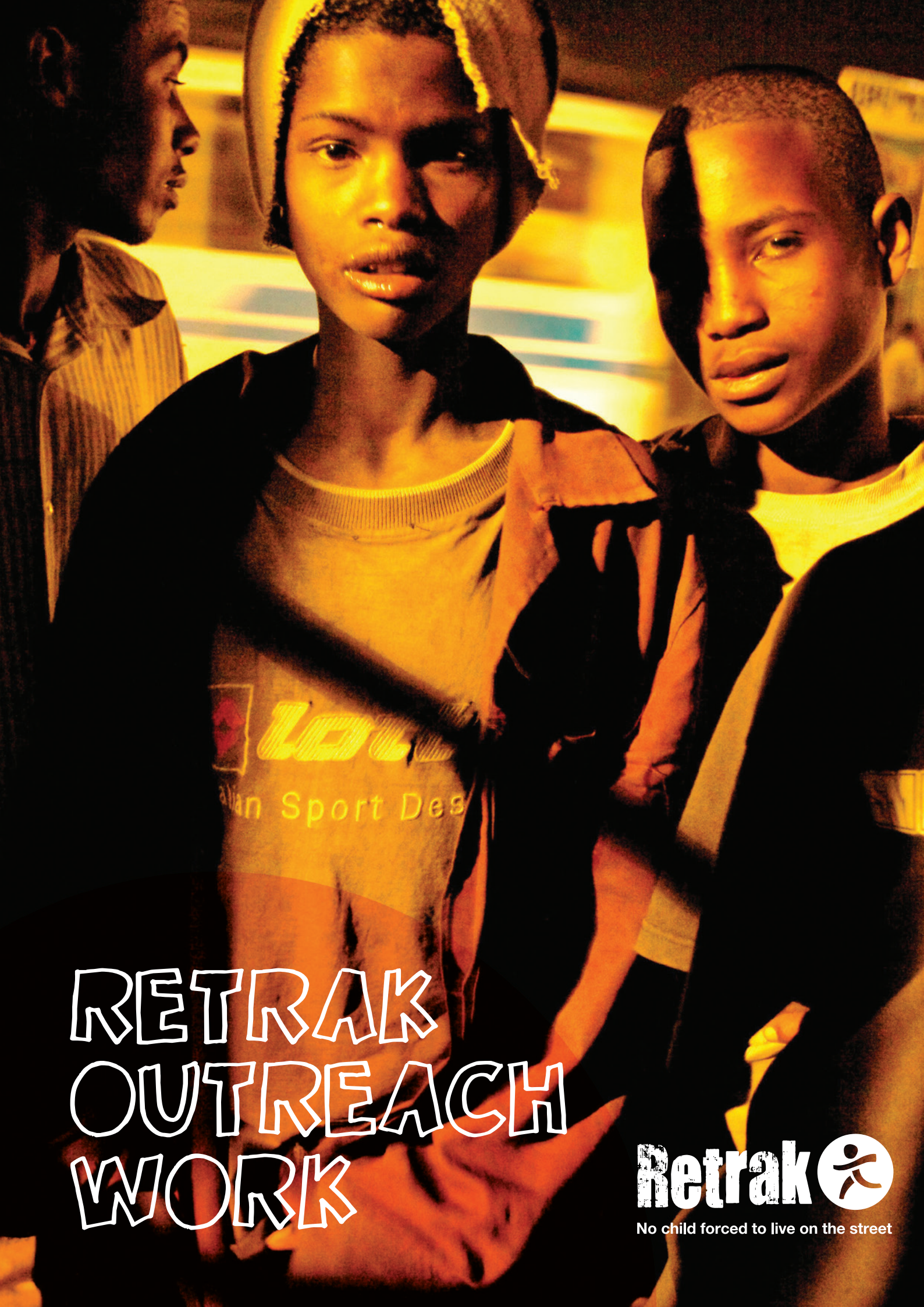


RETRAK OUTREACH WORK

Retrak

No child forced to live on the street

ABOUT RETRAK

Across the world, there are hundreds of thousands of children living on the streets. Every day they suffer hunger, poverty, abuse and violence.

Retrak is a charity which reaches out to these vulnerable children to provide them with the food, medicine, clothing, hygiene and shelter which they desperately need. Beyond this, Retrak works hard to tackle the reasons why children end up on the streets - this means helping families to heal rifts, enabling children to complete their education or gain a vocational qualification and providing children and parents with the means to earn a sustainable income.

This long-term approach helps to make sure that children never have to go back to living on the street, and it works; to date more than three-quarters of the children helped by Retrak have remained at home with their families.

OUR VISION

A world where no child is forced to live on the street.

OUR MISSION

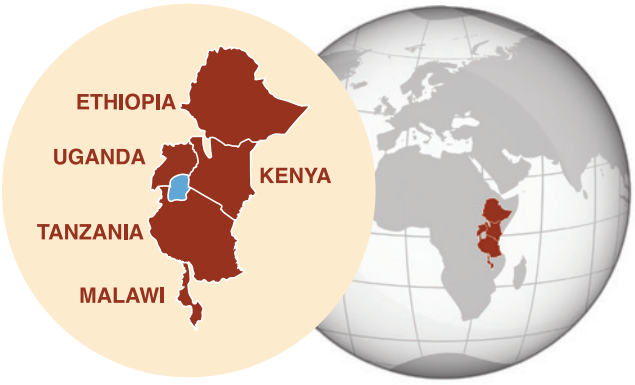
Retrak works to transform highly vulnerable children's lives; preserve families; empower communities and give each of them a voice.

We put children at the very heart of everything we do and will be fearless and tenacious in defending and promoting their rights.

WHERE WE WORK

Retrak has programmes where there are thousands of street children with nowhere to turn for help.

We work in the countries shown here:



APPROACHING OUTREACH WORK

Retrak has placed a central importance on outreach to children on the streets since it began in Kampala 20 years ago. At that time the creation of a football club was a simple way to gather children together in order to get to know them and build trusting relationships. Since then Retrak has developed a range of outreach activities in Uganda, still including football, along with meals, medical clinics, HIV peer education and street visits.

In Ethiopia, the large numbers of children led to a focus on street visits specifically targeting the area of Addis Ababa where children living on the streets were known to congregate. Retrak has also worked in partnership with local organisations in Kenya and Malawi to increase effective outreach to children on the streets. In all these countries outreach activities provide a means to build positive relationships with children with the aim of enabling them to be safer on the streets and access further services.

Retrak is a charity which reaches out to these vulnerable children to provide them with the food, medicine, clothing, hygiene and shelter which they desperately need. Beyond this, Retrak works hard to tackle the reasons why children end up on the streets - this means helping families to heal rifts, enabling children to complete their education or gain a vocational qualification and providing children and parents with the means to earn a sustainable income.This long-term approach helps to make sure that children never have to go back to living on the street, and it works; to date more than three-quarters of the children helped by Retrak have remained at home with their families.

Between 2009 and 2013, 6,000 children on the streets of Kampala and Addis Ababa met with a Retrak outreach worker through a range of activities, and 4,000 children have chosen to go on to receive further services at the drop-in centres.

As part of the process of developing Outreach Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), it has become

clear that despite variation in outreach activities and drop-in centres, there is a clear approach to outreach which is common across Retrak. This reflects the international approach to outreach in youth work and with other hard-to-reach population groups. This paper aims to clarify Retrak's approach to outreach and the principles underlying it, drawing on wider research and good practice. It is a precursor to the publication of Retrak's Outreach SOPs.

Retrak's approach to outreach

Retrak's experience, in line with international research, has shown that children on the streets[1] have experienced a range of challenges in their lives, including poverty and the impact of HIV/AIDS, but in nearly every case they have also experienced one or more broken relationships. At home people who should have been caring for these children have abused, neglected or abandoned them, whether due to illness, alcohol abuse, death or marriage breakdown[2]. On the streets, the general public, along with law enforcement and other children, have also stigmatised, mistreated and abused them[3]. While some children on the streets receive support from community members, this can also become a negative experience when promises are broken or false motives discovered[4]. All of these experiences mean that many children have learnt that adults cannot be trusted or relied on. Instead, for many, the street has become their home and their fellow street children have become their family. They attach to places on the street that have significant meaning for them[5]. Children adapt to their lives on the street, forming strong peer groups who provide friendship and support, as well as learning independence and the ability to survive.[6]

[1] Retrak recognises the debate around the terminology to refer to children for whom the streets, rather than family, are a major influence. This paper cannot address that debate in full, but will use the terms 'children on the streets' and 'street children' interchangeably to refer to any child for whom the street is a major influence.

[2] Wakia, J (2010) *Why children are on the streets?* Manchester, Retrak; and Railway Children (2012) *Struggling to Survive: Children living alone on the streets in Tanzania and Kenya*, Cheshire, Railway Children

[3] Haliu, T, J Tusingwire, J Wakia & P Zacharias (2012) *Retrak research summary: The situation of street girls in Kampala and Addis Ababa*, Manchester, Retrak; Jani, N & K Schenk (2014) *Formative research to develop an intervention for addressing mental health/psychosocial issues and HIV vulnerability of marginalized adolescents in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, HIVCore Formative Report, Washington, DC: USAID; Railway Children (2012), op cit

[4] Hailu, T et al (2012), op cit; Railway Children (2012), op cit

[5] Young, L (2003) 'The 'place' of street children in Kampala, Uganda: marginalisation, resistance, and acceptance in the urban environment', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21(5) pp607-627; Ennew, J (2003) 'Difficult Circumstances: Some Reflections on "Street Children" in Africa', *Children, Youth and Environments*, 13(1)

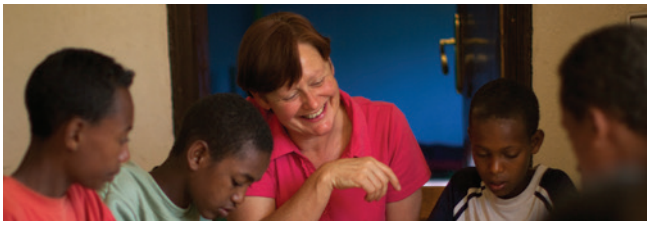
[6] Railway Children (2012), op cit; Aptekar, L (1991) 'Are Colombian Street Children Neglected? The Contributions of Ethnographic and Ethnohistorical Approaches to the Study of Children', Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 22(4) pp326-349; Ennew, J and J Swart-Kruger (2003) 'Introduction: Homes, Places and Spaces in the Construction of Street Children and Street Youth', Children, Youth and Environments 13(1)

This understanding of the background and experiences of children on the streets necessitates a specific approach to outreach if it is to succeed in building trusting relationships. This approach must reflect:

- ✔ A recognition of these **children's experiences of broken relationships** and their tendency not to trust adults. This means that outreach work must make children feel valued and offer them a consistent, non-judgemental and reliable relationship with a caring adult. Achieving this requires a lot of patience and time: outreach is rarely a quick fix activity, but it can be the beginnings of a foundation for helping a child move forward.
- ✔ An understanding of **the importance of street life and peer relationships to these children**. Outreach activities must be designed to respect the people, spaces, schedule and activities that are part of a child's daily life on the streets. Children must be recognised as independent social actors who cannot be forced into change, but need to be given time and choices.

Therefore, **outreach activities** must create safe spaces for children to interact with their peers and outreach workers. These activities need to be easily accessible for children on the streets, both in their location and timing[7]. An activity which is scheduled at a time when most children are working or looking for food, or that happens far away from the places children usually congregate, will not be well-attended. Visits to the streets by outreach workers in the evening when children are relaxing, or a short education or health event at a centre or slum area close to children's 'hang outs', are likely to be more successful. Activities must be welcoming and friendly, so that children do not feel intimidated or threatened. Sports, such as football matches, provide an excellent way to attract children and create an informal, fun environment. Similarly, street visits where the outreach workers interact with children on their ground and participate in their activities also help to reduce barriers and encourage positive interactions. Most importantly, activities should be repeated regularly, so that children have several opportunities to meet outreach workers at the same time and place. This shows children that the outreach workers are committed and reliable, and gives children the opportunity to slowly build up relationships. Outreach activities should build awareness of further services that are on offer, and allow outreach workers to make assessments of children. Those most highly at risk should be able to access emergency support and protection immediately[8]. Outreach activities are also an opportunity to reduce the risks that children are facing, for instance through HIV education or health care on the streets[9].

Outreach workers are central to a successful outreach process, since the main emphasis of this work is on building trusting relationships[10]. These relationships are a key support in enabling children to be safer on the streets and to decide to access further services. Given that street children have probably experienced difficult relationships with their families and others, one of the most important goals at the beginning is *"to provide an experience of a secure attachment that allows the child ... to develop a new internal working model enabling them to relate [with others] differently, to leave behind traumas of the past and to live more fully in the present"*[11]. Attachment theory demonstrates the importance of children having a secure base from which they can explore the world. This secure base enables children to successfully learn and develop and to understand the world and their place within it[12]. An outreach worker who is able to build up a strong relationship with a child on the streets will begin to understand how that child is feeling and thinking and what their past experiences have been at home and on the streets. This unique understanding of the child's background and current situation, and of how the child is thinking and feeling, can be vital in helping the child to make sense of their experiences; as well as offering some predictability, to help the child feel more secure and competent[13]. They will then be able to support them as they begin to access services and make decisions about the future. A close attachment will help a child face the challenges ahead and reduce the likelihood that they will give up when it becomes difficult.[14]



[7] Volpi, E (2002) Street Children: Promising Practices and Approaches, World Bank Institute Working Papers, Washington DC, World Bank

[8] Although all children on the streets are at risk, some require emergency assistance. Retrak's Outreach SOPs provide more detail on this issue.

[9] West, A (2003) At the Margins: Street Children in Asia and the Pacific, Poverty and Social Development Papers 8, Manila, Asian Development Bank; Thomas de Benítez, S (2007) State of the World's Street Children: Violence, London, Consortium for Street Children

[10] Volpi, E (2002), op cit; and Ray, P, C Davey and P Nolan (2011) Still on the streets-still short of rights: Analysis of policy and programmes related to street involved children, Geneva, Plan and London, Consortium for Street Children

[11] Safe Families Safe Children (2011) Breaking the cycle of violence – building a future for the most excluded, Safe Families Safe Children coalition, p 21

[12] Schofield G and M Beek (2006) Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption, London, BAAF

[13] ibid

[14] Safe Families Safe Children (2011), op cit

Principles of Outreach Work

There is no internationally-recognised guidance on outreach work with street or homeless children, but a broad review of relevant literature does highlight some clear principles which Retrak's experience demonstrates are important. In particular, Retrak draws on child rights and attachment theory, which are central to Retrak's model of work, as well as international youth work practice. The following principles are closely linked and in some cases overlap. They build on and reinforce each other and should not be treated as separate elements.

- **Following a rights-based approach** – Outreach work must recognise that all children, including children on the streets, are entitled to certain rights and should be seen as active agents in their own lives, with strengths and capabilities to develop as they make their own decisions for the future.[15] Decisions need to be made based on the best interests of the child and on the principle of do no harm.
- **Understanding each child and his/her situation** – Outreach workers should respect each child and cultivate an appreciation of their issues and interests, potential and aspirations. Empathy and curiosity are key tools for an outreach worker. When a child feels fully understood and accepted s/he will feel empowered and will be more likely to want to participate further.[16]
- **Building relationships** – Building trusting relationships is at the heart of effective outreach work. Outreach workers must model a positive attachment by being reliable and showing that they are thinking about and understanding the child. Trust takes a long time to develop but is essential in enabling children to share, gain hope and engage further.[17]
- **Being flexible** – It is important that outreach workers are able to respond to each child's situation and needs, and have the flexibility to deal with the unexpected.[18]
- **Building in reflection** – Outreach workers must develop the skills of self-reflection and self-awareness in order to keep learning and maintaining responsiveness. Outreach workers should be raising questions about what they do before, after and during every activity.[19]
- **Ensuring staff care and protection** – Outreach workers invest themselves heavily in their work and therefore need to be adequately supported. This includes reflecting and sharing on their experiences and challenges, establishing boundaries, and recognising risks, in order to put in place appropriate health and safety procedures, contingency plans and exit strategies.[20]

Outreach aim and process

Retrak's Outreach SOPs are based on the principles above. They provide the foundation to which outreach workers can return as they apply the SOPs in their daily work. The aim of Retrak's Outreach SOPs is to get to know children on the streets and begin to build trusting relationships with them, so that they can be safer on the streets and choose to access further services which could lead them to an alternative to street life. Key steps in this process are:

1. **Preparation** – planning and preparing for activities, including learning about where children are on the street and what their lives are like.
2. **Initial contact and relationship building** – going out on to the streets to make initial contacts with children, building deeper relationships and beginning to understand their situation and background.
3. **Reflection and assessment** – creating the space for outreach workers to reflect on their experiences and compile information about children in order to issue invitations to access further services.
4. **Admission to further services** – admitting children to join regular activities (such as education, meals, health care etc) and overnight shelter.[21]

[15] Davies, B (2010) 'What do we mean by youth work?' in J Batsleer and D Bernard (Eds) *What is Youth Work?*, Exeter, Learning Matters Ltd; McEvoy, D, S Morgan, S McCready, J Bennett and P Heany (2013) 'Working with Street-Connected Children: A Training Model for Street Work Practice', Practice: Social Work in Action, 25(4), pp233-250

[16] Davies, B (2010), op cit; Golding, KS & DA Hughes (2012) *Creating Loving Attachments: parenting with PACE to nurture confidence and security in the troubled child*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond (2010) 'Building Relationships through Effective Interpersonal Engagement-A Training Model for Youth workers', *Youth Studies Ireland*, 5(2) pp25–38; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith (2005) *Informal Education: Conversation, Democracy and Learning*, 3rd Ed, Nottingham, Education Heretics

[17] Connolly, JA & LE Joly (2012) 'Outreach with street-involved youth: A quantitative and qualitative review of the literature', Clinical Psychology Review, 32, pp524-534; Davies, B (2010), op cit; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond (2010), op cit; Kidd, SA, S Miner, D Walker & L Davidson (2007) 'Stories of working with homeless youth: On being "mind-boggling"', Children and Youth Services Review, 29, pp16–34; McEvoy, D et al (2013), op cit; Safe Families Safe Children (2011), op cit

[18] Crimmens, D, F Factor, T Jeffs, J Pitts, C Pugh, J Spence & P Turner (2004) *Reaching Socially Excluded Young People: a national study of street-based youth work*, Leicester, National Youth Agency; Connolly, JA & LE Joly (2012), op cit; McEvoy, D et al (2013), op cit

[19] Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond (2010), op cit; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith (2005), op cit

[20] McEvoy, D et al (2013), op cit

[22] Further information on these steps can be found in: Retrak (2012) *Retrak Standard Operating Procedures: Outreach*, Manchester, Retrak

Recommendation

Retrak believes that no child should be forced to live on the streets. While children have the right to choose a life on the streets, and for many it is a preferable option to staying at home, Retrak believes that every child also has the right to a positive alternative. They should not be forced to stay on the streets because that alternative does not exist or cannot be accessed.

Providing such positive and sustainable alternatives begins with outreach work that values and believes in each child, and aims to help them move forward individually in the best way possible. Achieving this requires investment in trained, skilled and supported outreach workers who are passionate about their work and the children they meet.

Retrak calls on all agencies working with children on the streets to scale up outreach work and to ensure that it is always rights-based and relationship-focused. This means outreach workers must be carefully selected and resourced, so that children are valued and given hope for the future.

Children on the streets, like other children living without family care, should be able to access reintegration and alternative care services, but this can only happen when organisations intentionally reach out to them on the streets and patiently build trusting relationships. We therefore call on donors, governments and UNICEF, who are working to improve alternative care, to ensure that their strategies specifically include children on the streets. This requires an emphasis on the importance of outreach work and adequate funding for training of outreach workers and outreach activities on the streets.

This paper was written by Joanna Wakia, October 2014. *© Retrak, 2014*

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WE DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO HELP STREET CHILDREN
HOW CAN YOU HELP?