

Creating a culture of hope

Lessons from street children agencies in Canada and Guatemala

● **Jeff Karabanow**

To the rest of the city [Cornerville] is a mysterious, dangerous and depressing area. Respectable people have access to a limited body of information about Cornerville . . . People appear as social work clients, as defendants in criminal cases, or as undifferentiated members of the ‘masses’ . . . There is one thing wrong with such a picture; no human beings are in it. (Whyte, 1955: xv)

There is growing concern that within our emerging globalized political and economic environment, an ever-increasing number of people who lack sufficient resources to ‘hook into’ the rapid-paced movement of new technology and high finance, will undoubtedly be left behind. In both developed and developing countries, we are witnessing massive waves of homelessness; growing disparities between low-income and high-income groups; rising unemployment; disturbing levels of poverty; decreasing standards of living; and an overall fall in our collective quality of life (Campfens, 1997).

A telling portrait of how well a society is performing can be obtained by exploring the lives of its children. This article illuminates the present-day experiences of street children in Toronto, Montreal and Guatemala City. Street children are defined as ‘minors [under the age of 18] who earn their livelihood by working on the streets or as children who reside on the streets full or part-time’ (Lusk et al., 1989: 289). Street children have always existed

Jeff Karabanow is Assistant Professor at the Maritime School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, 6414 Coburg Road, Halifax NS, B3H 2A7, Canada.
[email: jkaraban@dal.ca]

on the fringe of mainstream culture, and throughout history they have been variously labeled. Early 19th-century categorizations included 'petty thieves', 'street sinners' and 'begging impostors'. In the early 20th century street children were known as 'young barbarians' and 'street wandering children' (Rivlin and Manzo, 1988). In the 1950s, perceptions were painted by notions of this population as 'psychologically deviant' and 'disturbed', and the 1970s we renamed these children 'enfants perdus' (Robertson, 1992). The modern image of this population is that of the sexually and/or physically abused runaway (Ruddick, 1996). William Whyte's opening quotation addresses an important limitation in how we understand social phenomenon. By labeling specific individuals as 'delinquents', 'criminals', 'victims', or 'clients', we fail to see them as human beings. It therefore follows that the programs which have become most successful in attracting street children have provided them with a symbolic space where they can feel safe, cared for and part of a community. In essence, these programs provide a culture of hope, an environment in which young people can gain strength, courage, resiliency and a sense of optimism for present and future endeavors. The notion of citizenship rather than pathology is reinforced in such a setting. As one street child staying at a Montreal agency eloquently noted: 'When I'm here, I feel like a human being; when I leave, I feel like a street kid'.

Methodology

This article explores the stories and struggles of children living on the street, as well as highlighting some of the programs that have been successful in supporting and empowering this marginalized and hard-core population. The methodology employed falls under the rubric of naturalistic enquiry, intermingling grounded theory and ethnographic approaches. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with 110 street children (44 in Toronto, 35 in Montreal and 31 in Guatemala City) and 49 service providers (18 in Toronto, seven in Montreal and 24 in Guatemala City). In addition, I conducted participant observations of street life and shelter culture in all three sites; and eight case studies of street children's shelters and programs (two in Toronto, one in Montreal and five in Guatemala City). The cases discussed here include: Covenant House, a prominent Toronto shelter; *Dans La Rue* ('On the Street'), an alternative Montreal shelter; Street Kids International,

a Toronto-based street child advocacy program; Casa Alianza, a renowned Guatemalan shelter, and the Center for Integral Community Development (CEDIC), a rural Guatemalan prevention program. The data have been collected during the past eight years and have spawned numerous academic projects (Karabanow and Rains, 1997; Karabanow, 1994, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; and a documentary entitled 'Zone 1: A Case Study of Street Kids in Guatemala City'). This article attempts to integrate my past research as well as allowing for reflection upon my own personal work experiences in each of the three sites. All three locations have unique political, economic and social environments, but they contain strikingly similar characteristics of child homelessness.

Common stories

The street child literature concerning etiology has primarily focused upon two dimensions. Before 1980 great attention was placed upon individual factors, such as needing independence, not wanting to abide by rules, depressive and/or anti-social character structure, 'personality pathology', searching for fun and excitement, and involvement in drugs, alcohol and sexual deviancy (Yablonski, 1968; Jenkins, 1971; Stierlin, 1973; Edelbrock, 1980). Street children were understood through their individual pathologies and it was commonly believed that this population had chosen their street lifestyle. However, this perspective, framed before the 'discovery' of child abuse, has since been largely rejected as 'naive and inaccurate' (McCarthy, 1990: 24). As one girl in Jack Rothman's (1991: 1) study of American runaway and homeless children notes, 'Why would any kid leave a happy environment?'

In the last two decades a more holistic perception has arisen. There is now greater understanding of the overall situation of street children, in which issues such as despair, poverty, abuse and alienation have moved to the forefront. Much of the recent research on homeless children has identified them with 'running away' from the horrors of their particular family setting: sexual abuse; physical abuse; neglect; divorce; separation; new siblings and parents; poverty; and general family dysfunction (Farber and Kinast, 1984; Janus et al., 1987; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987; Lusk et al., 1989; McCarthy, 1990; Lave, 1995; Verma, 1999; Smollar, 1999; Diversi et al., 1999). In his survey of 536 clients of homeless agencies in North America, Shane (1989: 212) found that 'running is less

frequent *toward* than *away* from something, often from a place and life in which the runaways felt abused, rejected, unheard, unwanted and unhappy'. In her study of Guatemalan street children, Lave (1995) reported that most street children have histories of familial emotional, sexual or physical abuse. Increasingly, the literature on street children now focuses upon the circumstances that lead children to street life. The majority of service providers who I interviewed noted three substantial factors pushing children towards street life: family dysfunction, physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse and poverty.

The debate between the pressures of individual pathology and the environment continues (especially in public discourse). Nonetheless, there is more evidence of children 'running away' or 'escaping' from problematic situations, or being 'kicked out' from home, with the streets serving as a temporary safe haven (Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987; Child Welfare League of America, 1991; Rothman, 1991; Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Hare et al., 1998; Smollar, 1999; Earls and Carlson, 1999; Karabanow, 2000). As one Toronto street child interviewed exclaimed: 'Don't you think I'd go back home if I could, why would someone want to be out here on the streets?' In their study of Mexican street children, Lusk et al. (1989: 291) comment that these children are 'pushed into the environment by family poverty, neglect and violence, [and] are pulled into the street by the availability of work and income'. This section discusses some of the common stories of street children with respect to etiology and street life culture.

Etiological factors

Although the street child population is by no means homogeneous, it does present service providers with a number of common experiences. In my analyses, some of the etiological factors shared among participants included: escaping traumatic family experiences (such as sexual, physical and emotional abuse); being 'kicked out' or 'pushed out' by parents or guardians (some due to family dysfunction, some due to 'tough love' approaches in dealing with problematic behaviors and some due to poverty); and escaping or graduating from child welfare institutions. The Child Welfare League of America (1991: 3) described similar characteristics: 'Young people run away or find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons, including family contact and/ or sexual abuse, family

breakup due to homelessness, aging out of foster care, struggles with sexual orientation issues, substance abuse, serious health problems (i.e., HIV/AIDS), school truancy or dropout, and poverty-related situations. The streets – with their myriad dangers – are usually the first refuge for these youths.’

A more recent phenomenon in Toronto and Montreal are immigrant and refugee children (primarily from war-torn countries such as Rwanda, Zaire, Congo and Yugoslavia) who have entered Canada with no status and/or support (Karabanow, 2000). In Guatemala (as well as other developing countries), a growing population of street children are either orphans (parents killed in civil wars, by natural disasters or by disease) or displaced (by civil wars, natural disasters or extreme poverty) (UNICEF, 1990; Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Verma, 1999). Moreover, in both Guatemala and Canada, growing numbers of families (predominately female-headed) are experiencing homelessness, often living on the street, in slums and shanty towns in Guatemala, and sidewalks, parks and under bridges in North America (O’Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Lave, 1995; Mayor’s Homeless Action Task Force, 1998; Yalnizyan, 1998; Smollar, 1999; UNICEF, 1999). Related to this phenomenon are children who are working on the street in order to eke out a living for themselves or their families (squeegee children in North America, and vendors, shoe-shine boys and flower sellers in Guatemala) (Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997; UNICEF, 1999). As Lusk (1992: 296) points out in his study of street children in Rio de Janeiro, ‘they are on the street and earn money because there is not enough at home or because they have no alternative’. In Guatemala children provide an important source of additional income for impoverished families (Lave, 1995). Lusk et al. (1989) suggest that street children in Latin America should be primarily viewed as ‘workers’.

The majority of street children interviewed in my analyses came from disturbingly high levels of poverty (in such areas as rural settings, inner-city ghettos, slums, squatter towns and native reserves). While most governments round the world take less direct action in the lives of their most vulnerable (in terms of privatization, contracting and reduced spending on social assistance subsidies) (Lave, 1995; Yalnizyan, 1998) and agencies working with such populations are increasingly underfunded and overutilized (Allewa, 1988; Karabanow, 2000), it makes sense that the street has emerged as a last resort for increasing numbers of young people in crisis.

Common challenges

Much attention has been placed upon street children's experiences of street life, emphasizing their methods of survival and particularly their involvement in deviant and criminal activities (for example, drug use and sale, prostitution, panhandling and theft). In an early investigation and follow-up of transient youth surveyed from a Canadian hostel (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1970, 1971), the most common sources of income while living on the street were identified as employment, contributions from friends and panhandling. More recent studies have emphasized the process of progressive involvement in more serious forms of criminal activity as street survival strategies. Illegal behavior is presented as a response to the conditions of being on the street (Palenski, 1984; Lave, 1995). Regarding Brazilian street children/workers, Lusk (1992: 297) comments that 'even the most occasional street worker is exposed to drugs, violence and worker exploitation that characterise street culture'.

In their study of 489 adolescents interviewed in the downtown core of Calgary, Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987) divided their sample into 'runners' who have lived on the streets for an extended period of time and 'in and outers' using the street as a temporary coping strategy. The authors report that a much greater percentage of 'runners' were involved in deviant activities (such as prostitution, drug sales and theft) and had experienced physical and sexual abuse.

McCarthy's (1990) study of 390 street children residing at several downtown Toronto shelters and common street hang-outs reaches similar conclusions. Using multivariate techniques to analyze the prevalence and incidence of illegal activities associated with living on the streets, the author concludes that 'a greater proportion of adolescents violate the law [in terms of theft, drug-selling and prostitution] after they leave home (relative to the proportion of offenders at home) and offend on more than one occasion' (McCarthy, 1990: 1).

Much of the literature regarding Guatemalan (and Brazilian) street children has emphasized this population's deviant behaviours, such as petty thievery, drug use, gang violence and prostitution (Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Inciardi and Surratt, 1998; Diversi et al., 1999; UNICEF, 1999). Lave's (1995) analysis of street children in Guatemala suggests that the more these children are inculcated into street culture, the more involved they become with deviant activity. In contrast, one particular study of Latin

American street children/workers (Lusk, 1989) questions the common perception of this population as criminals and delinquents. The author found that it was a minority of street children who engaged in deviant behaviour as a survival tactic, yet this group overshadowed the majority of children who worked legally. Moreover, Lusk's (1992) subsequent research showed that delinquent behavior was more prevalent in street children who had severed ties with family and school.

In my analyses street children faced numerous interrelated challenges once on the street. A large number of street children interviewed were involved in alcohol and drug abuse (in Canada, marijuana and heroin; in Guatemala, glue and varsol) and identified boredom, emotional pain and suffering as reasons why they had engaged in such activities. Similar findings are discussed in Diversi et al.'s (1999) study of Brazilian street children and Lave's (1995) analysis of Guatemalan street children. Prostitution and petty theft also make up some of the activities of street life, explained by my participants as the primary manner by which to 'make quick money'. There is also growing concern for the physical and mental health of street children, who are involved in high at-risk behavior (such as drug abuse and sexual interaction without condoms) with little support and guidance from concerned adults (see for example Lave, 1995; Inciardi and Surratt, 1998; Earls and Carlson, 1999). Many street children interviewed in my studies admitted to unprotected sexual intercourse with strangers and indiscriminate sharing of syringes. Violence among street children and/or gang activity played a small part in my participants' street life but has been identified in the literature as an emerging street activity (Lusk, 1992; Kipke et al., 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Inciardi and Surratt, 1998; Marquez, 1999). Unique to Guatemala and other developing countries (especially Brazil) are the horrific documented accounts of harassment, torture and death of street children at the hands of military officials, local policemen, security guards and private citizens (Americas Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, 1991; Lave, 1995; Casa Alianza, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997).

There has been increased attention placed upon the perceptions of street children themselves vis-a-vis their conditions, experiences and aspirations (De Oliveira et al., 1992; Karabanow, 1994; Karabanow and Rains, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1997). Common experiences of many participants in my analyses included 'feeling alone', 'having little purpose' and 'not fitting in'. These expressions of alienation and marginalization appear to be regular experiences of

street life. Numerous participants stated that they did not feel 'a part of anything', and believed that most citizens perceived them as 'thieves', 'criminals' and 'dregs of society'. Many children in Lave's (1995) sample identified themselves as 'outcasts'.

A final characteristic that has received little academic attention is the nature and scope of emotional and psychological trauma experienced by street children from events beyond their control or comprehension: wars, natural disasters, being displaced from home, separated from loved ones, abuse, violence, abandonment, rejection or abject poverty (UNICEF, 1999; Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997). Such traumatic experiences undoubtedly leave deep emotional scars and affect children's educational, emotional and social development.

Although there may exist some redeeming qualities to street life (such as independence, freedom, a sense of family and support), for the vast majority of children this lifestyle offers a problematic and unhealthy existence. Consequently, the last 20 years have witnessed a growing industry of non-government and non-profit organizations that have taken up the cause of child homelessness. The following section focuses upon these organizational structures.

Street children's organizations

There are numerous conceptual maps on how to deal with street children. For example, some agencies adopt family reconciliation frameworks, others espouse tough-love perspectives, and still others maintain outreach goals. Lusk (1989), Carrizosa and Poertner (1992) and Rizzini and Lusk (1995) outline four overarching ideological assumptions that guide service provision for street children. First, the correctional and institutional approach views street children as delinquents and threats to community safety, so that intervention follows the ideology of removal from society and correction of personal pathologies. This response tends to blame the individual for being a street child or engaging in street activity (such as drugs and prostitution). The rehabilitation approach is more benevolent than the correctional approach, yet it still assumes personal pathology or deficiencies. Here street children are perceived as inadequate, needy, abandoned or harmed. The intervention involves protection and rehabilitation, attempting to fix the individual and integrate him or her back into society. The third approach is that of street education, which assumes that street children are normal adolescents who have been forced by a deficient society to

live under difficult conditions. In other words, street children are in their predicament because of structural social deficiencies (such as lack of affordable housing and meaningful employment). In order to fight the problem, this approach argues that the education and empowerment of street children will lead to engaged collective action whereby solutions to collective problems can be forged. The last approach identified is prevention and involves strategies of education and advocacy in order to find solutions to the root causes of homelessness. This approach attempts to stop children from moving towards street life, and rather than focusing upon institutionalized strategies, it promotes community-based programs (such as after-school programs and midnight basketball activities).

Agencies and programs that have shown remarkable success in attracting street children have overwhelmingly adopted street education and prevention strategies. The major characteristics of such initiatives include: providing for basic needs (such as shelter, food, clothing) in an immediate fashion; fostering the strengths of participants through community building; linking with external communities; and advocating on participants' behalfs. When interrelated, these elements function to create a safe and caring environment where participants can build an empowered and resilient community. In other words, when taken together, these four elements forge a culture of hope for an otherwise marginalized and forgotten population. As Figure 1 below demonstrates, each of these elements acts as a stage of intervention allowing for the best possible environment for street children. Once these elements are in place, they can produce a synergistic environment whereby the community is expanded and renewed. In their review of the literature regarding street children, Earls and Carlson (1999: 75) suggest that a 'more systematic analysis of the services available to street and working children must be obtained'. The following analysis attempts to provide this insight.

Basic needs

Street children require basic immediate services that can be administered in a timely, flexible and caring manner. Street children approach social services agencies for such essential needs as shelter, medical services, showers, food and clothing, and attempt to avoid organizations that maintain obtrusive rules and regulations. Montreal's Dans La Rue, a short-term immediate crisis center, gained an impressive reputation with hard-core street children because the agency provided flexible services 24 hours per day in a

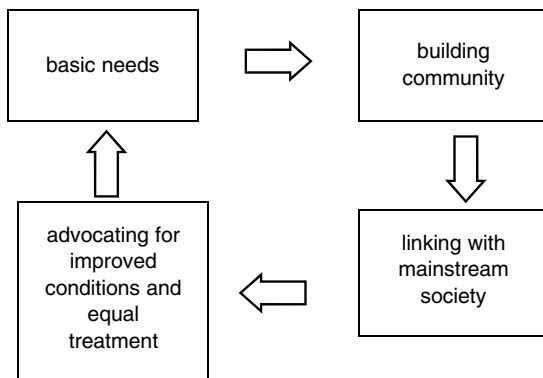


Figure 1 Characteristics of successful street children initiatives

caring and informal manner (Karabanow, 1999a). Moreover, Dans La Rue allowed street children the luxury to simply relax and hang out without having to meet a worker or follow a service plan, a rarity within the world of social services.

One way in which to meet a population's needs is to listen to what they request. Dans La Rue began as a mobile van roaming the Montreal downtown core. As newcomers to street culture, the agency spent considerable time with street children discovering the important needs and characteristics of this population. The van quickly became equipped with many of the supplies (such as health kits, toothpaste, shelter referrals, city maps, etc.) requested by street children. For example, the agency realized that many street children owned pets and thus became the only shelter in Montreal that allowed animals and provided them with dog and cat food and supplies. Dans La Rue continues to invite feedback from participants, and this is evident in the overwhelming involvement of residents in the shelter's activities (from group meetings run by street children to board meetings that include residents).

Similarly, Toronto's Covenant House is a prominent street child organization guided by five principles, one of which is the immediate servicing of clients' needs. Before intake or assessment, workers ensure that the child's primary needs have been met (regarding food, sleep, medical support or a shower). Such an orientation allows street children to feel comfortable and cared for. In a sense, it shows children that they are important and respected. Many of the non-profit, alternative street children organizations in Guatemala,

such as *Casa Alianza* and CEDIC, have created settings where youngsters can obtain immediate services, such as those discussed above, in a safe, warm, and clean environment, a drastically different scenario from the squalor of street life.

Community building

When basic needs are sufficiently met for the short term, and a sense of care, trust and respect is emerging between parties, children begin to perceive a positive community atmosphere. Street children agencies attempt to create a liaison with hard-core populations by first providing them with basic services, and then allowing them to feel safe, cared for and part of something. This in turn fosters a sense of symbolic space in which participants feel as if they belong. Individual counseling and group mutual aid and support provide the essential ingredients to cultivating this sense of community, supporting and guiding street children in building important skills (such as finding housing, preparing for a job interview) as well as allowing for participants to realize that they are not alone in their suffering, that others too have similar experiences, and that their own personal tools (internal strengths), coupled with linkages with other children, can be highly potent in searching out diverse solutions.

Dans La Rue provides a telling example of such a situation. After several weeks of regaining their strength and feeling more comfortable in their new surroundings, five street children asked the agency whether they could use a downstairs office to discuss among themselves certain issues, such as recounting their lives before moving on the street, their consequent experiences once on the street and what plans they held for the future. Along with one worker who had created a close relationship with this group, a mutual aid, self-help setting was born. This informal group acted as a safe arena for the exchange and share of personal experiences and knowledge, led by street children, with the worker acting as guide or enabler. Participants left this group with a greater sense of confidence, accepting that they were not alone with their problems, and that there were positive strategies with which to solve many of their difficult issues. At present, there are four different group work sessions existing at that shelter.

In a similar vein, Guatemala's *Casa Alianza* created a supportive setting where children could take time to reflect on past, present and future issues and connect with others in a safe environment. Community building sparks the groundwork for future positive initiatives taken by participants. The most important characteristic

at this stage is for children to feel connected, to view themselves not as street children but as citizens dealing with difficult situations.

Linking with mainstream society

In order for children to feel part of a community, to feel normalized and active citizens, they need to form positive relations with the outside world. It is imperative that agencies working with hard-core, marginalized populations re-route them towards mainstream culture. In numerous developing countries, Toronto's Street Kids International has created bike courier projects with business groups whereby street children act as messengers between business communities. This program allowed street children a positive link with mainstream society (that is, a feeling of being an important part of the business community) as well as an opportunity for future employment. Moreover, in this program there was a noticeable increase in participants' self-worth, self-esteem and confidence (Dalglish, 1998).

Toronto's Covenant House has forged collaborative educational and work programs with local universities and businesses in order to provide street children with job training outlets, apprenticeship programs and educational projects. Numerous participants have subsequently been employed by the collaborating partners. Dans La Rue has also fostered positive relations with local universities, local police and neighborhood businesses and community centers in order to provide street children with the opportunity to become familiar with their community and be able to utilize these facilities. In addition, these connections can provide street children and the community with a greater appreciation for each other. For example, weekly baseball games with police at the local station allowed for positive interactions between two groups fraught with misinformation and tension.

CEDIC, a rural Guatemalan prevention program, has created numerous micro-enterprises and small loans projects that help indigenous families link their skills to the local market place. In addition, CEDIC has developed impressive apprenticeship programs for children in the agriculture, manufacturing and information sectors.

These programs provide street children with a sense of belonging to a greater community, integrated into their local environments and existing as productive citizens. Linking with the outside world allows street children to feel normalized rather than identified as a deviant subculture. However, at the same time, organizations should not

ignore some of the unique and positive elements of street culture, such as survival skills and group solidarity.

One unintended shortcoming of some street children services is to further alienate their participants by relating to them simply as clients or consumers. The goal of social service agencies must be to reintegrate street children into mainstream culture, while signaling their unique and alternative attributes. This orientation takes the form of a delicate balance between street ethics and mainstream culture's values. For example, Dans La Rue collaborated with a recycling company to create a job-training program that successfully fused street values (such as environmentalism and advocacy) with mainstream values (such as business ethics). While obtaining such a delicate balance can prove difficult, allowing children to participate in creating such a balance can be helpful. Many street children dream of traditional careers (such as teaching, marketing, computer programming and law), yet search unusual paths to obtaining such employment. Much like parents watching their adolescent choose her or his path of discovery, agencies need to be patient, supportive and provide guidance, so that children can attempt to create their own fusion between street culture and mainstream culture.

Advocacy

The final element in creating an empowered street children community is for organizations to clearly understand street children's experiences and work in partnership to create a stronger and more vibrant community. Agencies that acknowledge the hardships and injustices of street children must also collaborate with them to foster a unified voice. Montreal's Dans La Rue and Toronto's Covenant House have been in the forefront of this activity, demanding that municipal, provincial and federal governments make stronger commitments for affordable housing, meaningful employment and emergency resources for disadvantaged children. Dans La Rue (workers and children) has been involved in protesting the closing of a downtown park (known as a street children's hangout); advocating against police ticketing and harassment of street children for minor crimes (jay-walking and loitering); and sensitizing the local community to the realities of street culture.

Amid alleged death threats, bombings and the assassination of a street worker, Guatemala's Casa Alianza has taken up the cause of torture and assassination of street children, fighting in the local courts against police and military impunity. Street Kids International, with the input of thousands of children around the

world, has created a powerful and provocative video ('The Karate Kid Story') that allows street children's stories of drug use, prostitution, violence and AIDS to be told in a realistic and heartwarming manner. This informational video acts not only as a prevention tool shown in classrooms around the world, but also as a sensitizing device for communities to better understand the experiences of street children.

These agencies have carved out a symbolic space for street children by forming egalitarian partnerships with them in the fight for needed resources and/or better treatment. For street children, these activities translate into feelings of worthiness and importance, feelings they have rarely held throughout their young lives. It is important that street children's organizations act as partisans to the cause of the homeless, being able to provide important resources and knowledge as well as friendship and support to a population that has seldom been acknowledged and listened to.

Merging locality development and social action

As shown above, successful street children's agencies and programs operate in two diverse yet complementary arenas. First, there is an intense focus paid to locality development, the notion of broad participation at the grassroots level. Locality development emphasizes community competence and social integration. Montreal's *Dans La Rue* and Toronto's *Street Kids International* are examples of programs that have energized participants by allowing them to feel safe, cared for and owners of their respective programs.

Second, organizations such as *Casa Alianza* and *Dans La Rue* have adopted social action strategies in order to provide street children with a voice, organizing participants to make demands for increased resources and/or equal treatment. *Casa Alianza's* legal clinic has brought attention to the torture of street children by military and police regimes. Social action initiatives at *Dans La Rue* involved consciousness-raising, mutual aid and collective responses to such issues as the closing of a downtown park. Community development and social action operate in a complementary fashion: while social action initiatives focus upon end results (gaining resources), locality development places importance upon process issues (the emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs of a group).

In this regard, successful agencies tend to adopt two fundamental roles: that of guide or enabler (providing resources and information in a supportive and safe environment), as well as the role of partisan

(joining with street children to protest injustice). It is the fusion of these two roles that allows such organizations to be at the forefront of street children's services.

Conclusion

In the last 20 years there has been an increase in the number of alternative, non-government agencies working with homeless children. Generally, these agencies have emerged out of the frustration about the formal child welfare system, a system that has been consistently characterized as bureaucratic, institutional, professional and having too many roadblocks to the immediate delivery of needed services. The literature abounds with tales of hard-core populations being ignored, neglected, misunderstood or harmed by formal systems (Alleva, 1988; Edney, 1988; Henry, 1987; Lave, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Karabanow, 2000). It is unrealistic that in order to gain needed services, street children must make appointments, call back at specific times, leave a phone number and address, disclose personal information or provide identification. But alternative agencies are generally characterized as small, flexible, non-bureaucratic, and not rigidly professional, rather acting as 'buffers' (Vosburgh, 1988) for hard-to-serve populations vis-a-vis the formal system.

A glaring conclusion that emerges from the data is that agencies that are respectful, caring and allow street children a sense of humanity and dignity (in other words, a culture of hope) have great success in attracting this marginalized population. Organizations such as Dans La Rue, Covenant House, Street Kids International, CEDIC, and Casa Alianza are prime examples of agencies and programs that have reached out to street children in unique and innovative ways. Their common attributes include: immediate and direct service provision; developing safe, trustful and respectful relationships with children; working to join street children to external communities; providing a safe and secure community for street children; developing the competence of street children's circles in order that they can define their own situations and construct their own paths; and advocating for increased resources and/or equal treatment. Such agencies have forged symbolic spaces by which street children can gain a sense of friendship, ownership and normalcy. It is not surprising that successful agencies (from the perspective of street children) combine the roles of

enabler and guide through locality development, and that of partisan through social action in order to create a sense of community.

As governments of all levels move further away from direct services, there is a greater imperative for community-based, alternative organizations to take up the street children's cause: providing them with basic services; allowing them to build a sense of community; providing them with opportunities and linkages in mainstream culture; and advocating for improved conditions in their lives. In the future, these characteristics of intervention will be imperative for any organization who cares enough to touch the lives of this hard-core, marginalized population.

References

- Alleva, F. (1988) 'Youth at Risk, Systems in Crisis: A Dialogue with Youth who Needed Shelter'. PhD dissertation (Education), Boston University, MA.
- Americas Watch and Physicians for Human Rights (1991) *Guatemala: Getting Away with Murder*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Campfens, H. (1997) *Community Development across the World*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Canadian Council on Social Development (1970) *Transient Youth*. Ottawa: Canadian Council of Development.
- Canadian Council on Social Development (1971) *Youth 1971: An Inquiry into Transient Youth and Opportunities for Youth Programs*. Ottawa: Canadian Council of Development.
- Carrizosa, S. and J. Poertner (1992) 'Latin American Street Children: Problems, Programmes and Critique', *International Social Work* 35(4): 405–13.
- Casa Alianza (1995) *Torture of Guatemalan Street Children: Report to the UN Committee Against Torture*. Guatemala City: Casa Alianza.
- Child Welfare League of America (1991) *Homelessness: The Impact on Child Welfare in the '90's*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.
- Dalglish, P. (1998) *The Courage of Children*. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- De Oliveira, W., M. Baizerman and L. Pellet (1992) 'Street Children in Brazil and Their Helpers: Comparative Views on Aspirations and the Future', *International Social Work* 35(2): 163–76.
- Diversi, M., N. Moraes and M. Morelli (1999) 'Daily Reality on the Streets of Campinas, Brazil', in M. Raffaelli and R. Larson (eds) *Homeless and Working Youth Around the World: Exploring Developmental Issues*, pp. 19–34. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Earls, F. and M. Carlson (1999) 'Children at the Margins of Society: Research and Practice', in M. Raffaelli and R. Larson (eds) *Homeless and Working Youth Around the World: Exploring Developmental Issues*, pp. 72–82. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Edelbrock, C. (1980) 'Running Away From Home: Incidence and Correlates Among Children and Youth Referred for Mental Health Services', *Journal of Family Issues* 1: 210–28.

- Edney, R. (1988) 'The Impact of Sexual Abuse on Adolescent Females who Prostitute', in M. Michaud (ed.) *Dead End*, pp. 25–36. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises.
- Farber, E. and C. Kinast (1984) 'Violence in Families of Adolescent Runaways', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 8: 295–9.
- Hare, F., B. Leslie and S. Saunders (1998) 'Research Collaboration in Child Welfare Services'. Paper presented at The Realities and Dreams Conference, Scotland.
- Henry, E.M. (1987) 'Voluntary Shelters for the Homeless as a Population of Organizations'. PhD dissertation, Social Work, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr.
- Human Rights Watch (1997) *Guatemala's Forgotten Children: Police Violence and Abuses in Detention*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Inciardi, J. and H. Surratt (1998) 'Children in the Streets of Brazil: Drug Use, Crime, Violence and HIV Risks', *Substance Use and Misuse* 33(7): 1461–80.
- Janus, M., A. McCormack, A. Burgess and C. Hartman (1987) *Adolescent Runaways – Causes and Consequences*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Jenkins, R. (1971) 'The Runaway Reaction', *American Journal of Psychiatry* 128: 168–73.
- Karabanow, J. (1994) 'The Shelter Experience: A Case Study of Street Kid Residents at Toronto's Covenant House'. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Sociology, McGill University, Montreal.
- Karabanow, J. (1999a) 'Creating Community: A Case Study of a Montreal Street Kid Agency', *Community Development Journal* 34(4): 318–27.
- Karabanow, J. (1999b) 'When Caring is not Enough: An Exploration of Emotional Labor at a Canadian Street Kid Shelter', *Social Service Review* 73(3): 340–57.
- Karabanow, J. (2000) 'A Place For All Seasons: Examining Youth Shelters and the Youth-In-Trouble Network in Toronto'. PhD dissertation, Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada.
- Karabanow, J. and P. Rains (1997) 'Structure Versus Caring: Discrepant Perspectives in a Shelter for Street Children', *Children and Youth Services Review* 19(4): 301–22.
- Kipke, M., T. Simon, S. Montgomery, J. Unger and E. Iversen (1997) 'Homeless Youth and Their Exposure to and Involvement in Violence while Living on the Streets', *Journal of Adolescent Health* 20(5): 360–7.
- Kufeldt, K. and M. Nimmo (1987) 'Youth on the Street', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 11(4): 531–43.
- Lave, T. (1995) 'Breaking the Cycle of Despair: Street Children in Guatemala City', *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 27(1): 57–121.
- Lusk, M. (1989) 'Street Children Programs in Latin America', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 16(1): 55–77.
- Lusk, M. (1992) 'Street Children of Rio de Janeiro', *International Social Work* 35: 293–305.
- Lusk, M., F. Peralta and G. Vest (1989) 'Street Children of Juarez: A Field Study', *International Social Work* 32: 289–302.
- McCarthy, W. (1990) 'Life on the Streets'. PhD dissertation, Sociology, University of Toronto, Toronto.
- Marquez, P. (1999) *The Street is my Home: Youth and Violence in Caracas*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Mayor's Homeless Action Task Force (1998) *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*. Toronto: Metro Community Services.
- O'Reilly-Fleming, T. (1993) *Homeless Canadians Down and Out in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

- Palenski, J. (1984) *Kids Who Run Away*. Saratoga, NY: R.E. Publishers.
- Rivlin, L.G. and L. Manzo (1988) 'Homeless Children in N.Y. City: A View from the 19th Century', *Children's Environment Quarterly* 5: 26–33.
- Rizzini, I. and M. Lusk (1995) 'Children in the Streets: Latin America's Lost Generation', *Children and Youth Services Review* 17(3): 391–400.
- Robertson, J. (1992) 'Homeless and Runaway Youths: A Review of the Literature', in M. Robertson and M. Greenblatt (eds). *Homelessness: A National Perspective*, pp. 287–97. New York: Plenum Press.
- Rothman, J. (1991) *Runaways and Homeless Youth*. New York: Longman.
- Ruddick, S.M. (1996) *Young and Homeless in Hollywood*. New York: Routledge.
- Shane, P. (1989) 'Changing Patterns among Homeless and Runaway Youth', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 59(2): 208–14.
- Smollar, J. (1999) 'Homeless Youth in the United States: Description and Developmental Issues', in M. Raffaelli and R. Larson (eds) *Homeless and Working Youth Around the World: Exploring Developmental Issues*, pp. 47–58. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Stierlin, H. (1973) 'Family Perspectives on Adolescent Runaways', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 29: 56–62.
- UNICEF (1990) *Children and Development in the 1990's*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund.
- UNICEF (1999) *The State of the World's Children*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Verma, S. (1999) 'Socialization for Survival: Developmental Issues Among Working Street Children in India', in M. Raffaelli and R. Larson (eds) *Homeless and Working Youth Around the World: Exploring Developmental Issues*, pp. 5–18. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Vosburgh, W. (1988) 'Voluntary Associations, the Homeless and Hard to Serve Populations – Perspectives from Organizational Theory', *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* 17(1): 10–23.
- Whyte, W. (1955) *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*, 2nd edn. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Yablonski, L. (1968) *The Hippie Trip*. New York: Pegasus.
- Yalnizyan, A. (1998) *The Growing Gap: A Report on Growing Inequality between the Rich and the Poor in Canada*. Toronto: The Center for Social Justice.