



Newsletter 87

October 2020

### WHO LIVES IN THE SLUMS?



Living in a kiosk.

Dear Reader,

We are still in period of uncertainty because of the Corona virus, but this period has also made us reflect more on the phenomenon of street children, their families and how best to assist them in the future.

As explained before, we are now concentrating on “urban poor children”. These families live in the urban setting. Their parents do not have enough financial means to send their children to school. But the schools are closed anyhow. Or are these children more technical inclined? They prefer working with their hands. Interestingly, we discover that very quickly. Those who have no feeling for working with their hands abscond after a few weeks.

Our fieldworkers visit the families to see if help is needed. Very often the home situation is not very good. There are parents who struggle even to feed their children. Not all, but many of these families have migrated from the rural areas. They live in rented rooms or managed to build a kind of a house with cheap building material. Running water, electricity and toilet facilities are not available.

The positive point is, they are still together as a family and try to make the best out of it.

During the first ten years of existence of CAS, staff decided to work only for children who had migrated from the rural areas. As soon as management discovered that the child was not a migrant child but an urban poor child further action was stopped. This was usually done after the social survey report had been presented.

This approach changed when we discovered that the second generations of children had arrived. We were not sure any more whether the child, who lived in a kiosk, was a migrant child or an urban poor child.

Over a period of time we have seen slums developing in and around Accra. Often, children who are living in the streets are from these slums. It becomes even more confusing when complete families moved there.

Our definition of Migrant children, children of various generations and urban poor children is clear to us, but it is not always clear where the border line has to be placed.

Social-workers who conducts the social survey report names the child a migrant child and the others name the child an urban poor child.



DOES IT MATTER?

We think it does. With the experience CAS has, to work with the different groups we clearly see some differences now. I am sure many of the workers will agree with me.

A migrant child grows up in the street often alone or with a few friends from the same ethnic background. They have learnt to survive. They have become stronger and harder. When visiting the House of Refuge they show or display their restlessness. They often quarrel and fight. It takes time to calm them down and able to listen to the workers. They also need time to make up their mind of what to learn for the future. We have witnessed children who for years visited CAS, took part in activities but refused to go to the classroom at the refuge.

CAS workers had to teach them the basic elementary skills of living. Usually these skills are taught when living in a family. Those who had learnt the wrong skills or life-skills in the wrong way needed months to be corrected.

It was difficult for many children to change their habits when remain living in the streets and visiting CAS occasionally. Those who were invited to go to Hopeland to live and stay there had a better opportunity because Hopeland has a residential setting. CAS members of staff live with the children in the same compound.

It is clear; these children miss the family setting and everything that goes with it. These include family, the extended family, and the tribal customs' among others. In short, they miss their identity.

We tried to give them back their dignity. This could only be done when the child cooperated. They had to help themselves with our assistance.

The corona virus has changed a lot for CAS.



We are very careful to work with the first two categories of children. Our fear is, we do not know where the street child is coming from and with whom he or she has been in contact. Therefore, we decided for the safety of all the workers to ask these children to return home or find a safe place for themselves.

Now we pay attention to Children who live in some kind of a home and have a family. And the difference we notice in terms of general response to programs and activities at the Refuge and at Hopeland.

- These children do not have to learn the basic elementary life skills.
- The restlessness, fighting and quarreling have stopped.
- Children respect the workers.
- And those who have the inclination to work with their hands remain and learn the skills they want to learn.
- Hygiene has improved because the children go home in the evening.
- The majority are girls some older than 18 years of age or young adults.

#### WORKING WITH FAMILIES.

We at CAS are beginning to get convinced that working with families or assisting them, will reduce the numbers of children in the streets and improve the safety and quality of the society in Ghana.

1. Our plans are to highlight the differences of the various groups of children.
2. To seek expert advice as how single parents should be assisted.
3. To ask the church leaders to advice the youth in universities, schools and other institutions on friendship, relationship, marriage and responsibilities to have their own children.

We will use our website, face-book page and other social media platforms.

Working with parents also have negatives effects.

Some parents want CAS to take complete care of their child, supply transport, feed the child and take care of the child when sick.



Some parents do not allow their ward to attend classes when they need them for other purposes.

In short, some parents want to hold CAS responsible for everything.



Fortunately, there are several individuals, groups and organizations which are ready to help us.

Ms. Joy Emefa Dawudu and friends donated books and stationeries to CAS. Some individuals came to celebrate their birthdays with the children. Several parishes and individuals donated food and products for hygiene to CAS.

The Standard Chartered bank has signed an agreement with CAS and Fr. Campbell's to run soup kitchens and continue to support children. We are very grateful to everybody who wants to assist the children.

## FEEDING STREET CHILDREN.

CAS has always been hesitant in feeding street children. The reasons are:

1. CAS cannot employ staff specifically to cook and distribute food. We want to run it as part of the catering and cooking training programs.
2. Feeding children cannot be sustained. What will happen when the donation has been used or run out?
3. The numbers of street children is too high. Therefore, we have decided to feed those who are in training and helping themselves. Later, when the corona restrictions from the Government are lifted, the other two groups of children can join and also benefit.
4. We do not want to take the responsibility of the parents to take care of their own children.
5. We try to restrict this program to “children”. The limit is eighteen years of age unless otherwise.

Because the schools are closed, we have observed that “school going children” of the neighborhood joined the children during eating time.

Therefore, we are ready to feed the children but in a restricted way. It will surely not be a soup kitchen for anybody.

If we want to reduce children entering the streets, we have to educate the children. The most natural place for a start is while they are with the family.

Why do we not assist the parents who have difficulty to take care of their children? Food for thought.





  
Bro. Jos van Dinther  
(Director CAS)