

Fall 2009

# Children on the Margins: A Case Study of I Care's Hope Centre for Street Children in Durban, South Africa

Morgan Sullivan  
*SIT Study Abroad*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection)



Part of the [Social Welfare Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Morgan, "Children on the Margins: A Case Study of I Care's Hope Centre for Street Children in Durban, South Africa" (2009). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 736.  
[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/736](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/736)

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

CHILDREN ON THE MARGINS:

A Case Study of *I Care's* Hope Centre for Street Children in Durban, South Africa

Morgan Sullivan  
Geoff Waters, Sociologist  
School for International Training  
South Africa: Reconciliation and Development  
Fall 2009

**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements.....2

Abstract.....3

Introduction.....4

Methodology.....7

Findings

    Daily Routine.....10

    Staff.....13

    Outreach.....16

    Reunification.....18

    Rehabilitation.....21

    Glue Related Incidents.....22

    Life Stories/Observations of the Children.....25

    My Role.....30

Conclusions.....31

Bibliography.....34

Appendices.....35

## **Acknowledgments**

I would first and foremost like to thank John, Shola, and Langa for opening my eyes to the wild world of South Africa and opening their hearts to myself and the rest of the group allowing us to feel comfortable and taken care of while staying in this country. Without your guidance, constant concern, and respect, I could never have experienced as much as I have. You have opened my eyes, my mind, and my heart to more than I could have ever expected and for that, I thank you. I appreciate all you have done for me and for the group as a whole.

Thank you to Geoff Waters, my wonderful advisor, for being patient with me and being so helpful in my times of need and never ending confusion. For encouraging me to be creative and for showing general concern for me...especially when I was going in 15 different directions with my project. Thank you for helping me narrow my ideas and for giving me the support that I needed.

I would like to thank the staff at *I Care* for opening your doors, your ears, and your hearts to me. Thank you for welcoming me with open hearts and showing care and concern for me and for the children that come to you every day. I thank you for sharing your stories and for showing your trust, your love, your respect, and your passion for helping the children.

I want to thank the boys that I have met for letting me into your lives and into your world. Thank you for sharing your stories with me, for the hugs, for the laughs, and for erasing any stigma that existed in my mind about children living on the streets. I hope that you gain the respect and the love that you deserve and that your futures are bright. I am grateful for my time with each and every one of you and know that I respect, care, and love you deeply.

A very special thanks to, my family at home and my new family here in South Africa, for showing me continuous support and concern while I have been in this country and especially when working at *I Care*. I appreciate your open ears and hearts to my day-to-day heartaches after each grueling day and offering me love and advice when needed. To you, I lift my glass in gratitude and know that without your support, I wouldn't have made it this far.

## **Abstract**

Seeing street children was a new concept to me, but all too familiar to Durban, South Africa. It is something that had struck me and bothered me from my arrival here in South Africa and an issue that will trouble me for a lifetime. Working with *I Care* at the Hope Centre allowed me to get an inside look at the lives of some of these street children while building positive relationships with both the staff and the children alike. I began to see the children as children and saw past their rugged, stone-faced exteriors deep down to their desperate, attention-seeking souls.

While at *I Care*, I was able to participate in daily activities and have informal interviews with both the staff and the children. While being an active member of the *I Care* staff, I was able to gain insight into the lives of the children and the organizations that attempt to better their lives. Although sometimes the days at the centre were grueling and painful, each day was filled with new and eye-opening experiences that allowed me to formulate the opinions and conclusions that I will outline in this paper.

What I realized while working with the children was that the majority of the kids are vastly misunderstood by society as a whole. Many people walk past these children on a daily basis without a second thought about where they are from and why they choose to sniff glue on a regular basis. Many people refuse to acknowledge the truth that these children have a history and many are simply aching for love. While at *I Care*, I realized that there are people who do good work and care about the well being of these children and want to help them to help themselves to a better life. As Dr. Seuss says, "A person's a person no matter how small".

## **Introduction**

The issue of homeless street children in Durban is a growing problem and one that burdens the community. The street children of Durban, and of the world, are often gravely misunderstood. Social stigmas suggest that most of them are drug addicts, that they enjoy living on the streets because there they can get what they want, that they really do have homes and are merely "naughty children". While some of this is true to an extent, much of it is formulated by the close-mindedness and prejudices of a society with a tendency to view them as little more than a nuisance. It is easy to judge someone who is homeless--especially a child--rather than to face the reality that these kids belong to someone and that they *do* have a story. Many of the children on the streets do not want to be there-- but it is actually better for them to live there than to live in their homes. The children beg because they need something to sustain themselves and so they often turn to glue or other drugs to keep their minds off of how cold they are or how hungry or just struggling to stay alive. The reality is that the life of a street child is much more complex than the average bystander would realize...or would want to realize.

Street children are a major issue in South Africa's urban cities. The problem is not just with the rising amount of crime that they contribute to, but also where they stay, their education, and their rehabilitation. The issue is not only a heavy burden on the social workers and the people who work with the children, but also on the cities and the officials themselves. Social workers and many childcare workers try relentlessly to acclimate the children back into their communities and have tried many desperate attempts to rehabilitate them so that they can move up in their lives and either go home or get back on their feet. Several shelters and drop-in centers have been put in place in order to assist the children on a daily basis and to keep them off of the streets for a period of time. Many of these organizations' eventual goals are to reunite the children with their families. Some are successful, and many are not. The overall goal, in my opinion, is to offer respect to these children where they often feel disrespected. "Millions of children worldwide are subjected to poverty, abuse, and neglect, yet only a minority chooses to abandon their homes in search of a supposedly better life on the street"<sup>1</sup>. My intent was to better

---

<sup>1</sup> (Roux & Smith, 1998, p. 1)

understand the lives of these children and what we, as a society, can do to better their lives and improve their futures. For these reasons and many more, I chose to spend my time with *I Care* in Grayville.

My attempt to understand the topic of street children began with an extensive search for any and all publications that have been released in regards to this issue. To prepare myself for my time at *I Care*, I read resources that had been published years ago—the most recent short article published on the street children of Durban was found in a journal in 2007. The sources that I had found displayed very similar information, each of them attempting to examine the daily life of a street child and the workings of organizations that assist them.

*I Care* is a faith-based organization that deals with the street children of Durban on a daily basis. Its operating credo is “Giving Children a Future”. They believe that by giving a child money directly when they beg, it only feeds into the issue of child homelessness because that child, in turn, will buy what they want—which is usually not something that they really need and something that will not sustain them. Their main goal is to promote the reunification of the children with their families as well as to rehabilitate the children and to get them back into school. This organization, like others, attempts to give the children a sense of community and to develop a compassionate relationship with the kids so that they may feel comfortable enough to open up and to feel that it is okay to go back home when they are ready.

Many shelters and different street children organizations attempt to reunite the child with their families. They attempt to better understand the lives and the situations of the children and, of course, what caused them to run to the streets. Many organizations, however, try to get the child to go back home immediately instead of when the child is ready. This will eventually cause the child to abscond again. Some organizations, such as *I Care*, will work with the families in order to improve their situation. The family must be socially, economically, and emotionally ready to take the child back. The shelters who want to reunite the families should be prepared to

ensure the safety and positive upbringings of these children<sup>2</sup>. When there is not enough continued support on the end of the organization is when the reunification is unsuccessful. There must be continued support and communication between the child, the family, and the organization to ensure the child does not abscond again. This includes assisting the family with basic needs (food, school fees, and the like) and what also may be important is teaching them basic life skills (i.e. budgeting, a trade, or gardening)<sup>3</sup>. Although life on the street is appealing to the child in regards to no rules, no responsibilities, and a lot of freedom—the dangers that are packaged with life on the streets are all too real. *I Care* attempts to stress that the love and care that a family provides is necessary in order for a child to grow. If an organization wishes to rehabilitate a child and reunite them successfully in order to provide them with a better future, they must first address the needs of the children. All programming should be planned accordingly to what the child wants—or else it will not be successful<sup>4</sup>.

The way that *I Care* operates as an organization, as described on their website, is in cyclic form beginning with awareness, outreach, rehabilitation, housing/shelter, education, job skills, and the end result is (hopefully) molding the children into effective members of society<sup>5</sup>. This cycle is carried out by the several different services that *I Care* provides including outreach, aftercare, Khutaza rehabilitation program, lower Illovo homes and school, and various life-skills and entertaining programs conducted by volunteers at the Hope Centre.

In my study, I focused mainly on the workings of the *I Care* organization, focusing especially on the Hope Centre, and how it affects the children who utilize its services. I observed and participated in its several programs, including outreach which uses the streets as their working field, I visited the homes and school which is designed for boys who are no longer on the streets but who cannot go home for various reasons and have completed the Khutaza rehabilitation and life skills program, and also played a very active role at the Hope Centre on a daily basis. As time went on, I was able to build trusting relationships with many of the children

---

<sup>2</sup> (Kariuki, 2007, p. 188)

<sup>3</sup> (Garlick, 2003, p. 1)

<sup>4</sup> (Jackson, 2002, p. 1)

<sup>5</sup> (*I Care: the I Care cycle*, 2009)



so that they felt comfortable telling me their stories so that I could, in turn, re-tell them to people who may not know about how hard their lives really are. I believe that this study is relevant in order to provide a greater understanding to the community so that the children are treated with more respect and dignity, factors which they are refused on a daily basis

## **Methodology**

I first became interested in street children before the first book review was due. I selected a book that I found very interesting that dealt entirely with the pains and triumphs of working with street children. It offered an inside look not only into their lives, but also into the lives of the people who worked with them<sup>6</sup>. It was a very realistic account of the trials and tribulations and interested me instantly. The book was captivating and it opened my eyes to who the kids are as people and why they run away in the first place. It allowed me to think and look deeper into the issue and to look beyond the rough exterior of a street child into whom they really are. This was followed by a viewing of the movie, *Izulu Lami* and a lecture presented by the director of the film. I was captivated by the depiction of the children and their lives and wanted to know more. I started to notice them more on the streets and my heart went out to them. When approached with the idea of working with *I Care* for my volunteer NGO week, I jumped to opportunity. At this time, I was hesitant as to what my independent study would be on, but deep down I knew that I wanted to reach out to these children in any way possible. I knew that I wanted to offer them understanding and care and to give them the opportunity to tell their stories to me so that I could re-tell them so that others would also understand.

My time at *I Care*, although short, was always busy and well spent in regards to the amount of information that I gathered while playing an active role in the daily *I Care* “routine”. I took advantage of every opportunity that arose, including outreach, informal interviews, participating in staff meetings, and conducting programs with the boys. I also had a few experiences outside of *I Care* while walking in the city. I was able to participate and observe

---

<sup>6</sup> Heather Parker Lewis' *Also God's Children*, 1998.

simultaneously and my time spent at the Hope Centre allowed me to utilize my resources and the relationships I had built with the staff and the kids to the fullest extent. Overall, I learned new things everyday and my horizons were broadened on a regular basis. Through my experiences at the Hope Centre and beyond, I was able to make keen observations and, from there, was able to make conclusions.

Because I was fortunate to have an exposure to *I Care* for a week prior to the official independent study start time, I already had one week of information and experiences under my belt to add to the 3 weeks of experiences and information that I would eventually gather. I was able to ask a lot of questions and see things that I did not get to see again during my actual independent study period (i.e. reunification). I was able to get a loose grasp on what *I Care* was really about and get a sense for what the boys and staff were like before I could fully indulge into the organization.

What the program director, Jenni-lyn and I had come up with for my time at *I Care* was for me to participate in outreach two days a week, have time with the boys for my own program two days a week, and go to the school and home for rehabilitated boys once a week. Because of this, my first idea for my focused study was to interview former or “reformed” street children who were trying to or had already bettered their lives. This quickly went out the window because it is so chaotic and hectic at the Hope Centre, where I was stationed daily, that there had to be space for flexibility and quick change of pace on a regular basis. In turn, this caused my decision on a more focused study to be delayed and I decided to “live in the moment” at the Hope Centre because sometimes, there is nothing else you can do.

Despite the abrupt change in plans, I was able to conduct several informal interviews with Donation, the leader of the outreach team, on the way to and from the Hope Centre as well as when I joined him for daily pick-ups. I was also able to get close enough with many of the boys and was able to ask questions and they felt comfortable enough to speak freely. I always made the children and the staff aware that I was eventually going to write up my experiences in a paper for university and that their stories and accounts were very important in order for me to produce a work that would open people’s eyes to the reality of street children and who they

really are as people. Both the kids and the staff encouraged me and were very open with their answers and asked me to ask them questions on a regular basis. Many of these question and answer periods were interrupted, however, by the regular fights or disruptions that would occur within the centre on a daily basis. There was also a language barrier that often got in the way of getting to know all of the kids equally and wholly. I was unable to hear many of the stories of the boys because they could not speak or understand English well enough to converse with me. This also became an issue when there were programs or interventions between the staff and the children. I often found myself asking one of the older boys or staff members, “What did he/she just say?” and “What just happened?”. This would often prevent me from getting a full account of what was going on between the staff and the children and also what the children would say during the course of the day.

While it wasn't too difficult to get information out of the staff members, many of the kids were hesitant about sharing information with me. It was difficult working with such a vulnerable population and in order to get the information that I was curious about, I often had to ask staff members or sit in on data input to find out why each child was living on the streets. While the children knew I was there as a volunteer, the ones who knew I was observing and trying to know more about their lives were the ones who offered their stories and anecdotes freely. I tried to ask many questions, but I often found myself listening to whoever I was talking to without having to ask many questions at all.

Every day was a journey and a plight in itself. While I was not at *I Care* for a long time and I could have seen and learned much more if allotted more time, I believe that I experienced enough to compile a paper that would make an impact on at least one person who has ever had an encounter with a street child. Although my idea of how I would be utilized at the centre did not go as planned, I do believe that I learned a lot and that I made a difference as they definitely made a difference in me. If anything, I realized that the kids that I encountered deserve and want desperately respect, love, and care—just as any other child does. Each face, each story, and each

child will never be forgotten and will never go unnoticed on the street by me—and hopefully not by anyone who comes across this paper.

## **My Findings:**

### **Daily “Routine”**

An ideal day at the *I Care* Hope Centre would begin with pick-up by either Donation or Jabulani starting around 8:30AM. The boys are picked up from Umhlanga, Point Road, and by the container shelter by the harbor. The other staff members arrive at the centre by 7:30AM and begin preparing breakfast and get ready for the boys’ arrival. This is typically 3 staff members: Thulile who runs the Hope Centre, Nonsi who is a childcare worker, and Precious who prepares the meals. The boys arrive to the Hope Centre by 10AM and have their baths before breakfast. I would typically arrive with the boys because I would be picked up before or after them on the way to the centre. There is some free time before they eat and during this free time, a roster is formed by one of the more responsible boys to determine how many boys came to the centre that day. The list of boys is then divided into groups for chores which include sweeping inside, sweeping outside, washing dishes from breakfast, and cleaning the bathroom. These chores are done after each meal. Once all the boys have bathed, they pray and quickly shovel the food into their hungry mouths. Breakfast is usually six pieces of bread with butter, peanut butter, or jam on them—but sometimes there are also donuts and croissants that have been donated. This meal is accompanied by either juice or tea. The older boys have a tendency to take bread from the smaller boys, and they don’t seem to mind. There is rarely any complaining about the food—but sometimes they become picky about the type of bread that they receive. All food is donated by individuals and by a Rotary sponsored food donation program which delivers to the centre once a week.

After the chores have been completed, there is typically a lot of free time while the children wait for a program to begin. Donation told me while we were on our way to pick up boys in Umhlanga one day that programs have to start much later because pickups must be done

after Donation has gotten to the centre. He complained that time is an issue because he cannot go with his own car to get the boys; even though it's on his way and that everything starts too late to have truly productive days. He believes that the days are not being taken advantage of to the fullest extent because time becomes such an issue.

After the boys have eaten and done their chores, it is already around 11:30AM and a program begins around 12—that is if someone comes to do something with the boys. Every Wednesday, there is supposed to be Bible study for an hour. The boys usually enjoy this, but it only happens if there are enough boys at the centre to participate. This Bible study is the only real religious thing that the boys participate in on a regular basis. There is often talk about God and how to help yourself through the power of God, but there is not regular praise and worship to fulfill the ideals that *I Care* was founded on.

In addition to this, there is also surfing once a week (if the weather is nice) which is donated by Roxy Learn to Surf. The boys really enjoy this and have gotten lessons regularly and many are becoming quite good. If the children do not want to surf, they are taken to Blue Lagoon pools. They also really enjoy this on a hot day—like any child would. On Thursdays, a man comes and does clay sculptures with the boys. This man volunteers his time and donates materials to the program in order for the boys to be able to produce something that they can be proud of. Although the kids do not get to keep their works of art for fear of destruction, they are displayed in shops and in the teacher's studio accompanied by a photo of the boy who created the work. He offers guidance to the boys and encourages them to be creative with their works. He told me that he believes art is a positive way to show emotions and talent that may not have been realized without some encouragement. If the pieces are sold, the money goes back to *I Care* as a donation. More programs should exist like this for the boys—but the reality is that there are not enough people who are interested in working with street children. Jenni-lyn told me that she stood up at three separate masses at her church to talk about *I Care* and ask if anyone would be willing to donate time in any way that they can. No one had gotten back to her. She said that it really is a struggle to find people who are not afraid of the boys and who are willing to assist

them and care for them by looking past their exterior and seeing beyond the preconceived notions that they may have about the boys.

If there is no one to do a program for the boys, Jabu works with them. She does an ice breaker to get them excited and involved and then does a thought-provoking activity with the kids. For example, one day Jabu had the boys do a debate on respect. She also had them talk about the difference between a good friend and a bad friend and how to find (and keep good friends). In addition to these activities, she has also had the boys do small art projects. While this is sometimes just “busy work” for the boys, it is easy to see that many of them are involved and perhaps what is happening internally in the boys’ minds and hearts is greater than we can see from the outside. The point of the exercises is to get the boys to think about their own lives in a productive way. If the boys are not participating in any of these activities, they are sleeping. Many of the boys spend the day sleeping at the centre instead of playing pool or participating in any of the various activities. Their fatigue is most likely caused by the lack of sleep that the boys get on the streets.

After the program of the day has ended, lunch is provided to the boys. Usually lunch is more sustaining than breakfast—but how tasty or how filling it is really depends on donations that are received at the centre. One day, a small Indian boy decided to share his birthday with the boys at *I Care*. His family donated a large pot of briyani as well as ice cream and served the boys one of the best meals they had had in a while. He and his family had no affiliation with *I Care*, but he wanted to share his day with the boys because he recognized that they did not have enough to eat. After lunch, chores are done again by the boys and soon after that (around 3 or 3:30PM), they are brought back to their respective sleeping spots—but not without their beloved glue bottles.

In a normal day, all of these things would occur with no issue—but the reality is that the *I Care* Hope Centre is a very hectic and chaotic place and very rarely do things go according to plan. On the wall of the centre, there is a fixed schedule with what is supposed to happen each day. Of course, this always goes awry for various reasons: there are not enough boys, there isn’t

anyone to run the programs because the volunteer didn't show up or there is a lack of volunteers, there is not enough staff, there is a fight, or something else will happen that will inevitably disrupt the day. I was told many times that *I Care* operates in the South African way and that you must be prepared to be flexible and not to have expectations that are too high of the boys and especially of how the day is supposed to go. If you do, then you set yourself up for disappointment. Only in my first week was I surprised that things did not go as planned on the schedule, the issue with this, of course, is that the children live with no rules on the streets. They have no responsibilities and their lives are at their fingertips. It is very difficult to affix boundaries and rules to children whose lives are boundless.

### *I Care Staff*

At the *I Care* Hope Centre, there are up to eight staff members working there at a time. This includes the outreach team, the aftercare team, the cook, child care workers, a volunteer social worker, a coordinator, and the program director. Each of these staff members has a different relationship with the kids. Some are closer with them than others, but many seem to be discontent with their jobs. I realize that this job wears on the heart strings, but I was surprised to see that most of the staff members hardly interact with the kids. While I was there, I was constantly with the kids—and maybe that relieved them of that duty, but I was surprised to see that they did not appear to be as passionate about the kids as one would expect.

Donation of the outreach team seemed to be the one who was the most passionate about his work with the boys and seemed to really care about each and every one of them. In addition to Donation's vibrant personality, his passion for his job was evident in the way he interacted with the boys during pick-ups and the little time he spent at the centre. His passions were clear to me when he told me that his mind is always on the boys and hardly ever on himself. He has a wife and a daughter, but he said that it is very important that they see what he does so if he is asked to work late, he will bring them. Every morning when he picked the boys up, he would play a trivia game with them in the car, play house music, sing, and dance with the boys. He

would act as a father or “big brother” figure when he would lecture them about the glue and he gained their respect by showing them respect as well.

Lucia and Jabulani of the aftercare team also have a tendency to lecture the kids on the importance of family and the love of God. The boys seemed to really respect Lucia as they would always listen to her and stop doing whatever they were doing when she entered the room. Perhaps this is because they have very limited interactions with her, but maybe it is because she shows them a lot of love and consideration while ruling with an iron fist. She has a way with talking to the boys and getting things out of them not only because they respect her, but because they trust her—which is very important in the life of a street child.

Thulile, the coordinator and leader of the *I Care* Hope Center, was the one who all of the boys respected as “Mama Thulile”. She also had a tendency to rule with an iron fist, but also had a great sense of humor. She had a way with the boys so that they would talk to her respectfully and would stop whatever bad thing they got caught doing (i.e. glue) because, in a way, they fear her. I do not believe they fear her because she was intimidating or scary—but I think it is because she is like a mother figure and in this country, you are required to respect your mother or any mother. From simple interactions with Thulile, I could tell that she had a real passion for helping the boys and ensuring their safety and well-being. She expressed her frustrations to me when the boys were sneaking glue and she was tired of being the one to discipline them. She does not like being the “bad guy” and having to be the one to constantly scold the boys because, she says, it is not her job. Although she is the main authority figure at the Hope Centre, she and the boys can joke around freely. Her approach to working with the kids is an effective one. She will be running the Khutaza rehabilitation program and the Hope Centre will be sad to see her go. Staff members like her are hard to come by.

On the opposing side, however, there will always be staff members who don’t seem to really care about their jobs or their line of work. I observed a few staff members who appeared to be this way—two of which were paid staff members. In Heather Parker Lewis’ book, [Also God’s Children](#), she explores the aches and pains of running various shelters for street children near



Cape Town. She expresses in great detail how especially difficult it is to find reliable help and also to build trusting relationships with the kids. Most information on street children in South Africa is very similar to Lewis' findings. Valid points have been made in regards to the work that miscellaneous organizations do for and with the street children, but there have also been many findings proving how the work that these organizations do is not beneficial to anyone but the higher-ups of the people who run them. It is hard to find honest, caring people who are passionate about the issue of street children and the dangerous, taxing work that comes with it when working for such a non-profit organization. The issue seen by an outsider is simple: kids are kids and they don't want to follow the rules and often don't respect the people who care for them. It is difficult to be authority figures because the children left home from their parents (their authority figures) and are constantly being disrespected by police and other officials. In turn, shelters are viewed in conflicting ways:

Some argued that shelters were ideal alternatives to home, providing security, love, and care. They pointed out that life in the shelters saved them from living in the streets and kept them away from harsh and difficult conditions at home...other children did not enjoy the image of a shelter as a home because the shelter revived unpleasant memories of their home environment and routine from which they were trying to run away...they felt that although living on the streets was not good, the streets offered an alternative to unbearable circumstances at home. Some...felt strongly that shelters should be less rigid on rules and regulations arguing for more flexibility...<sup>7</sup>

The biggest challenge that staff members at *I Care* face is the issue of respect. Because so many of the kids are constantly disrespectful, it is easy to see how the staff members can get frustrated quickly and, of course, lose their temper. In this respect, there are a few staff members who, on a daily basis, sit in the kitchen area—away from the kids—sending SMS's on their cell phones or eating. Maybe they could be uninterested or bored because they have been involved in the

---

<sup>7</sup> (Kariuki, 2007, p. 184)

organization for a long time and the routine got old—but I can't see how this could be so. I believe it takes a special person to be in the childcare field, but I also believe it takes a passionate person to make a difference in their work. The volunteer social worker told me that she doesn't enjoy working at *I Care* and that she is just waiting for a job elsewhere. She has little to no interaction with the boys and, I believe, she chooses to continue to do so. Especially if you are a volunteer, I believe that some sort of excitement, interest, or passion must be exhibited in order to prove yourself as useful tool to the organization and not merely taking up space and wasting time there.

## **Outreach**

According to the *I Care* website, the outreach team is the first contact that is made with the children and the initial relationships that are formed with the children are crucial. The staff members record the information of the new children on Form 4 information sheets, in compliance with the Child Care Act. This information is entered into the database and also kept on paper files so that the child's progress can be tracked and monitored in an efficient way<sup>8</sup>.

Outreach with Donation was my favorite aspect of the *I Care* cycle. I believe that it is one of the most important aspects, as well. I was always happy to see Donation in the morning and for our drives to fetch the boys from their various locations. I believe that this is when I got to see the boys in their rawest, most vulnerable state. Not only did I get to see the boys' natural (rather unnatural) environments and what they called "home". Once I was picked up and we drove around the Point area looking for one of the boys who we hadn't seen in a few days. We drove in circles for almost 30 minutes and picked up two kids along the way. We didn't find him. We would make the trip out to Umhlanga to pick up the ten boys that stay under the bridge there, but when it rains they travel by foot to Pheonix which is very close. When it is raining, the boys are constantly moving and because November is the rainy month in Durban, it was often a struggle to find the boys in their regular locations. In addition to this, the boys are using glue a

---

<sup>8</sup> (*I Care: the I Care cycle*, 2009)

lot more when the weather is bad because it keeps them warm. Because of this, when Donation and I would pick up the boys on a rainy day, they were all using glue before they got into the car. They pile into the car and hand Donation and I their jars, bags, and containers full of glue—making sure that we distinguished them from one another. The amount of glue that these boys had filled up the entire glove box and the smell was literally intoxicating. It was hard to sit near it and to sit in a car with a group of boys whose hands were covered and clothes stunk of glue. At first I was surprised and uneasy about seeing the boys high on glue when we picked them up in the morning, but I quickly became accustomed to collecting their bottles and bags of glue and putting them into the glove box of the car each morning...however I never became comfortable with it. It is absolutely heartbreaking to see a small boy slowly killing his own brain cells with a substance that makes him not feel anything at all.

On the pickups, sometimes all of the boys would come and sometimes some would stay behind. One day, two of the boys were begging at the robots when we arrived and Donation and I tried to get them to come, but they said that they owed two men money and that they would beat them if they didn't get it to them by the afternoon. We had to leave them behind. Sometimes it takes some real encouragement on Donation's part to convince the boys to come to *I Care* for the day. The boys are habituated to begging for money all day and getting what they want on the street—so why waste a few prime begging hours of the day at *I Care*? It was easy to see that Donation has a good relationship with the boys and when we are doing outreach, he is always honking his horn at boys that he knows (or doesn't know) who are living on the streets. He will pull the car over and talk to older boys who used to come to *I Care* but then got too old. He makes it a point to put his all into his job and to show the kids that he cares.

An important part of outreach is attempting to find and “rope in” new kids into the *I Care* system. After all, the overall goal is to get the kids off of the streets and eventually into safe shelter. I witnessed this process first-hand when we picked up a group of boys and one was new. When we arrived at the Hope Centre, the boys who were familiar with the shelter went inside and the new boy stayed in the car with Donation while he asked about his home life, why he was on the streets, and for how long. This process is not only important in the eventual rehabilitation

of the child, but also for the databases for *I Care*. It is crucial, as part of outreach, to attempt to get I.D.s on all of the kids who have ever come to *I Care*'s Hope Centre. None of the boys have I.D. books, so they get their names and supposed birthdates to enter into the system. Many of the boys have a tendency to lie about their ages and say that they are older than they actually are. 1996 seems to be the most popular year to be born in for most of the boys. After talking to many of the staff members, we concluded that the reason the kids lie about how old they are is for protection on the streets. They say that they are between 13 and 16 in order to save themselves from being bullied on the streets—even though their size and mannerisms suggest that they are far younger.

Outreach is one of the most important aspects to *I Care*, I believe, because it does just that—reaches out to the kids who need services. The outreach facet of *I Care* allows for a child to feel important while not feeling forced to be a part of the *I Care* family. The child is not required to come to the centre every day, but it does not stop Donation from searching for the child who was there the day before.

## **Reunification**

Another major aspect of *I Care*'s cycle is the reunification of the child with their family. Before this can happen, a child must fully disclose the information regarding their home life and why they left in the first place. The main reasons as to why the boys leave their houses to begin with are primarily due to poor living conditions or abusive and negligent parents. In Also God's Children, Lewis explored the family lives of the children *with* the children in order to assist in their rehabilitation. Many of the cases described in the book were horrific. In one instance, a child was reunited with the parent only to discover that the home was overpopulated, a parent was not present, there was garbage and feces around the house, and there was no food anywhere. It was evident why the child left in the first place...because there was nothing for them there and there was no encouragement to better their lives. The children are tempted to leave their homes because of their dire circumstances, and are forced to grow up too fast on the streets by being

exposed to many dangers and drug issues that they may not normally see in a “normal” home setting. It is stated that,

Children on the street face the unhappy reality of increasing separation from their natural families and become at risk for losing their limited access to basic facilities, such as health, education, and recreation. Once this process is underway, it is very difficult to hold in check, with the result that the child may end up abandoning the family or being abandoned by it. In terms of emotional health, the lack or loss of an adequate relationship with an adult caregiver poses the greatest problem for most street children.<sup>9</sup>

On a larger scale, the main reason for children leaving home is the immense poverty that over 50% of South Africa’s people face often causes great hardship and despair. The children are often ignored and the values that the country attempts to instill on the people are ignored. While many children abscond from home for a variety of different reasons, the root of almost every case is poverty.

Most of the children who come to *I Care* come from Inanda—which is a really rough township outside of Durban. Virtually all of the children left home due to poverty. Some had no parents, some were neglected or beaten, one was threatened by his mother that he would be killed, and one was living with his aunt who is blind. There is one boy, Yamkela, who actually came from a good home—his mother works in Umhlanga Rocks as a domestic worker and her employer offered to pay for his schooling and all other expenses. He did not accept. His mother stayed with her employer and so he was being raised by his older siblings. He claims that he left home because he was lonely. Clearly there is something psychological about his mother being away all of the time and him feeling the gap of being essentially parentless.

The majority of the children who come to *I Care* left their homes for a reason and do not want to return home. This is especially true if a child has not been on the streets for too long or if the child has been on the streets for almost too long. When a child comes to *I Care* for the first

---

<sup>9</sup> (Roux & Smith, 1998, p. 1)

time, a home visit it made. This is often made difficult by the child because he wants to waste time rather than show you where he really lives. Sometimes the reunification happens right then and there, but more often the child returns to the street and *I Care* continues to work with the family and the child towards reunification. If the conditions at home are too severe, the child is not encouraged to go home and is instead offered refuge at the *I Care* home in lower Illovo after rehabilitation is completed. The process of the initial home visits sometimes lasts a few days because the children either cannot remember where they live, they live too far away from where they originally say they stay, or because they want to string you along.

I was lucky enough to witness a reunification near Empangeni with a young boy named Sfuno. When he arrived at *I Care* he told the staff, "I want to go home today" and without hesitation, they packed some things, gave him a bath and breakfast, and began the two plus hour journey to his home. Because most of the kids come from rural areas, it is often hard for them to name a landmark. He told us that he lived in Empangeni, but really he lived an hour outside of it deep in the hills of the rural areas. There is no electricity and no running water where he lives, but he still lived in a good home with a loving family. When we arrived, Lucia and Jabulani ask the head of the household, in this case the grandfather, about the home situation, about the child, and about further services. It is, in a sense, a counseling service between the child and the parent. Sfuno had run away two times before and he had been brought back to his home before, as well. Both of his parents were gone (one was deceased and one was not in the picture) and I believe that he felt lost in the family, even though the family offered him so much love and attention. Sfuno was able to stay home and *I Care* will continue to support him and the family so that he will stay and not abscond again.

The aftercare portion of the cycle is the most important, according to Jenni-lyn. She says that continuing to show care and support of the child allows them to feel like they are not being dropped off and forgotten, but supported and encouraged. The aftercare visits include food parcels, clothing, school fees, and uniforms. The child is essentially taken care of by *I Care* in order to prevent the child from fleeing from his home again.

## Rehabilitation

We went to the new Khutaza rehabilitation center in KwaMakhutu that was donated by an individual source. It was previously used as a development center and looks a lot like a school. This, when finished, will house up to 20 boys for 3 months. They will stay there and go through rehab and motivational processes in order to keep them off the streets and away from substances. *I Care* will have to pay for this center R5000 a month for 5 years. The Khutaza rehabilitation centre focuses on the following life skills:

- Conflict & anger-management.
- Peer pressure.
- Substance.
- Family values.
- Basic communication.
- Sexuality & HIV / AIDS.
- Rights & responsibilities.
- Fears & anxieties.<sup>10</sup>

They can then choose to renew the lease, but they are unsure if they will at this point. They have big plans for the center. There will be two rooms with 10 beds each, one for the smaller boys and one for the bigger boys. This is to keep the peer pressure away. When we brought the boys to the new place to show them what it was going to be like, they seemed really blissful to be there and excited to see their new rooms and to have a place to call their own.

Illovo is the area in which the three homes and the school are located. The homes house 20 boys in 3 separate houses. Each has a house parent and each house has daily activities and chores. They all attend school on the Mother of Peace campus, an organization that allows *I Care* their own space for their classrooms. All of the boys have been through rehab and many are

---

<sup>10</sup> (*I Care: the I Care cycle, 2009*)

going back to their homes permanently on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December. Others are going home to visit their families for the holidays. This is after a lot of work with the families. The kids range in ages from 8 to probably 18.

The school's purpose is to assist the children who were formerly living on the streets get the education that they have missed for the period of time they were away from formal schooling. Because so many children run away at such a young age, many are left with a very limited amount of adequate schooling which in turn creates issues for the child to reintegrate back into a normal school setting. As the *I Care* website states, "The I Care Christian School is founded on the ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) system". The school is registered with the Department of Education and allows scholars to bridge the gaps at their own pace. As each scholar succeeds in the ACE programme some of them are able to be admitted back into main stream schooling". There are currently three volunteers who help out with the daily events and schooling. The facilities are very nice and it appears that they are strict enough to contain and maintain the boys. Although many of the boys cannot go home, which is why they are at the homes, *I Care* is still working with the families in order to get them guardians and financial support in order to sustain the children.

### **Glue Related Incidents at the Centre**

Glue is a very terrible, very real addiction that exists in the street child culture. It is a means of survival for many of them, a way for them to not feel anything, a way to get warm when it is cold outside, and a way to escape from their harsh realities and from the terrifying and sad lives that they lead on the streets. I was told that the glue costs between R8 and R9 in Umhlanga, where many of the boys stay, but the prices are between R10 and R12 in Durban. The boys buy the glue from shops, on the streets, and at the Workshop. It is a strong type of glue whose purpose is to be used to keep the soles of your shoes attached to the actual shoe. It states clearly on the bottle "Warning: Dangerous. Do not inhale"<sup>11</sup>. Each jar lasts about six hours depending

---

<sup>11</sup> See appendix for photo.



on how often it is used. The glue is typically shared among the boys as they acquire their money together and split it between food and glue. Some of the boys told me that they need R13 for food (R5 bread, R5 polony, and R3 juice) and whatever other funds they receive goes towards glue. All profits are split among the boys who stay and “work” together. The boys told me that glue is very important, but that the food should come first because when you do the glue and you don’t have food, you will become even hungrier.

Glue is a very dangerous, mind and mood altering substance. Three of the boys that come to *I Care* were hit by cars in the four week period that I was there. One very small boy, Simo, was hospitalized for one week. One boy told me that glue can even make your legs stop working, which explains why one of the boys fell on me while he was standing. He became so limp that I had to literally hold him up so that he wouldn’t fall to the ground. He couldn’t keep his eyes open and he could not stop laughing. The children are often violent and angry when they are on glue, but they also seem to exhibit an altered sense of reality. Sometimes they seem playful and cannot grasp the gravity of a situation—and sometimes they have a tendency to overreact. Far too many times I had witnessed arguments and physical fights between the boys over glue. There was one day where we had to kick Mtho, one of the older boys who is constantly sneaking glue, out of the Centre. Not one day went by while I was working at the Hope Centre where I saw Mtho sober. This particular day, he was harassing the younger boys because he couldn’t find his glue and he thought that the boys had hidden it. Mtho is the only boy who intimidates me who attended the centre. Jenni-lyn and I both agreed that the way he looks at you and the things he says to you are so intimidating that you can’t recognize if it’s a real threat or if it’s glue-induced. There was one day where we were on an outing that I did not see him take the glue bottle off of his mouth for the entire day. On this same day, one of the boys had a tantrum because he couldn’t find his glue at the end of the day. I had never seen someone get so upset physically and emotionally over a small bottle of glue. He was crying and pounding his head against the wall because he thought he had lost it. These are clearly the symptoms of withdrawal.

Glue becomes like a safety blanket to the boys, just like any substance to an addict is. The boys will do anything to hide their glue at the centre to allow them to continue using throughout the day. They hide it in their clothes, in the paper towel dispenser in the bathroom, in the couch cushions, and anywhere they can imagine the staff would not look. They use bread bags, small plastic bags, milk containers, juice containers, and the actual jar to sniff the glue and many times, the boys come into the centre in the morning with glue covering their hands, faces, clothes, and lips.

The outreach workers are required to take away the boys' glue before they enter the Hope Centre. When I was with Donation, this was always executed—but the boys were never searched. Many boys gave their glue up willingly at the beginning of the day, but most of the older boys feel so strongly that they can't live without it and so they hide it from the staff. They did not, however, hide it from me all of the time which put me in an uncomfortable dilemma as to whether or not to take it away from them. I usually attempted to take the glue away from them or told them to not do it when I was around. I had a tendency to hang around the boys who I knew were trying to sneak glue around the corner of the building and they usually respected me enough to refrain from using in front of me.

While not all boys who live on the streets are addicted to glue, many of them do it only occasionally to keep warm. I have even seen adults and women doing glue on the streets. One boy, Snow, told me, "I do it when I'm cold. You will see me when it is raining dancing and happy because I am feeling hot from glue". You will often see boys and girls pilfering through garbage cans and bags looking for empty containers or bags to put glue into and stuff into their pants. When the boys start sniffing glue in public, after a while they forget about the public eye. You can tell them until you're blue in the face to stop—and they will for a few minutes—but then quickly continue once they've forgotten that you've told them not to. At first they hide it in their shirts or the sleeves of their shirts, but then they forget that anyone can see them and they sniff glue freely in the public eye. Many people tend to scoff at the children when they do glue

and they add it to their list of reasons as to why they are intolerable youth and a nuisance to society.

### **Life Stories/Observations of the Children**

When the children arrive at shelters, they are often drugged, sick, injured, dangerous, and many are mentally unstable. There are simply not enough resources for these children to be clean and safe on the streets and their relationship with authority is not good. The police in the area do not have any tolerance for street children in their sector, and therefore have a tendency to “dump” them in a far away area or bring them to the shelters for social workers to “deal” with. Many of the boys who come to *I Care* have had bad experiences with “metro” as they call them. They have told me accounts of being kicked and shoved to wake up in the night, their extra clothes and blankets being taken away, and then thrown into a van and dropped in Petermaritzburg. This has happened on a regular basis for some of these boys and they are often forced to run from the police through the night. When they are dropped far away, they have no other choice but to walk back to Durban. Another child told me about how the police come when he is sleeping and mace the boys for no apparent reason. When having an impromptu conversation with a policeman one day, he told me that he believes street kids are just naughty boys who have homes and families and that they simply did not want to do chores. This not only shows the extreme miscommunication and the misunderstanding between society and the street children, but also shows the extreme lack of consideration for these boys’ lives. Some publications and journals have proven that the greater society of South Africa views the street child as a nuisance and as just another beggar in the streets hoping for drug money. Clearly, this is widely misjudged and very reprehensible. One of the boys, Lucky, told me that he does not beg, he does not steal, and he does not do glue. He told me that he just waits for someone to give him change for food. He dresses pretty nicely and he keeps himself clean. One day he said, “You would never know I am a street kid until you see me sleeping”. They are associated with filth, drugs, and crime and their bravery is often overlooked. The negative aspects are glorified in the news and by tourists when they are bothered or robbed by the children, but people tend to look

past the fact that they are merely children. They belong to someone. They have a name, a face, and personality, and a story. Being at the Hope Centre for an extended period of time, I was able to get close enough to some of the kids where they felt comfortable enough to tell me their stories.

PHILANI:

I had an informal conversation with Philani, one of the older boys, about his life on the streets. He was not hesitant, but he repeated that it was in his past. He wanted to make it a point to me that he was not living that life any longer. He said that he left home in 2004 or so (he couldn't remember the year) after a fight with his mother over money. He wanted to go on a school trip and his mom wouldn't give him the money so he stole it. When he came home, he got in a fight and his mother hit him. That is when he left. Obviously, there is a lot of poverty in this situation. He stayed with a friend and then they went to the streets. He got hooked on glue and for a while, that's what kept him on the streets. He then met Lucia who tried to convince him to come to the centre, but he would not because of his addiction. He finally went and then went into the rehab program. After rehab, he fell back into the same routine because, he said, he saw his friends doing it and he wanted to as well. He then went to another rehab program and began smoking cigarettes. This fueled an argument with a childcare worker and Philani decided he wanted to go home. He now stays at home near Newlands with his mom in an RDP house. His brother, who is epileptic, also lives with them. His mother is a domestic worker, but they still do not make enough money. Philani wanted to volunteer with *I Care* because he wants to make a difference in the kids' lives and be a role model to them, but the bus fare is expensive. He has to hustle his belongings to get to Morningside. He sometimes stays at the church next door to the centre for days at a time because the fare is too pricey. He wants to be a mechanical engineer, but he said because he has to do everything for himself it is very difficult. He needs to go back to school and he wants to, but he doesn't know where the money will come from. He appears to be very frustrated and stressed out, but he has dreams and goals. He is unaware as to how to achieve his

dreams. He admits that there are still many problems in his household and he wants to leave, but he said he will never return to the streets—but that might be his only option. When I asked him why he chose to stay on the streets, he told me, “I am free and my life is in my hands. I can do whatever I want and other people don’t matter. Every move is watched but you don’t care. There are no rules”.

#### CHINA:

China has been on the streets for almost 14 years. He was 7 when he ran away from home for the first time. He left home one day by himself to take the train to a spot where he could eat sugar cane. He met up with other boys there and they offered to go with him to town. He went to Musgrave road with them and started there. The boys offered him protection and said that when he is with them, no one will hurt them. He was a small boy so not many people messed with him, anyway. He got into drugs and glue and he cared about nothing. The boys he was with often stole and broke into cars and houses. He followed suit. They got in fights in the streets and he said that boys do not fight with their fists; they fight with cigarettes and knives. They “poke” each other, which, of course means that they stab each other. He then showed me his huge scars from a big fight that he and his friends got in with another group of boys. His friend died and he said that he should have, too. He said that he doesn’t believe in going to the hospital, but that his cuts were so bad one of his friends convinced him to go. When he ran away, rape and crime was a lot worse among men and boys. He said that now it still happens but it isn’t as bad. He said that sometimes he remembers his mother and he loves her but that she is not a forgiving person. He is afraid that he will hit her because he gets so angry. Other children, he says, hit their parents and sometimes kill them. He doesn’t want to be like that. He says that he loves his mother but he has anger problems and she always tells him that he is no good and lazy. This causes him to get angry and act out. He has been to Westville Prison 4 times. The first time for house burglary, then theft, then assault, and then he was accused of rape (which he said he didn’t do and that is why he only spent 1 month in jail). He said that he cannot go back on the streets (he stays at the

church now) because he always gets arrested. Each time he was in prison it was for 5 or 6 months. Every time he got out he went home with his mother, but the same problems occurred. He said that his mother never forgets and never forgives. She always brings up the past. He came to *I Care* in August after he got out of jail the last time. He wanted to change his life. He did not want to live on the streets anymore and he does “not want to live this life anymore”. *I Care* made an exception because of his age and said that he must take charge of the boys. He is thankful that he can make a change in his life<sup>12</sup>.

#### LUCKY AND WISEMAN:

Lucky and Wiseman told me that they stay with a few other boys on Field Street in town. They do not do glue or smoke anything. They do not steal or beg for food. They just wait for someone to give them something. Lucky told me that he chooses to do this because he believes it is right. If he does glue, he said it makes you mad. He is 13 and he has been on the streets 2 years. He says that no one really messes with him because he sleeps with a lot of boys, but the police have hit him and sprayed his eyes a few times. He also had his extra clothing stolen from him and he often has to sleep in cold, wet clothes. He says that he goes to sleep by 12 or 1 because then he knows that people will be around and they will be safe. They have no blankets and they witness a lot of violence on a regular basis. When staying in Albert Park one weekend, they saw a man get stabbed numerous times in the face by another man. They do not live in fear, but they see things that no child should ever see.

Wiseman has been living on the streets for 6 months. He is 14. He said that he ran because his dad said that he was going to kill his mom and sisters and so they left—but Wiseman stayed with his dad and his dad beat him every night. When he got to Durban, he stumbled into Grayville park and the men threatened to rape him so he ran. He found Lucky and they became friends. Lucky told him not to get into glue and that he is lucky that he found him because he

---

<sup>12</sup> China was later told he was no longer welcome at the Hope Centre and then at the church for various reasons. See appendix for details and a more up-to-date story on China.

will stay sane with no glue. Lucky will not do glue because it makes you “not right” and do things that you shouldn’t which gets you in jail. Neither of them ever want to go home. Lucky wants to get a job that will get him enough money to survive—any job, he says, he will be happy with. Wiseman agrees. Neither of them has much of a formal education, but they are hopeful for jobs when they get older.

## OBSERVATIONS

Being at the Hope Centre from open to close for 5 days a week, I was able to make some keen observations of the kids and of the staff alike. With the many conversations I had with both staff and children alike, I was able to compile a large amount of information regarding the things that I didn’t see every day. For example, the Hope Centre is open to all street children, yet usually only boys utilize its services. I talked to China and to Jenni-lyn about the life of girls on the streets. They said that there aren’t as many girls but their lives are much worse and they are more at risk. The girls get raped on a regular basis and they are treated like objects. The boys fight over them and they often become a source of income. While talking to a guest at the backpackers I stayed at who also works with street children at Umthombo, I was told they are working with 2 girls who have claimed that they have been raped 4 times in one month and one is pregnant and probably HIV positive. There aren’t any shelters designed for street girls, but they do go to the container drop-in centre in the park. Many of the boys who come to *I Care* claim to have girlfriends on the streets and, from the many conversations I’ve had with the boys; I’ve gathered that even though they are on the streets—the traditional role still exists. I saw Mzwa begging at the wheel one day and I asked where his girlfriend was. He told me that she is in the park where they stay washing his clothes. This is not the first time that I’ve heard something like this. When I asked Jenni-lyn about the boys and their girlfriends she told me that in some cases, the “girlfriends” are just the smaller boys. She told me that when they searched Scarra, one of the older boys, he had condoms in his pockets and that he has sex with the younger boys. The small boys get so used to it that they even start asking for it. Largely because of this, *I Care* offers HIV testing for all of the boys and a few have already been tested--some have shown me their results,

proudly stating that they are negative. The sex on the streets with the boys is a reality. The Nigerians, she says, pimp them out. Even Scarra makes money off of the boys that he has sex with. She said that the last Khutaza program, Donation walked in on an older boy “gunning it” from behind a smaller boy. Some of the boys have girlfriends who probably live on the streets and get raped by HIV Positive men and then they unknowingly give it to the boys. It’s sickening...but, she said, “What can you expect with boys sleeping on the streets together in groups ranging from 7-17 year olds? Something has got to be happening”.

### **My Role**

While at *I Care*, I was essentially a volunteer at the Hope Centre. Although I was simultaneously collecting information through my observations and interactions with the staff and kids, I also believed myself to be a viable resource to the organization.

While I was not always viewed as an authority figure, I do believe that many of the boys respected me as so. In the beginning, I felt as though I only wanted to play and hang out with the boys—but that dissipated slightly as time moved forward. Although I was still technically an outsider, I eventually grew more comfortable as the staff and the boys became more accustomed to me being there. There was a definite separation between myself and the other staff members—not only because I did not speak their language, but because I was still new and naïve in the sense that my guard was down.

I was able to offer my opinions and my insights with the staff members and share my personal feelings on the organization and on the boys as well as listen to what the staff had to say. I felt as though I was treated as an equal in their eyes (except when they called me “umlungu” or “white person”). I was welcomed each day with a smile and a hug and I felt at ease and excited to begin each day at the centre.

In addition, I was able to run two small programs with the boys. I began a project with the boys which involved painting the amphitheater steps outside of the centre. Some boys took a liking to it more than others, but it was still something that they could witness with their own



eyes a finished product that they could enjoy on a daily basis. My idea for what I wanted it to have looked like was not at all how it turned out to be. At first I was frustrated with how messy it looked, but I then realized (with the help of the staff) that it made the Hope Centre look like a place for children—which is precisely what it is.

I was also able to, with the help of a staff member, ask the children to create a two-sided picture of what their lives are like currently and what they would like them to be like in the future. I asked them to draw, write, or cut out pictures in order to express themselves fully. Some did not take this exercise seriously, but many did and I was surprised with the outcome. I conducted this activity on my final day and was pleased with the results of how creative the boys could be.

My involvement with the street kids did not stop at the Hope Centre, it continued on in my daily encounters with new boys that I had never met and with boys whom I did know. I grew to be more and more comfortable and at ease with conversing freely with the boys as well as joking, playing, and laughing with them. I never once treated them as anything but equals and simply as normal children

## **Conclusions**

Overall, my role at *I Care*—no matter how small—did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. I was able to connect deeply with several of the boys and with the staff members on a level that was greater than I could have ever imagined. I felt appreciated and grateful to be there and to be exposed to the things that I was on a daily basis.

My time at *I Care* opened my eyes to an issue almost greater than my capacity to comprehend. It almost becomes a human rights issue and a heart-wrenching quest for understanding and respect. These boys struggle on a daily basis to get by. They beg, borrow, and steal their way through life just to make it until the next day. They risk their lives trying to survive and to be strong, powerful boys. Many of them have big dreams and big goals, but they feel as though they are unattainable. Several of the boys need serious psychological assistance,

but in reality will probably never receive the help that they need. Many of the older boys will probably never be rehabilitated and some will be forced to live on the streets begging for work and for money for the rest of their lives. There will most likely be several success stories, however, if the child wants to succeed and wants to better their life. This is very possible through the help of *I Care* and through the love and support that they offer anyone who desires it.

I feel as though I was a positive attribute to the *I Care* family and that I learned and grew in my short time there. I was able to soak in the information that I came across, witnessed, and heard about and am now able to construct a valuable resource for any person who is interested in the issue of street children. Through my work in the field, I was able to experience more than most people who would choose to look at street children through a lens. My time, energy, heart, and compassion for these children made my work at *I Care* both rewarding and physically and emotionally draining.

From my time spent and my many observations, I am able to conclude that in order for the issue of street children to even begin to be tackled, there needs to be a greater understanding in society as a whole. Organizations such as *I Care* are not funded by the government and are instead funded by independent donors. *I Care*, especially, has no international donors. They are completely funded by individuals, some churches, and by very few businesses and organizations. In order for *I Care* to be more effective in the lives of the children that it attempts to assist, there needs to be more resources available and more people willing to assist in programming. Awareness need to be a larger part of the *I Care* cycle and the general population has to be more open and willing to see and care for the lives of these children. For preventative measures, it would be ideal that NGOs would be set up in poor, rural communities where a large number of children abscond. These NGOs should be self-catering in that whatever issues are arising within the community needs to be solved by the community as a whole. It is important that every family with children is monitored in poor areas to ensure that the child is being cared for properly. If the issue of poverty is not going to go away, then there must be community action.

I recommend that any student who is interested in the topic of street children and who is up for the challenge to pursue it. It is a draining yet very rewarding experience. I would suggest the further studies be done on the effect of glue on a child, a case study on a child on the cusp of adulthood without education or a family, a study on the successes and pitfalls of the reunification process, and also the grueling process of rehabilitating a street child. Any and all of these studies would be beneficial to the greater understanding of the life of a street child. It would allow for minds and hearts to be opened to the harsh realities of the lives of these children and for raw, uncensored material to flow into a society who has already closed the door on the average street child.

Although working at *I Care* had its rewards and successes in my perspective, nothing can compare to the gravity of information I was able to gather and the eye opening experiences I was so lucky to have witnessed. Although these boys are rough and tough on the outside, deep down these boys really just need love and affection. Many are scared and all are vulnerable. They, like all children in the world, deserve safety, love, and respect. As Nelson Mandela said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children”.

## **Bibliography**

Garlick, T. (2003, December/January). Street life — seeking alternatives. *ChildrenFIRST* .

*I Care: the I Care cycle*. (2009). Retrieved December 1, 2009, from *I Care: giving streetkids a future*: <http://www.icare.co.za>

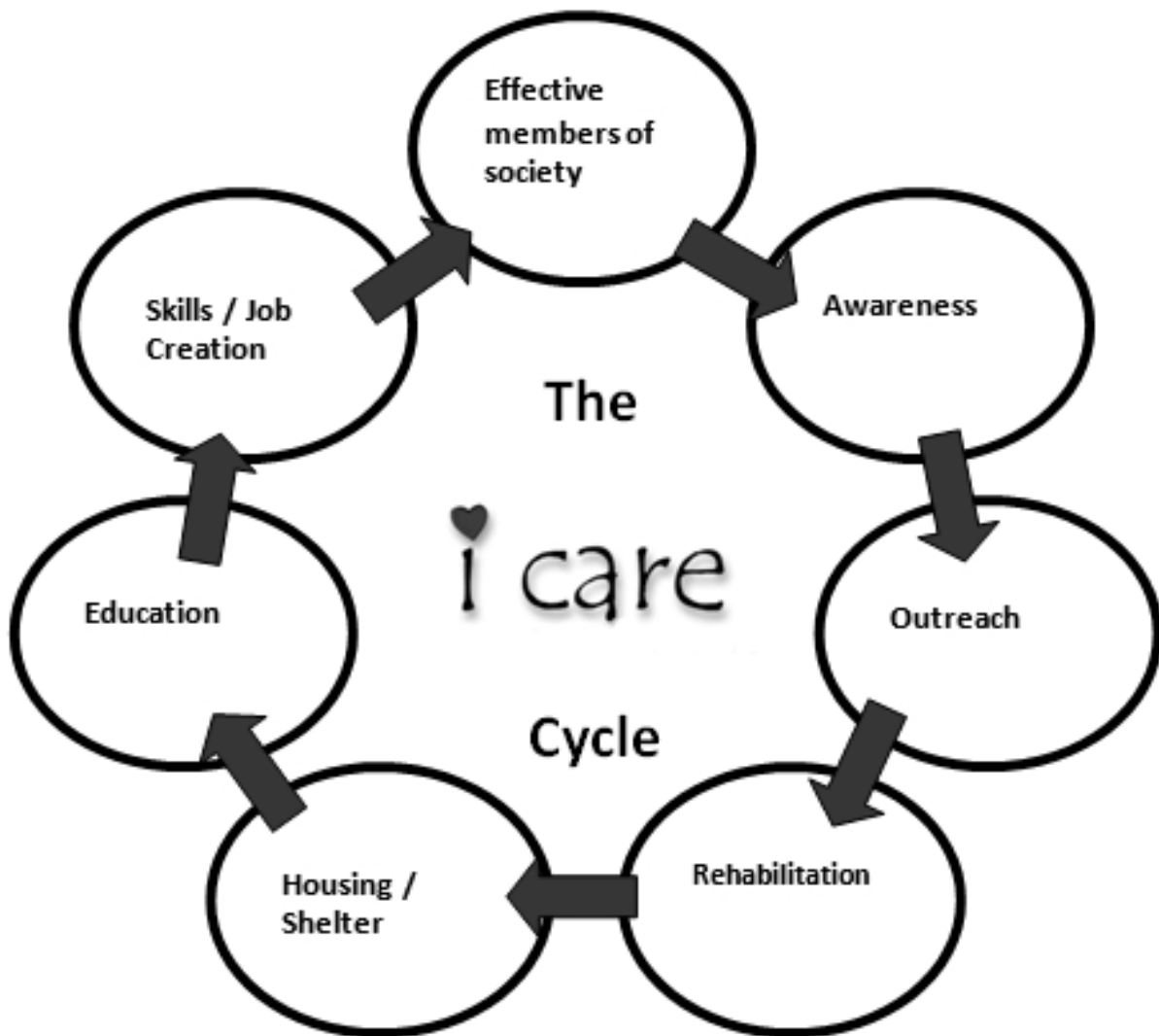
Jackson, P. (2002). Shelter is a safe haven for runaways. *ChildrenFIRST* , 6 (45), 32-33.

Kariuki, J. (2007). The Voices of Street Children in Durban Shelters. In R. Pattman, *Undressing Durban* (pp. 182-193). Durban: Madiba Publishers.

Lewis, H. P. (1998). *Also God's Children?* Cape Town: General Publishing Group.

Roux, J. I., & Smith, C. S. (1998). Psychological characteristics of South African street children. *Adolescence* , 33 (132), 891-900.

Appendix A



13

<sup>13</sup> (*I Care: the I Care cycle, 2009*)

**Appendix B**



## Appendix C

China is 20 years old and most recently began coming to *I Care* after being in and out of prison and living life on the streets for 14 years. He has no formal education, cannot read or write, and has severe anger issues. He is no longer considered a child in the eyes of *I Care*, but was allowed to continue participating in the programs because he showed that he wanted to make a positive change in his life. The staff allowed him to continue coming to the Hope Centre only if he took a more authoritative role with the boys and expressing himself as a positive role model to them.

My experiences with China were, more often than not, less than pleasant. He was often very forceful with me—which was even noted by Jenni-lyn and another staff member. He had a tendency to ask me for things to bring him or to give him things that belong to me which I told him, on many occasions, that it is impolite to ask for things that belong to someone else and that he should accept a gift if I wanted to give it to him. These were my only quams with China until after he got kicked out of the Hope Centre. The Hope Centre did not ask much of China, but when they did he failed to comply. He was often very violent with the other boys and on several occasions hit the boys and got in regular arguments. He even went so far as to pull a knife on the boys and on the man in charge of the church. *I Care* gave China the opportunity to go to a nice life-skills rehabilitation centre on a farm in a rural area with a nice family who offered him the opportunity to feel love and acceptance. He said that he did not want to be on a farm. The family said that he did not have to do anything farm related if he didn't want to and that he could do other projects such as art or carpentry, but he still said no. He would not even give it a chance. And so, because he did not take any chance offered to him by *I Care*, he was told that he was too old and too disruptive and unwilling to change to stay at *I Care*. That he was not doing his role as an older boy and was not complying by the rules. He was asked not to come back.

Because China was staying in the church next door, he was asked to comply by the rules which include a 5PM curfew, helping with tasks that need to be done at the church, being respectful, and, of course, not using substances. All of these rules were broken by China and so, he was soon kicked out of the church as well.

China is now living on the streets and is very angry. On my last few days at the Hope Centre, he would come and stand outside of the gate and swear at me and at other staff members.

He was caught sneaking glue to boys inside of *I Care* and doing glue himself. He is clearly a very troubled man who is living on the cusp of being a child and a man on the streets. He cannot identify himself as either and his anger has gotten the best of him. He needs serious psychological help, but in this country will probably never get it even if he wants to.



## Appendix D

While at the Hope Centre, my camera was stolen. It was something that was very shattering to me, as a volunteer and as a person, which I had to try very hard to become at peace with. It was mostly my fault for letting my guard down and for trusting the boys too much. I had brought my camera a few times before and had let the boys use it under my supervision. The one day that I brought it and turned my back for 10 seconds, it was gone. At first I didn't think much of it, but then I started to feel hurt and confused by it. Here I was trying to show these kids love and attention and to see them as children and look past their exteriors and what the public eye views them as—and this happens. The staff handled it very well, asking the boys who last had it where it was which, inevitably, led to the other boys ganging up on the 3 boys who were being questioned. The staff then put out a reward—R150 for anyone who could find it. Many of the boys searched frantically so that they could have this money, but my camera never showed up. It ended up being a big ordeal at the Centre causing a lot of anger and flared emotions because many felt as though they were being accused. I, myself, was completely blown by this because I am not just a day visitor and I had been coming to the centre for weeks. I had grown in my relationships with these boys and I was shocked that this could happen.

At this point, I am at peace with it. It was not so much the loss of the camera that upset me, but that my trust was violated. I realize now that this was just an opportunity for these boys to get money and that it was not at all a personal attack. It was something that one or a few boys saw as a chance to gain something without thinking twice that it would hurt someone else. I believe that this has a lot to do with glue and its effects on the mind and on emotions.

When I returned the next day, many people, including the staff, were shocked that I returned with a smile on my face. Several of the boys asked me about my camera and felt sorry that I did not find it. They said that if they found out who took it, they would “pay the price” which I then asked them to leave it be. Jenni-lyn and Thulile believe that China got a hold of it because one of the younger boys has a lot of loyalty towards him. Jenni-lyn said that she saw China in the park across from the centre, phoned Thulile to check, and then he was gone. When I saw him the next day, he swore at me through the gate, “I do not have your fucking camera”, which, of course, leads me to believe that he had seen it.

Although this experience was mildly traumatic for me, I am able to look past it and see that it still is not all of the boys who commit something such as this crime. I am still able to conclude that these boys are just trying to survive in any way, shape and form. They still need love and affection, as all kids do, and this incident did not stop me from respecting them as equals and loving them as children.