



Tomorrow's Future Today

Living on and off refuse

Payatas, a vast area of smoking garbage located in Quezon City, Metro Manila. Here live thousands of families trying to survive off the never-ending flow of refuse being trucked in from all over the metropolis. As a result of the meager earnings that can be made collecting recyclable garbage, a large community of people, including their children, has arisen on this dump-site. The families work in shifts during the day, awaiting the trucks as they return from their daily rounds. The more recyclable items the families collect, the more they earn. For this reason, the children are withheld from their schools in order to aid the parents in their work. The constant clouds of billowing smoke and dust are creating respiratory illnesses which are having a tragic effect, especially on the children.

Payatas made headlines around the world on 11 July, 2000, when a large section of

the dump-site collapsed, killing more than 500 men, women and children. In addition to this number, another 150 people were never found beneath the mountain of rubbish. However, as a result of the people's desperation, they returned to their laborious task, and it continues to this day. It is only a matter of time before another such avalanche occurs and tragically takes the lives of many more people. This could be avoided if the poverty of the people was alleviated, giving them a better, more dignified chance at life.



CRF begins child sponsorship programme

Beginning this year, the CRF is launching a programme whereby individuals and groups will have the opportunity to sponsor one or more children at the Papa John Centre. This will give the sponsor a chance to personally play a

role in the life of the child. These children who are either rejected or separated from their families will find hope and a brighter future knowing that an individual or group have taken a personal interest in their develop-

ment. A photo and report of the child will be sent to each sponsor with a yearly update on the child's progress. If you wish to sponsor a child, please refer to the last page of this newsletter for contact information.

Children's Relief Fund

Volume 1, Issue 2

May, 2003

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Substance abuse

Street children who live on their own rarely finish their academic studies. Some have never attended school. They are more heavily exposed to and more likely to be abusing drugs, alcohol and solvents. A survey taken of street children shows that children who are involved in substance abuse are generally in their teens and adolescent stages. They are predominantly male, and either the middle or the eldest among the siblings. Being absent from school, particularly for longer periods of time, provides them with ample time and opportunity to become involved in substance abuse.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported in its Programme on Substance Abuse that the substances of choice for Filipino street children were: solvents and glue ("rugby"), cannabis, alcohol, tobacco, methamphetamine ("shabu"), diazepam, cough syrup, benzodiazepines and artane.

Many of these children living on the streets of Metro Manila may feel exposed to constant humiliation by the more affluent passers-by, and as a result they experience low self-esteem and feelings of neglect, pushing them to use drugs and eventually to committing crimes.

Risks and hazards

In Metro Manila, and in other large cities, the street children are generally found roaming the streets and loitering in places such as parks and tourist spots; large shopping centres, commercial complexes and markets; hotels, motels and restaurants; prominent entertainment places such as discotheques and pub houses; by bridges and overpasses; church grounds, bus terminals, boat piers and in and around dumpsites. All these locations pose potential risks for street children. The children are at risk of being abused by adults who also work on the streets. Organised crime syndicates exploit them by making them beg, steal or traffic drugs. The children risk contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD), especially those who are assaulted or offered food, money and shelter in exchange for sexual favours. Street children who no longer live with their families are slightly older, predominantly 13 to 15-year-old boys. They are often recent migrants from the provinces, or have been evicted from their homes. Most of them come from female-headed households. These households show greater signs of de-segregation and are thus less able to provide a supportive environment.

Mental and physical abuse

All street children are at risk for abuse. Beyond the physical health hazards faced by children is the constant exposure to emotional hazards. The children are prone to street fights and are bullied by the older youths.

Police officers, misguided authorities and extortionists harass, abuse and torture them. These children are often arrested, and are treated no differently from the adult offenders. They experience various kinds of physical and mental abuse as a result of actions by the police and adult prisoners, including intimidation and threats, beatings and other forms of humiliation.

Street children as young as 10 years are often imprisoned under the Vagrancy Act, and end up in

the same cells as adult prisoners, including young girls with male adults. They are often forced to clean the toilets and cells and are, in many instances, sexually or physically abused by the prisoners as well as the guards.

These children are also prone to contracting tuberculosis from sleeping on damp concrete floors and being in close contact with sick adult prisoners.

In most instances there is no record of street children's arrests or length of stay in prisons, making it difficult for aid organizations to bring the matter into the light of day.



The PJC's ongoing struggle

The 32 children living full-time at the centre and the hundreds being helped in the streets and at the Payatas dump-site is only scratching the surface of a problem that is estimated by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to be growing at a rate of 2 percent per year. The PJC's resources are stretched to the limit, and can do no more unless it receives funds to accomplish the task it set out to do in 1994. This includes repairing the water well, painting the centre, acquiring transportation to safely bring the children to and from school, supplying the children with food and clothing, paying the local staff and expanding its street-based programme in order to help more children and their families. In the last issue the centre needed a new and larger refrigerator to keep its food from spoiling. Recently that money was donated by a person who decided to give up something of her own and help the children instead. The PJC is not backed by large donors and local resources are not bountiful to say the least. Their only hope lies with people like you who are willing and able to set aside a little extra in order to help those who have nothing. These children deserve the chance we've all had.

Romar Aguirre

Romar is one of 7 siblings. They were abandoned by their father when their mother died from a combination of meningitis and tuberculosis. At that point they were taken in by a foster mother who had 7 children of her own. The children were sent to the market to sell plastic in order to survive. Because the foster mother would always take the money they earned, Romar began staying in the marketplace. One of the storeowners in the market noticed Romar and brought him to the PJC. He displayed great insecurity due primarily to the fact that he couldn't look directly at other people due

to a condition of his eyes. However, he is very diligent in his studies and was recently permitted to enter grade 6 after having finished grade 4. He longs to be with his older brother, but his income is not enough to provide for both of them. Romar's dream is to become a cartoonist and his aspirations in life serve as his inspiration to go on despite the many challenges in his life.



Christian Cortes

Christian was approximately 5 years old when he was referred to the PJC in 1993. He was found by local officials roaming on the outskirts of a municipality of Metro Manila begging for food. The officials exerted all efforts in order to locate the child's family and relatives, but to no avail. They even went as far as reporting him to the surrounding municipalities and their officials, but no one recognized him. According to one concerned citizen, Christian's mother had gone insane and would drag him from one place to another, never settling down. At some point she must have simply left him and gone on her way. When asked he is unable to remember where he came from, the names of his family members and relatives, and has no recollection of his own name.

Therefore he was given a name at the Centre. He rarely cries and hardly ever asks about the whereabouts of his mother and the rest of his family. He seems unaffected by the whole ordeal, although the trauma may lie more deeply rooted than it appears. Christian is beginning in grade 4 next year and is always seen doing his work quietly. When asked about his future ambitions, he stated that he would like to become a doctor.



Children's Relief Fund

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The children's future in our hands



Children's Relief Fund, Inc. is a European non-profit foundation established in the Philippines in order to:

- Raise funds for street children and the less advantaged;
- Implement programs/projects, through donor funds, to alleviate conditions besieging the less fortunate;
- Promote and advocate for the rights of children, provide educational opportunities and skills training;
- Provide basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter for the less advantaged.

CRF was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of the Philippines under No. CN200259125, on 30 October 2002.

How You Can Help

The United Nations has called the children of today the future of tomorrow. This is a fact that can not be ignored. In a world ravaged by wars, disease, poverty and famines, the only hope that humanity has for a more civilized tomorrow is the children of today. If we can show them love and compassion, and teach them the wondrous things of our world, then maybe they can love and teach their children, and their children's children. However, if we don't help them, who will? What lessons are we then passing along to the next generation?

Giving the street children the chance of a lifetime does work, and it matters. They are receiving an education. They have a home,

whether temporary or permanent. They are learning that the world is not "out" there solely to exploit them. For the first time in their lives they are allowed to be what they really are, children.

Please allow us to continue giving them these opportunities. Allow us to help them so that they may one day help themselves.

If you would like to contribute to the street children's cause, please send your donations to:

Children's Relief Fund, Inc.

CITIBANK, Greenhills

Philippines

Account Number: 8241085751

SWIFT Code: CITIPHMX



"I need your help!"