

FEATURE

OXFORD'S STREET CHILD CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

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OXFORD'S STREET CHILD CONFERENCE

Amy Dafnis, Oxford Branch, November 2016



Oxford's Street Child Conference took place in May at the Oxford Hub
Photo: Nathaniel Hunt

In May 2016, SSSK Oxford hosted the charity's first ever Street Child Conference (SCC), inviting representatives from partner NGOs to come and discuss their work with students at the university. With activities, workshops (including some hosted by other university societies such as Amnesty and Oxford Against Slavery) and five speaker presentations taking place at the Oxford Hub, the event provided a platform for raising awareness of the difficulties that street-connected children face around the world.

The conference began with a brief introduction from Arjun and myself. Arjun provided an overview of the work that we do here at SSSK and then outlined some of our aims for the Street Child Conference. I then spoke about how my parents' experiences of teen homelessness influenced my decision to get involved with SSSK and reiterated the importance of advocacy in drawing attention to the issues faced by street-connected children all around the world.

As well as inviting guests to speak generally about their organisations and the amazing work that they are doing, we also presented them with the theme of 'identity' as a specific issue that could be used to inform their presentations and further discussions. The theme of identity was borrowed from the Consortium for Street Children's (CSC's) International Day for Street Children and was considered in relation to both legal and personal identities.



John has a go at the interactive quiz
Photo: Nathaniel Hunt

THE SPEAKERS AND THEIR PRESENTATIONS

John Wroe and David Garrido, [Street Child United](#)

John Wroe is the CEO and co-Founder of Street Child United. Street Child United uses the power of sport and the arts to challenge the negative perceptions and treatment of millions of street children across the world. The charity is widely known for its flagship initiative, the Street Child World Cup – an international football tournament uniting teams of street children from across the world to play football and call for their rights to be realised. David Garrido is a sports broadcaster with more than 15 years' experience and was involved in the Street Child Games this March, where he worked with former street children and witnessed the work of the charity first hand.

John opened the presentation by explaining to the audience that street children in Vietnam are described as 'the dust of life'. He and David then gave us an insight into how SCU collaborates with partner organisations and uses art festivals

to bring their events to life and to provide a platform for those people who are directly affected by life on the street. The culmination of these events was the General Assembly at the [2016 Street Child Games \(SCG\)](#), which was hosted by street children and provided a chance for them to share their own personal experiences. SCU also explained the significance of sport and the way in which the SCG fosters global understanding through an environment that is both competitive and supportive. Even something so simple as a game of football can be a powerful tool for breaking down barriers between children. John and David then went on to introduce the next big step for SCU - the 2018 Street Child World Cup in Russia.

Nicola McGregor and Kristina Downie, [Via Niños](#)

Kristina Downie travelled to Ecuador in 2014 where she volunteered with the organisation UBEI, helping street children in Quito. Whilst there, she met Tania Songini, chairperson of ViaNiños UK, and was inspired to get involved as a member of ViaNiños UK upon her return in order to continue to support projects like UBEI. Nicola McGregor has travelled to South America twice and has spent two weeks travelling across Ecuador. She currently works as a Marketing Manager at ViaNiños.

Nicola and Kristina, explained how the issue of 'identity' is directly relevant to ViaNiños's work to provide legal identities for street children in Ecuador. ViaNiños is an entirely volunteer-led organisation that is working hard to improve the situation of these children through educational, as well as legal support. To quote our speakers, children who are not registered with the local government are essentially invisible. However, thanks to organisations like ViaNiños, progress is being made on this front; in the 1990s 50% of children were not registered, but by 2015 this number

dropped to 7%. Another of ViaNiños's biggest challenges is spreading awareness of the importance of education. It is not only children but also parents, many of whom are suffering from drug addictions, that find it difficult to see the value of education. This means that one of ViaNiños's roles involves engaging families with the economic benefits and opportunities that education can provide. They recognise that a policy that aims to get all children back into 'formal' education is not necessarily in the best interests of every child. Informal education that focuses on vocational and life skills is often much better suited to street-connected children. These kinds of programmes are able to provide an environment where children feel safe and their specific needs are met.

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Karin Schulte, [The Hope Foundation](#)

Karin Schulte, Director of The Hope Foundation for Street Children (UK) worked voluntarily for 8 years whilst based in Singapore for an Indian NGO focused on improving the lives of street children in Jaipur, India. Karin joined The Hope Foundation in 2016, which focuses on improving the lives of children living on the streets and in the slums of Kolkata.

Karin started with a brief introduction to The Hope Foundation and discussed the Irish-born charity's role in enabling sixth-formers from Ireland to travel to India

and engage with issues affecting street-connected children. She also took some time to highlight the importance of using the official term 'street-connected children' as opposed to simply 'street children'.

'Street-connected' includes those children who may work or spend much of their time on the streets, but also have permanent or semi-permanent residences. However, the term is not perfect. For instance, when does a street child become a street adult? In India, there are an estimated 78 million homeless people and 250,000 of them are thought to be children. Hope Children works to provide access to education for these children and runs education programs across twenty-one slums across Kolkata. Thanks to their work, there has been an identifiable increase in the number of girls gaining access to education.



Director of HOPE Foundation UK, Karin Schulte

Photo: Nathaniel Hunt

Azey Siddiqui, [Amos Trust](#)

Azey Siddiqui is Amos Trust's Fundraising Manager and works across Amos street child programmes, which includes securing and overseeing project funding from Comic Relief. She supports Amos Street child local partners in delivering, implementing and monitoring advocacy and development projects to bring hope to street connected children, reaching them where they are, journeying with them and providing them with a chance to leave the streets, to be safe and to have a future.

In the first half of Azey's presentation, we learned about the work done by Amos to educate their partners on why children are on the streets and their efforts to challenge negative perceptions of these children. She also tackled the issue of 'effective reintegration' for street-connected children. Things such as art, sport, and psychological support can all be used to befriend street children and help them build relationships that are based on trust. As well as providing support for individuals, it is also important to engage with their families and provide help if needed. Furthermore, it is absolutely crucial that societies as a whole work together to push for laws and policies that can be used to safeguard children – and then make sure that such changes are actually put into practice.

Azey also shared some stories from her visit to Umthombo, an SSSK-partner organisation that works to support street-connected children in Durban, South Africa. Azey's experiences led her to conclude that more needs to be done to help street-connected girls. Many of these girls have some form of shelter and often find it hard to see reasons for leaving the streets, especially as they are able to make money there.



The panel engage with Karin's presentation on HOPE Foundation's work
Photo: Nathaniel Hunt

Eloïse Haylor and Louise Hopper, SSSK

Eloïse is currently working on the '[World's Largest Lesson](#)', which aims to educate young people on the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. She has been involved with SSSK since school and is currently a Trustee for the charity.

Louise Hopper became a trustee of SSSK just one month prior to the SCC, having been a regular donor to the charity for the last five years. She first got involved with street children while living in Egypt, where she volunteered at [Hope Village](#), a fantastic organisation which runs refuges and shelters for young women and their children. For her day job, Louise is a diplomat at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and is just back in the UK after five years away in Egypt, Libya, and Turkey.

Louise and Eloïse provided further insight into SSSK's work and Louise narrated some of her experiences from her time volunteering with Hope Village. In connection with our theme of 'identity', she explained how, in Egypt, children born to single mothers are rarely registered with the government. Although women received the right to register their children in 2008, a lack of awareness of the law combined with social stigma means that it is not often applied in practice. The subsequent Q&A session then lead smoothly into a round-table discussion, where all members of the table were able to share more of their own experiences and voice possible solutions for tackling some of the main issues raised throughout the day.

Amy Dafnis is Editor of the SSSK Newsletter and member of the Oxford branch.

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON THE DAY

At the same time as presentations were going on in the main room, we also ran two other activity rooms to help provide extra information and an opportunity to engage with other organisations who are working on similar issues. One of these rooms was a quiz room, which featured a map of all our NGOs and questions that guests could answer about street-connected children, based off CSC's fact checker. Then, in another room we collaborated with Amnesty, Oxford Against Slavery, the Refugee Campaign and others to host workshops which invited attendees to begin discussions around the topic.

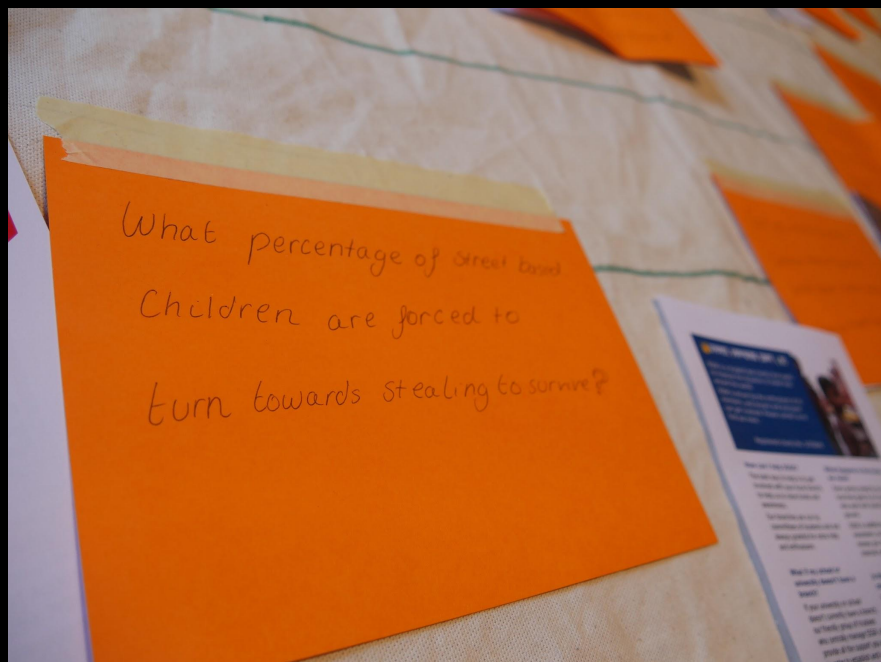


A world map illustrated SSSK's global network of NGOs

Photos: Nathaniel Hunt



An interactive quiz invited guests to learn more about street-connected children around the world and face the facts and figures





Partner organisations hosted workshops, including letter writing with Amnesty. Further stalls included Oxford Against Slavery, Oxford Students Refugee Campaign and the Oxford Poetry Society.

Photos: Nathaniel Hunt and Georgia Robson

THE FIRST STREET CHILD GAMES

Teddy Prosser, SSSK Trustee, December 2016



Photo: MalachyMcCrudden/StreetChildUnited

This year, as the world's attention returned to Brazil and Rio de Janeiro for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, I was privileged to be able to venture to the city for the inaugural 'Street Child Games' hosted by one of SSSK's partner NGOs - Street Child United. The Games would be a follow-up to the successful flagship Street Child World Cups of 2010 and 2014, once again harnessing the power of sport and the arts as platforms for street children to be heard.

Former street children from nine countries united together for a week of Olympic-themed events, arts activities and an International Congress in the Copacabana Palace Hotel, where they could directly challenge the negative perceptions associated with what it means to be a street child. Following years of fundraising and raising awareness with SSSK, volunteering at the Games was my first opportunity to work directly with children who have experiences of living and working on the street. As such, it was an immensely exciting prospect to work with a group of volunteers deeply committed to championing the rights and welfare of all street connected youth.

The week would be characterised by an overwhelmingly inclusive, encouraging and supportive atmosphere. As we witnessed



Photo: GustavoOliveira/StreetChildUnited

young people proudly representing their countries, both as athletes and ambassadors, there was a vivid generosity of spirit on display among all those involved. From the volunteers to the participants and members of the local *Babilônia* community hosting us, everyone sought to contribute however possible to allow the young people to take centre stage and shine. As they pushed themselves to the limit on the track and climbed the podium, each time was an inspiring example of sport's transformative power to elevate even the most marginalized groups.

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My work as a volunteer primarily fell in a 'team support' capacity, a role which required interpreting and translating for Spanish and Portuguese speaking teams. However, where I initially envisaged spending the majority of my time working with members of the Brazil, Mozambique and Argentina teams, I found myself immersed in conversations with individuals from every team - absorbed by the energy and confidence of the Burundi and Pakistani Boys, the quiet determination of the Team Egypt girls, and the powerfully impassioned words of Usha and her Team India colleagues. Like many volunteers, I was taken by how, with only a little help from interpreters, it was the spirit and enthusiasm which carried so much meaning when there was no common language. Simple gestures and expressions were empowering, with sport so often representing a global language. Not only that, children more than anyone are capable of proving language is no barrier for unity and common understanding, and seeing friendships develop while transcending cultural differences was at the heart of the experience.

While the main sporting events would inevitably provide the most emphatic

snapshots, the International Congress, taking place in the Copacabana Palace Hotel, provided a uniquely different dimension to the Games. Held every morning during the week, the Congress gave the young participants the space to voice opinions and discuss how the difficulties they have encountered have shaped their characters. The themes guiding these dialogues - Education, Violence and Legal Identity - would mean that many of details and subject matters were difficult, both for those narrating and listening. Many have been born into war, violence or abuse, and having these stories heard is the first step to pushing for wider recognition of street children in law. As such, the need for volunteers to create a safe and encouraging environment was evident, allowing all participants to feel comfortable contributing while taking considerable care to avoid shaping any discussions. Although the conversations would flow simultaneously across five or six languages, it was remarkable to watch how the teams spurred each other on through solidarity, patiently giving one another every chance to articulate themselves.

The culmination of these sessions would be the General Assembly at the end of the week, where the young participants presented their demands to the governments of the world as part of the [Rio Resolution](#). This was their moment, and together these former street children showed they are a driving force for change, championing the potential of millions of children worldwide and demonstrating that the streets should be no obstacle to fulfil this. Their message was clear - "I am Somebody".

The Street Child Games were a perfect way to build on the legacy of the Street Child World Cup and push for wider recognition of street children in law. Sport and the Arts are some of the most powerful outlets for expression, and it was a privilege to be work with an organisation which embraces these as a way to enable some of the most vulnerable and excluded in society to share their story.

Teddy Prosser works for Circus Street, an alumnae of SPS and Edinburgh branches and has been Trustee for SSSK since early 2016.



Photo: Malachy McCrudden/StreetChildUnite

WHAT WE LEARNT FROM THE SCC

Amy Dafnis and Arjun Paliwal, Oxford Branch, November 2016



Oxford member Hope Oloye and Street Child United CEO John Wroe
Photo: Nathaniel Hunt

HOW THE SCC CAME ABOUT

SSSK is fortunate to be partnered with excellent NGOs around the world who are best positioned to tackle the problems facing street-connected children in their local areas. Yet it is not often enough that we have the opportunity to invite our members to Oxford to introduce the work they're doing on the ground to students here. While extremely fortunate, and grateful, for the opportunities studying at such a university provides us, it's difficult to relate to the completely different world experienced by those who live and/or work on the streets.

This year's committee at Oxford saw an opportunity to spend an afternoon engaging students with a range of activities that could help them learn about what we do and why we're so passionate about the cause. The process started by brainstorming the different types of activities we wanted to run. Very quickly it became apparent that we wanted more than just presentations; during the busiest exam term of the year, it would be important to have some activities that students could drop in for just a few moments. We also noticed that we hadn't reached out to partner organisations before, even though they're often working towards a similar goal. Consequently, there were numerous opportunities available to provide a variety of activities on the day that would encourage collaboration and involvement with all students, however much time they might have.

Continued overleaf

LEARNINGS FROM PLANNING THE EVENT

Turnout

While we had a fair number of guests during our first speaker event, the second half dropped significantly. The time of year (exam seasons) clearly wasn't right for students, as few people had time to sit through a half-day conference. In the future, it would be great to have some method of measuring attendance, so we know which activities are popular and how long people are staying. It would also perhaps be wise to hold future events closer to the beginning of the academic year, when people have more free time and energy.

The Day

We ended up cramming a lot of activities into just four hours of the day. This was challenging from an organisation perspective and it also meant that our committee and guests had to choose where they wanted to go. While practically it made sense to do it over a short time, in hindsight we would have benefited from having a morning and evening schedule so our attendees could go to everything they wanted.

Marketing

While we may not have seen the numbers we had hoped for, I think we have seen a knock-on effect that has benefitted SSSK Oxford. In the run-up to the event, we lead a profile pictures campaign and emergency debate at The Oxford Union, which raised nearly £100 for the charity. What's more, almost every day since posting the SCC page live on Facebook, we saw likes being added to the branch's Facebook page. This may sound insignificant but hopefully it has all played a part in helping us achieve a solid committee for the current year. We also had two roaming photographers for the event and that has provided us with great marketing material going forward.



SSSK Trustees Eloise Haylor and Louise Hopper
Photo: Georgia Robson

Collaboration

We were able to provide an entire room of activities hosted by partner organisations, where guests were invited to think about our work. It was great for us to get a new perspective on certain issues, and we would highly recommend continuing to collaborate, not only on events like this, but for all events. Collaboration means a further reach on social media and email, and a stronger voice when you try and begin a conversation together.

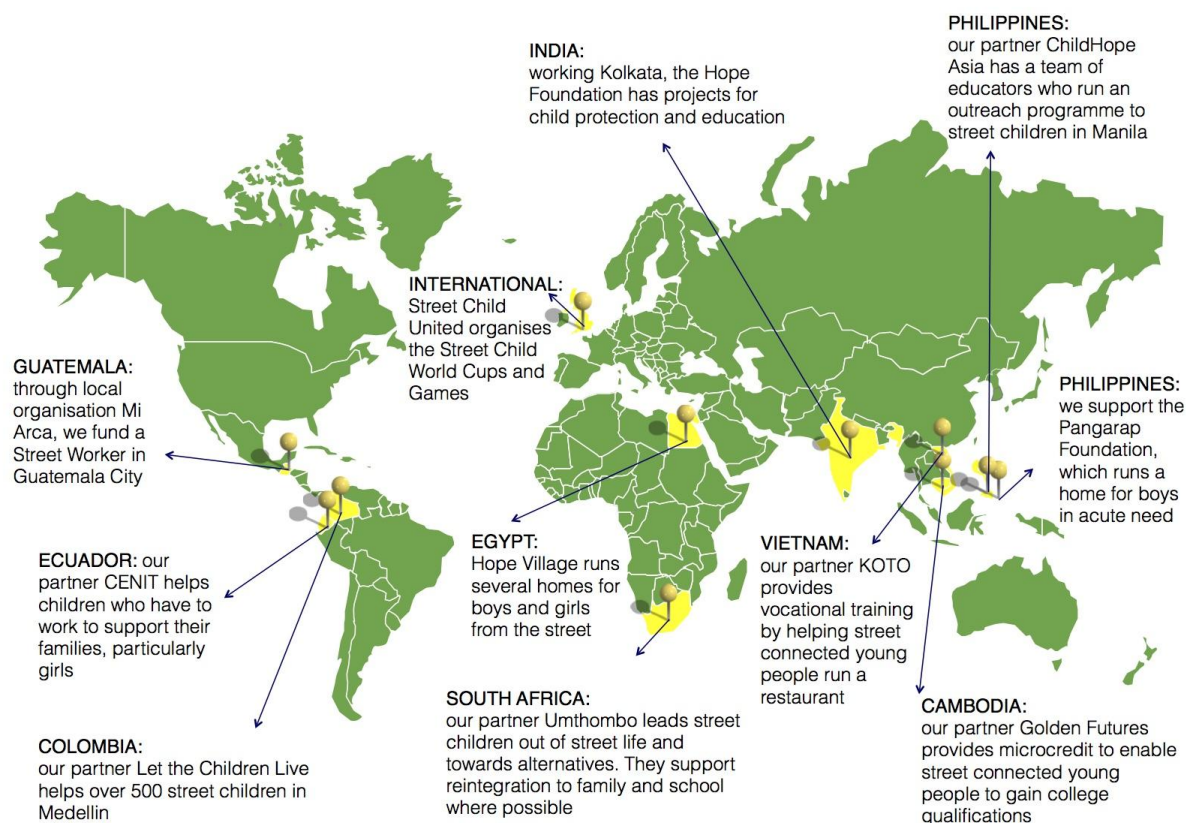
Going forward

The Street Child Conference was the first of its kind and it will (hopefully!) not be the last. It would be brilliant if future committees could use our successes and failures to aid them in organising their own conference and advocacy events. The 2016 conference at Oxford was just the beginning of a conversation – a conversation about the rights of street-connected children. Such a discussion needs to be continued within the public sphere, whether that be on university campuses, on social media, or in the national media, so that people can hear the stories of these children and the stories of those who are working to support them.

Amy Dafnis and Arjun Paliwal are members of the Oxford Branch. Both led organisation of the Street Child Conference.

SSSK'S GLOBAL NETWORK

Louise Hopper, SSSK Trustee, December 2016



Every year in June, the SSSK trustees gather together to allocate funds to our partner NGOs around the world. SSSK is proud that 100% of the money raised by our branches and donors goes directly to the NGOs we support, and that all of our partners are organisations we know personally, all having been visited by students or trustees in recent years.

In 2015, we were able to donate a total of £22,000 to our partners; in 2016, our fundraising totals were slightly lower and so we have had to reduce this to £17,500, but we are still confident that our contributions will make a real difference to the ten NGOs we are supporting. As trustees, we are also doing more this year to remain in closer contact with our partners so we can hear about the excellent work they are doing. We are skyping and speaking to them more regularly, and trustees and students have visited three of our ten NGOs in the last year.

Back home in the UK, it can sometimes be difficult to visualise what impact our funds can have for street connected children around the world, but the reports and updates from our partner NGOs really helps to bring this to life. For example in

Guatemala, £3,500 can fund a street outreach worker with our partner Mi Arca for an entire year. Their team of 22 outreach workers and volunteers was in contact with over 3000 street connected children in 2015, offering them much needed support and advice. Over the course of the year they provided 3000 one-to-one counselling sessions to street-connected children and over 1600 children benefited from education activities. In Cambodia, an average of £1800 can fund a street connected young adult through higher education, helping them to gain valuable skills. Our partner Golden Futures is currently supporting nine Cambodian students through their degree and diploma courses.

We make our grants available for core funding which means they are not restricted for use on any specific activity.

Even though our grants are not huge, we make them available for core funding, which means they are not restricted for use on any specific activity and can be spent on essential running costs and pressing needs. In Egypt, our partner Hope Village reported that they used our grant to repair the roof and to replace the kindergarten floor in the residential centre for young women. Another of our partners told us that they were experiencing a temporary shortfall in funds and that our donation was important in helping them to maintain all of their fantastic activities.

We are constantly inspired and impressed by the work our partners are doing across the world, from helping to reconcile and reunite street children with their families in South Africa, to providing healthcare to

street connected children in Kolkata, India, and supporting street connected children to get an education in the Philippines.

It is even more impressive that they continue to do this in the face of some difficult challenges. In Ecuador, our partner CENIT has been working hard to help children affected by the earthquake in April, which caused significant damage to the economy, forced some families to leave their homes, and created an increase in demand for the fantastic support services CENIT offers to street connected children. Several of our partners around the world have also mentioned the difficulties caused by post-referendum currency fluctuations: our funds are stretching slightly less far as the pound weakens against the dollar, which makes the committed and innovative fundraising efforts of our branches even more important.

So please keep up the good work! We shall be posting updates from our NGOs on our facebook page over the year, so please keep an eye out to see how your funds are being used. And here's to raising even more money to help our partners make even more of a difference next year – we couldn't do it without you!

Louise Hopper joined SSSK as a Trustee in April 2016. She is a diplomat at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



Photo: HOPE Foundation

AN UPDATE FROM UMTHOMBO

Yas Rana, Edinburgh Branch, September 2016



Photo: Yas Rana

Having been a part of SSSK for four years, I felt like it was time to visit one of the NGOs we support. Whilst I was able to quote statistics about the extent of the problem of street children, I did not have much of an idea of how the NGOs we support actually help and transform lives.

Two things struck me most about my six week stay in Durban. Firstly, the proactive approach of Umthombo to seek children and young adults who required help and the emphasis they placed on 'reintegrating' those who come to them back into society. Most days, they would send two or three of their staff on 'outreach', going around the city developing relationships with the vulnerable young with a long-term aim of bringing them to Umthombo's centre. The conditions the street children live in are noticeably squalid. One place dubbed the 'jungle' springs to mind, a bushy area at

the back of an industrial park where a large group of homeless youth live.

Acquainting themselves with the homeless youth is a difficult task, predominantly because of the prevalent glue sniffing which is highly addictive. The staff run nearly daily games of football in the city centre which attracts street children that they may normally struggle to talk to. A distinguishing feature of Umthombo in comparison to other NGOs in the area is that they help anyone who comes to them, not just children. In fact most of the people they work with are young adults left hopeless with little job prospects and much of the organisation's time is spent trying to help the employability of the people who come to them.

The buzzword around the centre was 'reintegrating'. Everything the staff did was geared towards reintegrating people back into society. So if they had family, reuniting them, if they were out of education they got them back into schools and if they were unemployed they did their best to sponsor college places or to provide them with work placements.

A difficulty with the work that Umthombo does that they're particularly conscious of is the chances of people they successfully help ending back on the streets. Despite the security of places to stay and work, the lure of the freedom of the streets for orphaned youth is often too much.

In an effort to reduce the chances of this happening, Umthombo run bi-annual camps in the imaginatively named D'urban Hotel. At these camps they invite people who they used to work with who now are recently reintegrated along with any family to remind them of the progress they young people have made in their lives. The bravery of shunning the street life in order to change their lives should not be understated. The girls in particular are often under the control of older men who warn them away from going to NGOs like Umthombo.

A question I wanted to answer by the end of the trip was how useful is our money to an NGO like Umthombo. The answer is extremely.

The summer camp was run almost exclusively on SSSK money, and Umthombo have fairly compelling evidence that suggests that since the camps have been running, the chances of reintegrated youth ending back on the streets are significantly reduced.

Witnessing the work of Umthombo was incredible. The workers are genuinely inspirational, going well beyond the port of call to transform the lives of the street children.

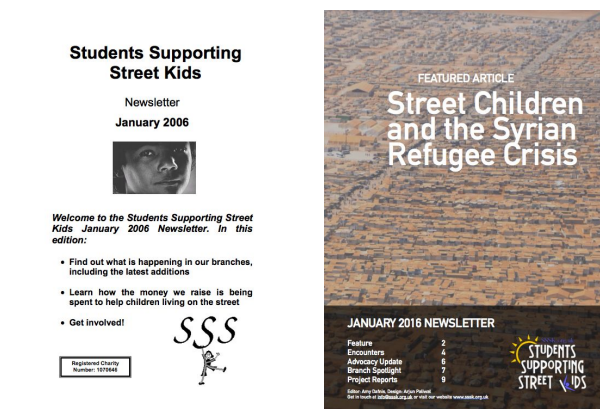
Yas Rana has been with SSSK Edinburgh for four years, leading the branch from 2014 to 2016.

THE SSSK NEWSLETTER IS CHANGING

Thanks for reading the SSSK Newsletter. Since relaunching the publication in 2015 we've seen six unique editions covering important developments in SSSK, our partner NGOs and beyond.

And now it is evolving once again, and migrating to a short quarterly e-newsletter to our wonderful network of student and alumnae supporters who've been a part of the SSSK story over the years. Don't worry, there will still be links to our in depth articles from our new team of student editors and journalists.

So if you'd like to keep hearing our news, please do drop a line to supporters@sssk.org.uk and we'll add you to the list.



Our first ever newsletter...

To our July 2016 edition.
We've come a long way!