



CATHOLIC ACTION FOR STREET CHILDREN

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GHANA



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Closure of Fieldwork Department-CAS

Dear Reader,

Here we are again with news from CAS. We wish you all a Happy New Year. Yes, we are one month late, but we are aware of it. We were not able to write a newsletter in December 2011 because as mentioned before, we were busy re-constructing CAS. We have indeed closed the fieldwork department and in this issue we will explain more about this decision.

During the month of December, we held many meetings to plan for this new-year. The discussions centred on the children. We noticed that a number of children have visited the Refuge for many years but do not progress. Even some members of staff were content with the children's participation but did not realize that less attention was given to the new-comers. You will understand that this has been a very difficult issue to discuss.

In 2012, we plan to train all the children who visit the Refuge. We offer training, those who are not interested to learn and leave the street should not interfere in the training as well.

It is very easy to say we train "out of school" children in skills and trades, but it is very difficult to develop their interest. They are happy with their freedom. When they get something to eat they will forget everything else. It is still surprising to us that some wait until they are 18 or more, before they take a decision about what to do with their lives. Last December, Fr. Patrick and Mr. Shand come to Ghana to start a pilot research. They questioned why some children succeed in leaving the streets and others do not.

In November, Bridget, who is responsible for volunteers and students together with bro. Jos travelled to Norway, to Harstad University. Here we discussed the same topic; 'do persons with a limited level of education have a chance to survive? Of course, there is a big difference between the European setting and the Ghanaian setting. In Ghana, we have many illiterate persons, people who never had a chance to be educated or they only received a limited level of education. The numbers are not in thousands but in millions persons who live different kinds of life. Without a certificate you can still make it. You can even be a leader of an association or in charge of something.

This explains why so many children are not bothered with their future. In the slums, there is a lively industry in all kind of sectors. Timber, food, metal, cars etc. There is a lot to do.

The research conducted by Fr. Patrick and Mr. Shand will reveal some aspects of this different world. We are very interested to cooperate with the researchers to find some answers.

TRAINING.

What kind of training are we planning to give? Let us first look at the skill training. I hope you know the difference between skills and trades? Skills includes not only management skills, organisational skills but also, soap making, laundry, bead-making, cooking food, repairing bicycles, dancing, rapping to mention a few. These abilities can help you to survive. Trades are abilities which need a longer period of learning.

Often trades can be learnt by practicing them. In a year or two you can learn the basics but the main trade you learn by doing it.

In Ghana, you can sit for a National Vocational practical trade test after two years of learning. Again this is the basics.

CAS wants to train all children to this level. Those who are capable can also sit for the theoretical test.



We intend to prepare the children first. Children from the street have still to learn how to behave, how to take care of themselves. Most of them have never gone to school so they have to follow literacy classes.

Drama, music, and computers lessons do game and sport and learn drawing. They also follow counselling periods.

This preparation period is different for each child. Some improve their behaviour very fast, others need more time.

CAS has now 5 departments:

1. The House of refuge Department
2. Demonstration Department
3. Short term sponsorship Department
4. Long term sponsorship Department
5. Hopeland Training Centre

History of the fieldwork activities CAS.

The fieldwork activities started even before CAS was officially registered as an NGO (1993). We met the children in the streets and tried to do something for them. Soon we realised that this could not be done in the streets. We needed a centre where the children could come to and receive education, medical attention and advice. This centre became the House of Refuge.

Fieldwork activities were organised in the centre of the city because most of the children could be found. From there we learnt what to do and how to help them. We shelved all our original plans because they were theoretical ideas.

In the centre of the city, we gave advice to children and discovered from them that many had never seen a school from the inside. We started street corner education programmes.

These were organised at so called “meeting-points”, places where street children gathered during their resting time. CAS developed the education materials which could be understood by the children since nothing was available in the world market.

We even improved these lessons by providing foldable stools for the children.

Most of the children we met during the starting period were migrant children who had come from the rural areas. CAS did not want to assist urban poor children because we thought they could be assisted by their own parents or relatives.

The city changed. Lorry-parks and markets were re-located and new roads were made. Also the number of children increased and not enough menial jobs were available for the children. Many moved to the sub-burbs because new lorry-parks were made there. CAS workers also moved to these suburbs. We decided to start mini refuges in some areas. Wooden kiosks were made. Although, during that time we held monthly meetings with the AMA (Accra-Metropolitan Assembly) planning office, we could not agree with the metro-officials in the particular areas as how to run these mini-refuges. Even some kiosks were destroyed by AMA officials during so called "cleaning exercises". Cleaning exercises are periods when AMA officials try to enforce their laws. No selling on the pavements, removing from un-authorized kiosks etc.

CAS learnt that there are many authorities in the city. We thought that by coming to an agreement with the main planning officers was sufficient. Not so, other officials have other ideas and implemented their own laws and regulations.

In addition to the AMA officials, there are officials of the transport union, market officials, and officials of associations such as the truck-pushers. Others are in-charge of certain industries in the area. In short, a lot of ground work has to be done before something can be organised.



CAS rented rooms instead and four mini refuges were used for some number of years.

CAS conducted a number of headcounts to get up to date figures of the street children population. We discovered that on an average every five years the number doubled. Street children moved to other areas and we followed. CAS closed all four mini refuges and concentrated on organising the activities at these meetings points.

The number of children increased and so did the number of street workers. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to measure the impact of the work in the streets. CAS had 11 street workers who had to be paid. The donors wanted to see results which we could not give. (period 1992-1999).

Every day the workers meet different children and they received advice from the workers and disappeared. How do you measure the impact of the teaching and interaction?

As a result we lost the donors we needed for this important work. CAS reduced the number of workers to four and conducted a lot of researches instead. There are still many questions we could ask ourselves about the children who do not go to school but are in the streets. We worked with the Department of Social Welfare and met the social welfare officers who are working in the various districts of the Greater Accra Region.

The number of children increased again and it became clear to us that fieldwork activities can only have good results when it is coordinated by one body and carried out by many officers. The “out of school” children are everywhere in the Region. These include migrant children, those born on the street, children from poor families and working children.

There are children on the many beaches of the coast of the region. Others appear in areas where there is a lot of sand winning and stone-quarrying. Children are working on the land; children are in the suburbs and in the centre of the city.



Even when many NGOs contribute, the impact will be minimal. The numbers are too great, the area too vast and the problems too many.

CAS still hopes that the government understands the gravity of the problem and support the work of the Department of Social Welfare which could do a lot of work for the children in the various districts with the assistance of the NGOs.

We will keep you informed about future developments.

Kind Greetings from CAS.

Bro. Jos van Dinther (Director CAS)