were sad to lose a couple of our core members to other commitments at the beginning of the year, Corall Friedman and William Ashford, both of whom put so much great work into getting the committee restarted again last year. We are also missing the wonderful Lucy Wilson and Emma Goodall, last year's President and Vice-President, who will be rejoining us next year with exciting stories of their year abroad - watch this space! We have,

however, had a really successful term of applications, and are pleased to introduce two new members, Holly Hewitt and Geoffrey Sato-Holt.

Our aim this term has been to branch out across the university and try to get members in from as many colleges as possible. We have been really successful so far, introducing a new role to the committee: the college rep. At the moment our college reps are responsible for publicising events in their college and faculties as well as lending ideas. We would definitely recommend this to any other smaller branches that want

to get the word out, it's been really great to see people sign up and express enthusiasm for the work that we do. We also attended our first Fresher's Fair this year. We got lots of enthusiasm and sign-ups and all in all it was a great couple of days. We thought that for next year's fair we might try to create some large captioned picture and slogan boards to summarise effectively and visually the work that SSSK does and what sets it apart from other forms of volunteering and fundraising.

Midway through the term we held a bake sale in King's College Bar which was a great success - we had lots of students suffering from midterm blues stumbling gratefully back to their rooms to gather spare change for our giant chocolate brownies.

As our final event of the term, we asked a couple of trained experts, Mestre Pedro Gatuno and David Marciano, to come in and teach some SSSK supporters how to do capoeira. Capoeira is a form of Brazilian martial art dance, described by one of our instructors as 'neither a fight nor a dance; you wouldn't go on a night out to fight'. It was quite an intense crash-course but we had a really great turnout and it ended up being a fast-paced, stimulating, and often giggly event - for many



Cambridge team at the Fresher's Fair in October



SSSK Bake Sale in King's College Bar

of us it was our first time even attempting a cartwheel or high-kick, let alone incorporating it into a movement sequence with a partner and Berimbau music. SSSK Cambridge has a really exciting and full term coming up for Lent. We are working with Amnesty, Streetbite, and CHOP for the term, running and holding several small fundraisers and a film and speaker event in Week 7 to consider the many facets of homelessness, both in the UK and abroad. We are also hoping to collaborate with the Cambridge branch of Save the Children on a joint fundraiser, and hold a town and university-wide jumble sale in Week 1. With a view to establishing relations with other charities and getting SSSK firmly on the Cambridge map we will be attending Volunteer for Cambridge on the 30th January, an event which aims to bring likeminded societies together in a space where they can share ideas and the great work that they do. It's been a brilliant year so far and we're excited for next term!

Olivia Bowman is the current branch President for SSSK Cambridge.



An intense introduction to Capoeira!

PROJECT REPORTS

QUITO,
ECUADOR

CENIT

Gordon Couch



CENIT operates in Quito, Ecuador.

It is one of the NGOs we have been supporting for a long time. It provides well-structured volunteering opportunities, and one of SSSK's past Trustees spent three months there as a volunteer. Ed Prosser from Edinburgh SSSK, (now graduated), is planning to volunteer with CENIT next year.

CENIT's team is made up of local staff members together with Ecuadorian and international

volunteers. It is run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. For the first time, they now have a lay director to oversee both projects and staff. She is Ruth Rosero, who has worked there for more than 23 years as a social worker and project manager. The change is bringing more stability and long-term vision to the organisation, and this includes the development of a three-year strategic plan.

CENIT runs an outreach programme across a number of markets in Quito where there is a high incidence of working children. This is the starting point for intervention, through which the CENIT workers can get to know the children and their families, build trust, and learn what the needs are and how they can be addressed. This could be through support in accessing health or dental care, or with assistance with school enrolment. It could be with social or legal problems, or by providing psychological support.

It also runs a number of educational programmes, including a primary school. CENIT's school has recently been granted special status and recognised as the only school in Quito fulfilling the function of helping children who have missed too much of their schooling to be able to join their peers in a regular school. It is uniquely able to help anyone up to the age of 21 to complete their primary education in a supportive environment with experienced teachers. The young people here, also have access to all the other CENIT programmes.

This is based on an article provided to us from ViaNiños UK. This is an NGO who work with a number of local organisations to enable street children to create a better future for themselves. We routed our contribution through them on condition that the whole donation reached CENIT.

Gordon Couch is one of SSSK's Trustees.



CENIT
ACTIVITIES

Hope Village Society (HVS)

Gordon Couch

CAIRO,
EGYPT

The streets of Cairo are unforgiving for the thousands of street children scattered through the city.

One of the oldest NGOs there, the Hope Village Society, provides a street mothers' centre, and a number of drop-in centres, where children can come for medical attention, showers and food. In addition, four long-stay shelters offer children a more permanent home.

HVS was one of the three local NGOs who sent the Egyptian team to the Street Child World Cup in Rio in 2014. They are supported by UNICEF.

When I visited Cairo a few years back, I went to one of the drop-in centres, and to the home for teenage mothers. These were girls who had been involved in prostitution and/or had been raped. When they discovered they were pregnant, they were faced with extremely difficult choices. For those who wanted to keep their baby, HVS provided a place where they could be supported by well qualified staff, and share their

experiences with other girls in the same situation. They were in a safe place where they could not only learn how to feed, and look after their child, but they could get some schooling and discover 'how to cope'.

My visit was a memorable experience.

When I asked (by e-mail this year) how the contribution from SSSK

would be used, I was told that it would fund a new floor in the kindergarten at the young street mothers centre, and pay for some necessary repairs to the roof.

Gordon Couch is one of SSSK's Trustees.



HVS at the Street Child World Cup



ALL-
GIRLS
KARATE
CLASS AT
HVS

Image Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/231724343297844858/>

Let the Children Live! (LCL)

Pauline Allan

COLOMBIA

This is an updated report on the work of LCL received in October, with thanks for SSSKs support. LCL is an NGO we have supported every year, and was originally visited by Johnny Glennie. It was that experience, and further ones in Kolkata, that resulted in the setting-up of SSSK in 1998.

Although the level of violence in Medellín has fallen considerably in recent years, the numbers of children who are at risk in the streets and shanty-towns are as great as ever. Life for the boys and girls we support is a constant struggle, and they are exposed to great dangers.

Life in the shanty-towns continues to be violent and children are always at risk of being recruited by the gangs that control them. In extreme cases, boys as young as ten may be trained as killers, whilst girls of twelve may have their virginity auctioned off. Let The Children Live! is the Charity of Last Resort which offers as many of these children as

possible, the chance to know love, care, safety and the possibility of a stable future.

Some of the children we help actually live/sleep on the street. For them we provide food and medical care whilst trying to arrange for them to return home (if that is possible), or for them to enter residential care. These youngsters come to our Centre, Casa Walsingham, to have a wash and a change of clothes, to have a meal, and to enjoy craft and leisure activities. Sometimes we can reunite them with their families. We currently have a group of about thirty young people who, thanks to the dedicated and skilled work of our educators, are making good progress through this programme.

The majority of our children come from the hundreds of shanty-towns that surround Medellín and they have to work in the street to support their family. They survive by begging, by prostitution or by sorting through rubbish to find things that can be recycled.

We try to resolve the family and economic problems that are forcing them to work. Then we can make it possible for them to go to school, and to leave the street and all its dangers behind. They too come to Casa Walsingham to have a meal, a wash, do homework, take part in artistic and recreational activities, and/or to see our psychologists and social workers. The building is frequently filled with song as all our children are given the opportunity to sing, and our award-winning choir can often be heard practising its repertoire.

The effects of five years of currency fluctuations adds to the difficulties of our work. Nevertheless, we are currently helping over 500 of Medellín's most vulnerable children who, without our help, would be in great danger. We are immensely grateful for the consistent support from SSSK which enables us to continue to care for these children and to offer them the chance of life in all its fullness.

CALL FOR
SUBMISSIONS

We want to hear from you.

We are currently looking for contributions for the next SSSK newsletter. If you've had an experience volunteering or working with street-connected children, whether or not it was through an SSSK partner organisation, then please get in touch and share it with us.

Personal stories like the ones in this newsletter are incredibly valuable as they help tackle negative misconceptions of street children and give greater insight into the problems that they face. These kinds of articles are also able to highlight the amazing work that is being done by NGOs across the world.

Any submissions for the feature and advocacy sections of the newsletter would also be very welcome! If you are unsure as to what kinds of articles would be suitable, then feel free to drop us an email or have a look through some past newsletters, which are all available on the SSSK website.

Please send submissions to Amy (amy.dafnis@hertford.ox.ac.uk) or Arjun (arjun.paliwal@new.ox.ac.uk).