



Street-Wise KZN

Care, Empowerment and Community Reconciliation for Children Found Living and Working on the Streets and Support for Children at Risk of Leaving Home

(Established: 1988)

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SUBMISSION TO THE KWZAULU-NATAL LEGISLATURE PUBLIC HEARINGS
ON THE CHILDREN'S BILL [20 October 2006], by email through Ms Nokuthula Zuma

Sr HELENA MCKINNEY, Founder and Co-ordinator

Firstly, my apologies for absence from the hearing on the 18th October. I was delayed at Heathrow airport and arrived back at the Convent in Durban after 19h00 that night. Thank you for accepting this written submission.

STREET-WISE

Street-Wise undertakes **street outreach** in Durban, runs a **shelter** in Mariannhill, a **halfway house** in Botha's Hill, a **prevention** project in Amaoti (Inanda), and **aftercare** for children returned home.

Each of these includes a range of programmes.

With its sparse current resources, Street-Wise KZN averages a successful annual graduation of about 35 boys per annum.

When Department of Welfare personnel are able to provide the back-up services (aftercare) for children who have been returned home, in their own communities, it will be possible to work with greater numbers of children again.

Until Street-Wise lost its annual funding of R1.4 million from the European Union to the RDP in 1998, there were 5 branches in Gauteng as well as the Durban branch. Now there is a branch in Gauteng and one in Durban. These are in the process of becoming autonomous.

AREAS OF CONCERN

We greatly appreciate the effort that has been made to enable public participation in shaping the Children's Amendment Bill.

Within this framework, we wish to express deep concern that children found living and working on the streets are excluded from mainstream programme planning and costing for children in need of care and protection, in the Children's Amendment Bill.

(a) PROGRAMME PLANNING

Members of the National and KwaZulu-Natal Regional Alliances have been acutely disturbed by the inconsistency of programmatic responses within drop-in, and residential centres.¹

As regards shelters,

- the ad hoc procedures followed by many non-members, have brought discredit to the sector, and
- the pressures under which staff work, lead even reputable staff members to sometimes engage in unacceptable practices.

In KwaZulu-Natal, these issues have been raised through children's participatory workshops and discussed in a participatory forum (18 May 2006) of the KwaZulu-Natal Alliance.²

RECOMMENDATION

In order to bring consistency and professionalism in programmatic responses to the sector, it is very important that residential centres (i.e. "shelters") that cater for children who live and work on the streets be resituated in Chapter 13, from Chapter 14.

The therapeutic and developmental programmes listed in Chapter 13, section 191 (2) (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(h) and (j) are all currently carried out by reputable, registered NGOs for children living and working on the streets.

AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL

Only minor, technical changes, will need to be made to the Children's Amendment Bill to accommodate this recommendation:

- **The word "shelter" must be deleted from Chapter 14.**
- **In Chapter 13, section 191 (1)(b) "shelter or" must be deleted.**

(b) FINANCING

We understand from the National Association of Child Care Workers that the Department of Social Welfare and Population Development has costed Child and Youth Care Worker services ONLY for Chapter 13.

The services of these professionals have brought a radical improvement to service delivery in accredited NGOs.

¹ Content Workshop 13-14 June 2006 as well as regional meetings and NASC annual conferences.

² Children's itemized lists of the "worst things that can happen in shelters" and the "best shelters" – as well as the recommendation from the KZN participatory forum are briefly outlined in ADDENDUM 1.

However, they are just as vitally important in Drop-in Centres as they are for residential services (“shelters”).

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that in Chapter 14 section 215, the phrase “suitably qualified” be inserted before “persons” and that it also be made clear here, that organisations must have suitably qualified staff members.

Unless the personnel are professional and follow professional programmes, the next phase for the children is not easily successful.

In recent years, when collecting children from so-called “first-phase” shelters, Street-Wise has battled constantly to deal with major problems which have been generated in those environments, before children are able to move forward in the Street-Wise programme.

At the HSRC Conference in 1993 it was clear that “first phase” (residential) shelters would not be necessary if really good Drop-in Centres were run, which could reunite children with marginal problems, with their families.

A number of presentations have already been made, that list the recommended Minimum Norms and Standards that members of the National Alliance for Street Children have approved for Drop-in Centres,³ and that the sector urges should be written into the Children’s Amendment Bill. These are:

RECOMMENDATION

Chapter 14, section 220: Add two sections before the basic norms and standards already listed, as follows:

(1) Premises used as a drop-in centre must -

- (a) make an immediate assessment of the needs of the child and the possibility of family re-unification;**
- (b) attend to referral of child to external developmental agencies;**
- (c) keep a daily register of all children with monthly reporting to the department of social services;**
- (d) have suitably qualified staff available during opening hours.**

(2) A drop-in centre must provide, in accordance with the prescribed standards, programmes for the children in its care. These programmes must include:

- (a) a development and treatment plan;**
- (b) a family reunification or other appropriate placement programme;**
- (c) access to education;**
- (d) access to health services;**
- (e) access to social development services; and**
- (f) any other prescribed programme or service.**

³ through the national Working Group facilitated by UCT Children’s Institute and ChildrenFIRST.
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ADDENDUM 1

1. Children's communications about "The worst things that happen in shelters"

(This is why the move to professionalisation of services and adequate, committed funding to ensure trained personnel and other resources, is so important.)

Children play-acted "The best things that happen in shelters". Verbalisations were taped but are not yet translated. Staff & personal respect, personal growth, peer support; were some topics.

GENERAL
children allowed to sniff glue
cigarettes & dagga for sale in shelters
clothes not clean
cold water showers only – "it's like the street like under a roof"
eating utensils insufficient
fancy food for staff only
food stale
getting old and torn clothes to wear
glue for sale in shelters
not being allowed to make your own choices
rape at the toilets
sleeping with dirty blankets – "it's like the street like under a roof"
stale bread for children but staff have cooked food
tools not available to fix toys to play
uncomfortable beds
visitors not given chairs
STAFF
abuse children emotionally
abuse children physically
beat children
buy stolen goods from children
call children names and label them
cover up rapes of children
don't listen to children
gossip about children and their problems
have affairs with children
judgemental in resolving conflicts
remind children of their pasts
sell glue and dagga to children
send children to bed without food
share drugs with children
show favouritism among children
slap children
smoke when with children
steal food donated for the children
steal good, donated clothes, for their own children
take frustrations out on children
talk on cellphone instead of with children

2. A KZN ASC meeting on 18 May 2006 concluded that staff are not sufficiently supported. They need debriefing due to the pressures they encounter. They work and travel for long hours, which allows little time for family, or to address personal problems. Themba Club and Street-Wise decided to introduce counselling and debriefing sessions. Other NGOs spoke of considering similar processes.