

# Stories from the street

Personal experiences of street social work from across the world

DYNAMO  
INTERNATIONAL





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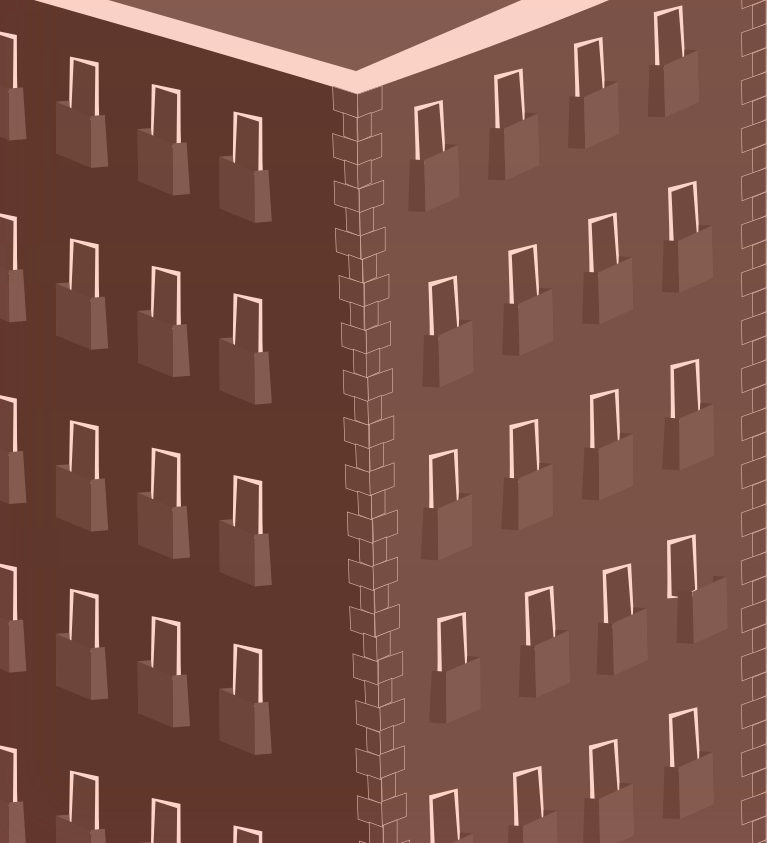
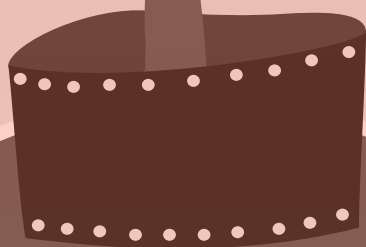
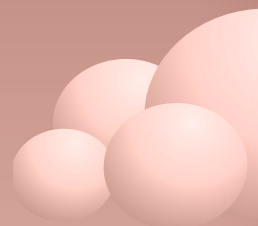
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# Introduction :



Over the past few years, the street social worker members of Dynamo International – Street Workers Network have been involved in producing several methodological tools . These tools are drafted by adopting a «bottom-up» approach to gathering grassroots experience. These daily accounts, which are a reality for several hundred street workers working around the world, reveal a wealth of experience. We therefore thought that it was important to share some of this with others.

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This publication is a collection of anecdotes, struggles and emotions. The stories have been grouped into themes such as rights, emotions, solidarity, resilience and violence.

Of course, the stories in this collection are not representative of what is really happening in day-to-day street social work in all countries and corners of the globe. Nevertheless, they do offer us some insight and snapshots of specific, unique images which can sometimes be very striking.

## Enjoy!

de Boevé Edwin

Director of Dynamo International- Street Workers Network

# Rights:



Human rights should be respected regardless of people's economic, social or cultural situation. People in street situations are therefore no exception to this rule: they have the right to exist and to be recognised. Street social workers campaign for the rights of these people to be respected and for them to have access to justice in order to be able to assert these rights. Awareness-raising initiatives and effective access to the right to education for children are essential. The rights of street social workers should also be respected: the right to be free from violence, the right to some measure of privacy and a family life in a «borderline» job where professional secrecy comes up against other laws and involves a great deal of human investment that friends and those close to us do not always understand.

## 🌀 Right to education

The aim of the programme is to provide school support and raise awareness amongst parents, teachers and the community.

I started out in the programme 4 years ago, working with a Muslim community. Their culture was different. They would send their children to Madarasa (their own cultural school) where children only completed primary school education. They then stopped studying. Girls are not free to go out and do not study, or, if they do, they only study for 2 or 3 years. We gradually got our programme going and children were admitted to the State school. We established a family awareness-raising campaign. Families learnt about the importance of education, the rights of children and women, participation, and child sex abuse. They decided that it was a good programme and took part regularly and we saw things develop.

When we went to speak to the community about our programme and our support, initially the population did not respond but we insisted: we spoke with teachers, community leaders, political authorities, and finally they consented. We use various types of resources such as docu-drama, documentaries, short films, posters, brochures, street drama, etc. (...) If we manage to run this type of programme, it brings us satisfaction.

Nawaraj Pokharel (Nepal)

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## 🌀 Right to exist, to be recognised

It is a pity that in a country which promotes hospitality, social street work jobs are noticeably absent. Furthermore, I would like to add that you can't learn how to treat a person just by reading books about it. Real knowledge is gained from being on the streets, real contact is in the eyes and the words of these children. If someone wants to be a sociologist, he has to get to know a society first-hand, rather than just by reading about it.

María-Mónica (Greece)



S. is a young 13-year-old Bulgarian boy. We met him when doing a shift at our office in the neighbourhood which is part of Schaerbeek.

Like many young people in the neighbourhood, S. is a recent immigrant. We quickly realised that he wasn't attending school. On several occasions, we tried to meet his parents so that they would take the necessary steps to enrol him in school. After we spoke to his parents, we realised that the family was living in extreme poverty and that in such conditions, sending the child to school was not a priority. Indeed, this family of 6 was living in a cellar which had been crudely set up like an apartment. Moreover, they did not have any kind of social assistance because of their administrative situation. On top of that, the situation was worse still due to the mother's very poor state of health.

Initially, the parents did not want to sign their children up to school, and instead made requests relating to adult concerns. We reminded them of the kind of work we do, a community-based outreach service (AMO) working with young people (0 – 18 years old) and their families, and tried to cater to their requests on the condition that we continued to try to enrol the children in school.

As the months went by, we met S. several times during our rounds of the neighbourhood and we reminded him of how important it is to go to school and the impact that not going could have on his future: illiteracy, greater risk of not finding a job, etc. After extensive negotiations, we managed to get the family together and make them agree to sign S. and his sister up to school. That was the start of an uphill battle to find a school that would agree to enrol these children, even though the school is obliged to enrol all children, no matter what their administrative status, at a late stage in the school year. Aside from this issue, the parents placed other demands on us, mainly related to their administrative situation. The family was illegal residents, looking for safe housing and healthcare for the family. Since we could not answer all these questions, we suggested that they make an appointment with a specialist lawyer in order to assess their situation, and he agreed.

However, on the day of the appointment, the parents did not turn up. We had not reminded them about the appointment the day before and they had forgotten. The daily reality for this family meant that their concept of time was not the same as for any other citizen living in decent conditions. We hadn't really gauged this difficulty. We arranged a second appointment

with the lawyer and this time the family attended. We realised that without housing, all administrative procedures were doomed to failure. S.'s family has now been evicted from their «home» by the owner of the building. No solution was found to re-house them and since they were evicted, we have heard no news about S. or his family.

We fear that today this family is either living rough, or in a detention centre. Returning to Bulgaria was not an option for this family because, according to the conversations we had with the mother the last time we spoke, they would be even worse off than in Belgium. We feel extremely frustrated; all the work done with this family has been reduced to nothing. We are worried that S. and his family is now living in an even more precarious situation. The children are no longer going to school and no appropriate help was offered to the family.

The conditions these families are thrown into do not offer these children the same rights from which other legally residing children benefit. The solutions offered for these families are extremely flimsy and the options available to us to try to get these families out of precarious situations are practically non-existent. As such, the most basic rights such as the right to housing, to healthcare, to education are totally flouted for these families.

Isn't the Belgian state supposed to give the same opportunities and rights to children no matter what their administrative status? For these children and many others who use our services, this is clearly not the case!!!

Gaëtan (Belgium)





## ⑥ Continuous struggle to restore people's rights

A mobile social work service was set up in a neighbourhood in Varna, a city on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. The neighbourhood was called Vladislavovo, where a large part of the population is made up of Roma people. The aim was to make non-formal groups of people from the community with planned topics of discussion, including domestic violence and the upbringing of children. As we already knew some of the people from the community, a non-formal group was created and we were all invited to one of the participants' houses. Some of the women were with their young children and babies.

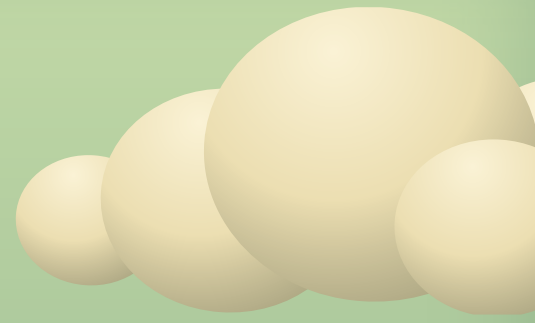
The men discussed the topic of family violence, which they identified as physical violence. They admitted that they "slap" their children, and also women, but all three men said it is not a common occurrence. The conversation turned to the fact that physical punishment is harmful and that parents should talk more with their children.

Some of the women, gaining courage, shared that they do not feel good when they are beaten. Then a dialogue was undertaken by participants of both genders and they all agreed that it is better rarely to have physical fights. Everyone thinks that the main reasons for the violence are poverty and low education. Two women said that they have problems with their partners, but it only happens when they are drunk. Mainly their scandals are because of lack of money. Other participants became more relaxed and commented that this is normal and they accept it as part of life. We talked about the law that protects people from violence and the support centres for victims of violence. The female participants in the conversation were ashamed to share personal problems. They talked about themselves in the form of a third party, but it was obvious that they were talking about themselves. There was a sense of fear, as they had children and were financially dependant on their husbands. At the end of the meeting they expressed satisfaction for having the opportunity to share some personal problems.

After this they talked about more general problems, such as the difficulty of providing food for their families and feeling disadvantaged regarding institutions. A man had prepared his documents for a one-off social support payment, but they were not accepted. A lady shared that she was going to quit her job in the city cleaning service because the conditions were hard, her salary was low and she couldn't afford to get to work. Another woman told us that she had to take a document relating to her disability to social services, but then couldn't afford the expensive hospital tests that she needed to prove it. Two women couldn't afford to buy urgent medicines for their children. The street workers made the decision to buy the medicine for the children, help the man with his social support documents and to support the lady in finding another job.

Gergana Encheva (Bulgaria)





Throughout the entire region of the former kingdom of Danxomè local communities have remained reluctant to promote and respect the rights of the child ever since Benin ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. And yet, they do agree on not considering children's violations of traditions, rites, or worship as a sacrilege.(...)

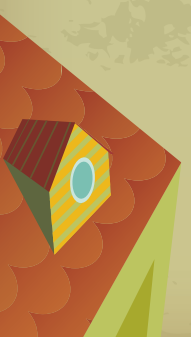
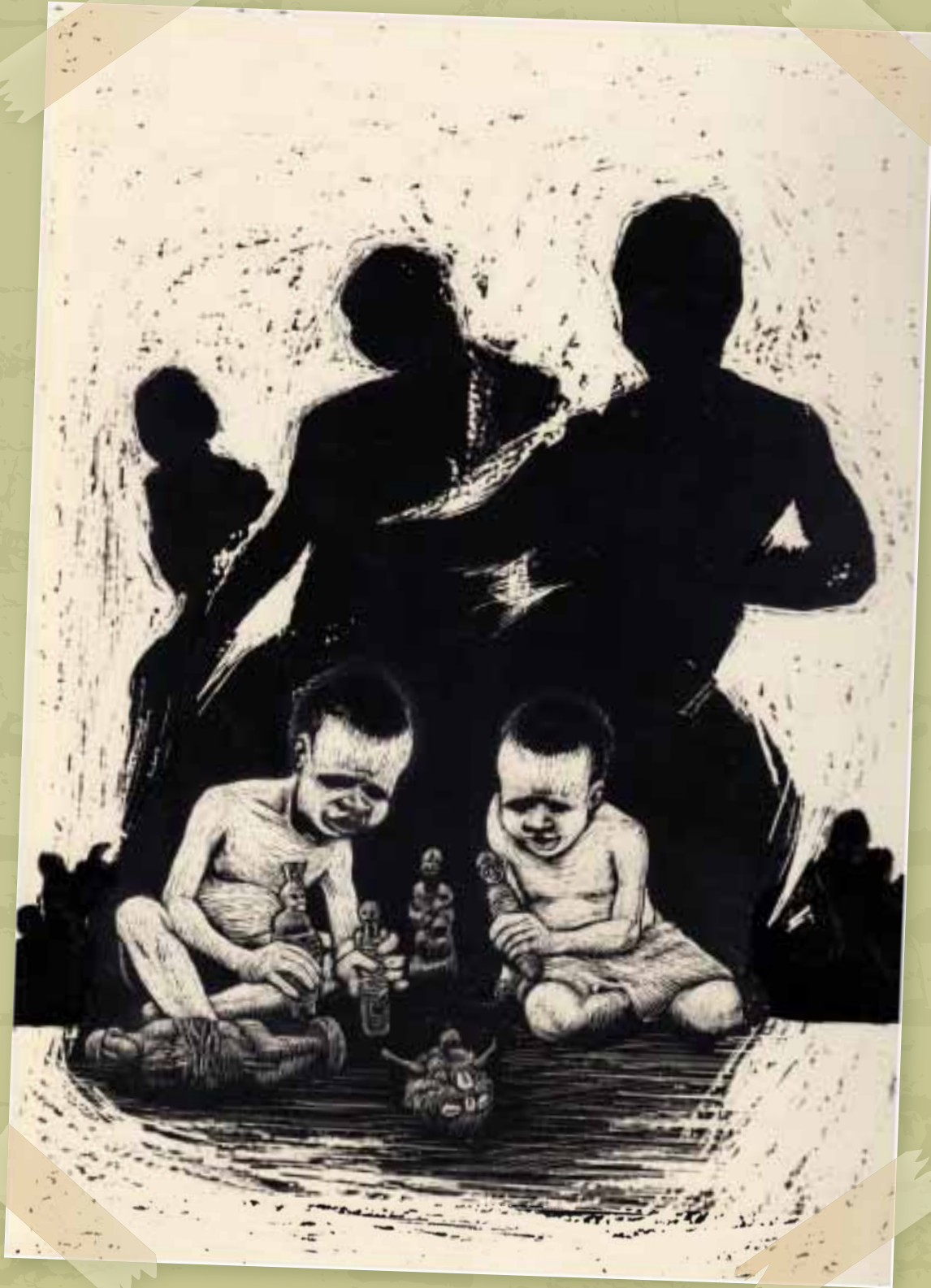
On meeting children aged 6 to 14 in this little hamlet, which is home to the centre dubbed Maison des Enfants (ME), the team of street workers following the methodological assistance is both surprised and captivated watching the children playing of their own accord all day long. They were spread out in little groups of activity, playing freely, and it wasn't long before they started putting on a performance of all the age-old fetishistic traditions of their parents. Within the community, imitating sacred rites, worship and ritual dances is considered a fundamental taboo and has always been fatal for the uninitiated, whether they are native to the area or not. Why not children, then? Opinions and answers vary but all point towards one reality: socialisation, self-socialisation of younger generations. Indeed, when we spoke to a religious cleric, he replied, "children only imitate what they have seen. There are sacred elements to worship that they are not aware of. When an adult does it, it is an act of provocation or wilful challenge". We also spoke to a believer in "Sakpata" who said, "a child learns everything by imitating. It is bewildering for a child to be prevented from imitating which is why we let them do it".

So, every Wednesday afternoon from 2pm to 6pm, in the village of Sacló, several groups of children meet for a wide range of group leisure activities based on imitating the rites and worship of endogenous religions. For example, «Hwèdè» is a beat linked to the divinity «Héviosso» used during cultural demonstrations in the run-up to ceremonial vigils, and is performed by children in the photo above. Children therefore have the right to imitate rites and traditional worship, unlike adults who are subject to community sanctions.

We have therefore not finished exploring the endogenous capacities of our communities to promote and respect children's rights.

Laetitia Akplogan and Roger Ouensavi, «The right to imitate sacred rituals: a community right granted to children alone» (Benin)





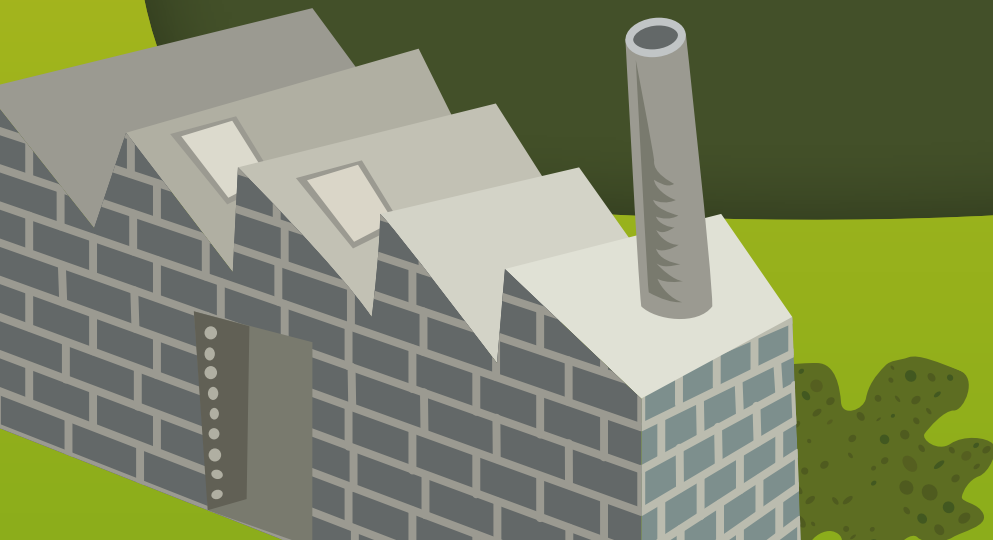
We provide social, legal and psychological support, supplying them with clothes, food and a safe environment in which to discover their talents. One of our main concerns is informing the children on the street, and their parents, about Children's Rights. This part of the job can be challenging and sometimes dangerous.

Maria-Monica (Greece)

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On June 12th (World Day Against Child Labour), the streetwork team went to undertake activities for children (games, music and painting) and provide information to raise adults' awareness of child labour at some central spots in the city. Many of the kids who work on the street themselves participated in these events, as they either happened to be passing by or we spotted them and drove them to the events ourselves. Rather than holding the boxes containing the items they are forced to sell, they chose to take the opportunity to play and paint with the rest of the children. I got close to a child who was absorbed in his painting and tried to talk to him. I asked him about school, but he replied with just one word, then changed the topic and paid no more attention to me. Even though he was just 12-years-old, I decided to tell him about World Day Against Child Labour, and asked him if he knew what day it was. He replied to me, "Wednesday." I then explained to him as simply as I could the meaning of that specific day. At first I thought he wasn't interested, until he stopped painting, stared at me and pointed to himself saying, "So, it's a day for me?" At that moment it was extremely hard to explain to him that the day was not a day for him, but a day dedicated to campaigning against the presence of child labourers on the streets. With all the attention given to the children and with all those games organised, I wondered whether the day was seen by the children as a feast, a day in which they are in the spotlight of society. While in fact this day is an occasion to highlight the phenomenon of child labour, it is of, course, not a feast for anyone.....

Alessandra Matou (Greece)



It is 4 p.m. and I have a meeting in the little grocer's shop on F. Street where the manager, originally from Sri Lanka, has made his shop into a place for socialising where many people pop by, including people from various African communities. I often stop by to have a drink and to keep in touch with these people, particularly those without an official residence permit, who are searching for «Eldorado». K. called me half an hour early as some young Nigerian adults were sad and distraught. One of their friends had drowned in the nearby lake the day before.

I go with them to the cemetery where around thirty other Nigerians are gathered. Their faces tell a story of anguish and anger. «Knowing» (street presence and group project developed together) most of them, I am very quickly introduced into their circle of contemplation. Gradually, after conversations in English or in their traditional language, it becomes clear that incomprehension is the overriding feeling and exasperation oozes from the tone of their discussions and the intensity of their brows. They are angry because the boy drowned during an ID inspection.

According to witnesses, the young man, who had had a few beers and didn't know how to swim, ran away and jumped into the water in order to avoid a confrontation with the police.

In the cemetery, a few individuals suddenly walk towards one of their fellow Nigerians, V., sitting at the foot of a tree, and hold him partly responsible for this situation. The latter has been around here for a long time and, unlike 99% of the people present, has a valid residence permit. He had previously gone through a dark period when he was involved in dealing coke and he spent an extended amount of time in prison. Since then, as a means of repentance, he has set up a project through which he intends to put an end to drug dealing by Nigerians. He took part in producing an amateur film which features a Nigerian dealer and, in order to try to raise awareness, has done all he can to publicise what he is doing and the scope of his project. For the other members of the community, he represents the traitor who has loudly and clearly declared that Nigerians are, above all, coke dealers.

Faced with these comments, V. in turn expresses his anger and incomprehension and says that he cares about the wellbeing of his community; he becomes verbally and physically aggressive. Beer bottles are broken and a bit of a scuffle breaks out. «Knowing» the protagonists, I saw the opportunity to separate a few of them and to talk to the most «rebellious», one of whom, ended up collapsing into my arms in utter despair. There was a great deal of sadness. In the midst of conversations or

arguments, I loudly and clearly ask for us to calm down and, rather spontaneously and without really knowing exactly what I was going to say, launch into a short and solemn (which is customary in their native community) speech where I ask us to remember the young deceased A., who was a peaceful person and friendly to all around him. Everybody immediately stops to listen. V. comes to join us, having calmed down. This speech is then followed by several others in which each, in his own way, explains what they are feeling about this experience; some say it is something that can be learnt from and others that it is a sign of excessive police harassment and the deceased was a victim of police brutality. Several human rights organisations are mentioned as well as the desire to go to the press and media to speak out loudly and clearly about what had happened.

Our discussions finish by addressing organisational matters where V. reminds us of the need to focus on how to repatriate the body to Nigeria. He doesn't want contact with the press or the media and volunteers to represent the Nigerian community. Some, however, made it clear that they did not need him. He speaks up and tries to convince the gathering to go through him for everything. I take advantage of this new crisis movement to try to allow the others to speak and hear from each of them. Poignant accounts are solemnly told and priorities are outlined. First, arrangements for repatriation of the body, then expression of resistance and promotion of fundamental human rights that they feel were flouted.

Some continued discussions about how they fail to understand the attitude of the police and are ready to come to blows to show their annoyance and rebellion. In this commotion, and after long discussions that led to the confrontation of convergent and divergent views, anger seemed to dissipate somewhat. They express their sincere thanks and I hand out several business cards to those who ask for one.

V. and one of his friends came to thank me separately and are first to leave the gathering place. We stay there a little while longer and then leave the cemetery together as a group. In front of the exit, some point at a couple of plainclothes officers posted on a bench at the entrance to the cemetery. The people (around 40) at the front of the group decide to walk by the nearby police station in order to remind them or show them that they are not indifferent to or fooled by everything that has just happened.

I walk with them a bit further until our paths separate in the town centre.

Vincent Artison (Switzerland)

This morning, I have a meeting with Léon to go to the legal advice service. I hope that Léon has not forgotten about the appointment. I give him a call and he hasn't forgotten but will be late. I phoned the lawyer to let him know. It is important for Léon to make it because you need to wait at least 2 weeks for another appointment. I hope that it will go well. Léon talks a lot, he has lots of problems and not much patience. From experience I know that not all social assistants or lawyers have a lot of patience..... Léon talks about his life and after about 5 minutes I ask him what is the question he has for the lawyer....

While walking around the neighbourhood, I get a call from Joseph. I couldn't remember his name. At least 8 months have gone by since I last saw him and helped in finding housing where he could take up residence, but to no avail.

Now, however, he has finally found some accommodation and I will help him through the administrative procedures. I go to the soup kitchen where I find several young men from the football team. I remind them not to forget about the next training session. It's not easy to find a free sports hall in Brussels. Most of these men are undocumented. For them it is very important that after training they can take a nice long shower. Thanks to the BXL R CUP football competition, I established good contacts with this group of undocumented people; they are truly grateful and always happy to see me.

Kris Blervacq (Belgium)

## Street work, a «borderline» profession; street worker as neighbourhood adviser

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### What is the street?

The street is not simply a juxtaposition of houses, footpaths and roads.

The street is alive. It lives through its zebra crossings, exchanged glances, children playing in the square, on the football field, young people chatting on a bench, in front of a café, or outside school. The street cannot be defined. It has no identity. It is made up of the identity of each individual that strides across it, stops, runs or plays in it; of children, young people, not so young people, the elderly, inhabitants, passers-by, with a subtle mix of cultures, stories, fleeting experiences, half-way between the inside and outside or neither in one or the other. The street oozes life and movement, it smiles, cries, sings, dances and shouts. The street is not a human being but yet it is in its own way. It is not serious, not as much as it would like to be, because everything that lives there is not serious.

And perhaps this is precisely why people find it difficult to consider street social work as a «serious» profession. Where is the framework? Where are the written rules? If there is a highway code, where then is the street code? Footpaths? Public areas? Who are these young people? Where are they? Where are they going? How can we justify our presence and absence? Neighbourhood inhabitants and yet not, a passive player, active player, providing information, ideas, advice, a listening ear, support. Support...this «hold-all» word which encompasses such a great deal that no matter what size the hold-all, it could not be contained. Giving support by walking with somebody along a stretch of the footpath or for a kilometre or so, providing support by guiding somebody back to themselves or towards others, support by being good company, sometimes, often, or only in order to forge ties and perhaps become somebody who can be trusted, a truly solid nucleus for some, a free electron for others.

Anonymous (Belgium)

In Greece the profession of social street work is not only little known, but in fact in some ways it doesn't even exist. It is not regulated like other professions, so we cannot even talk about professional fees, insurance or relevant training. What has been done so far in the field has been achieved through very great struggle by very few people. It is not always great to have a profession that others disdain, or feel helpless when faced with children who're living in squalid conditions or being abused. There are days when we are desperate, and we wonder whether it makes sense even to try. It is the smiles on children's faces that gives us the strength to continue, even if our contributions only concern the smallest part of society. Although we sometimes feel that we can do so little against such a big problem, it is worth trying for what you believe. Even the least significant person can change the course of human history.

Due to habit or daily routine sometimes your fear as a street worker relaxes, and work on the streets can begin to feel like a game, but you should never lose your alertness! You never know what lies behind a situation. No matter how well prepared you think you are, anything can happen and situations can get reversed in an instant.

Pipera Eleni y Koutsina Maria (Greece)


These people are living in very poor conditions, with so many problems that it is hard to find a solution, but I have found that the thing they need most are people to whom they can voice their needs, without the fear of judgement or oppression..

Antoniya Chilikova (Bulgaria)

I found work as a street worker. I didn't know what the work would be like, but according to my life's 'playlist' I am not afraid of anything. For me, street work was a way out which helped me in times of need. It is hard to say whether I helped thousands of clients or I helped myself by helping them. I am still as 'mad' about my work as I used to be. I like my clients a lot. I recruit to my team those people who can give something to the young people with interesting life stories. I like to work in the club and on the street, and I am learning online work. Besides my work I write, I train new street workers, I am a trained auditor of the Czech Street Work Association, I am an external methodical leader of several teams in the Czech Republic and I am open to new methods of work. The driving force which did not let me die in my personal life moves me forward both in private life and work.

Martin Holis (Czech Republic)





In the afternoon I set off for the 1st district. The guys out there play football every day, and today is no exception. It is a group of boys aged about 11 or 12 years old. They talk about the football tournament last weekend. In the distance I see Kris cycling towards us. Kris is a boy of 14-years-old, who often wears scruffy old clothes. Kris says that he has ADHD, and for this reason goes to a special school. It is weird to see him smoking in public, as he normally smokes secretly because his family do not know. "Kris, smoking in public?", I asked him. He replied that his mother now knows that he smokes, so he can smoke in public. At that point he gets a text message and leaves, shouting "I have some business to do" as he rides away.


I then leave for the 2nd district, Café Paro. On Tuesday the Paro is closed, but I know there will be people hanging around it. When I arrive there are two cars. There are some guys that I know, but also some older men I have only seen once or twice, but never with these guys. I step towards them and greet everyone by the hand. Leandro immediately begins to say things which no one can understand. He is under the influence of heroin. He has told me that he uses, but I have never seen him like this. The other guys laugh with him.

I ask Yasser why he is here in this district. "Normally you are always in the 1st district", I say. He says he is waiting for someone and it's funny to watch Leandro going crazy. Yasser is a 19-year-old Moroccan boy. At the moment he doesn't do much. He has left school and is not really looking for work. Whilst Leandro tells blurry stories, I ask Yasser more quietly whether he is still not smoking weed. The last time we talked he told me he was feeling very down, so he had stopped smoking. He tells me that he smoked it last weekend. "Too bad", I say, "You had stopped for so long." He says that he had stopped for two and a half months, and can live without it. "Besides, now I use hashish. It just makes me tired, unlike weed which makes me paranoid", he says. A conversation then starts in the group about the upcoming weekend. Khalid drives by suddenly then stops his car. He opens his window and asks who wants to buy something nice. Some guys have a look in his car to see what he has. I can see t-shirts, wallets and belts. "Would you like to buy something beautiful for your boyfriend?" he asks me. I refuse in a friendly way, saying with a smile that my boyfriend already has too much. Apparently there is nothing interesting in there, so nobody buys anything. Khalid greets everyone then he leaves. I make sure not to ask any questions about this to the guys, or they might think I want to know about Khalid's 'business'. Once I get to know Khalid better, I will talk to him myself. Leandro gives everybody a kiss and a hug. The guys watch him as he crosses the car park. "He is totally wasted" say the guys, smiling. Concerned, I ask them if they see a similar future for themselves. "No! You're crazy!" they answer, then they explain to me why they will never use heroin. They even want to make a deal with me; if I see them in the same situation in twenty years, I can punch them. "Deal!" I reply determinedly. We laugh and continue talking about the weekend.

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Cis Dewaele – Vlastrov (Belgium)





I went to the Place Communale around 4 p.m. There, I saw Diego in the car-park. He is a young lad that I know very well. He is 19 years old and suffers from a mental disability coupled with behavioural problems. He was standing close to a vehicle surrounded by a group of young people. I watched them, afraid that these were the young people who had seriously burnt Diego with a lighter the week previously. I took the initiative to call his mother in order to point this out to her. She asked me to pass the phone to her son in order to be sure that he wasn't close to his attackers. I approached the group and greeted Diego, handing him the mobile phone. At this point, the young people spoke to me, telling me that Diego needed help, as he was trying to smoke joints with them. I took advantage of this request to introduce myself and tell them about the support I gave to Diego and talk to them about his disability. They responded positively and seemed to appreciate the fact that this socio-educational support was available in their living environment. I also told them that some young people take advantage of Diego's disability to exploit his credulity. They acknowledged this but reassured me that it was not the case with them. Incidentally, Diego's mother confirmed this on the phone. I left them but went to sit down in the square. The weather was fine and there were some families around making the most of being out in the open air with their children. There were a lot of people in the square, mainly teenagers waiting for the bus, young people from the neighbourhood hanging about in groups. I also noticed that there was a lot of traffic and poorly-parked cars, particularly to go to the local corner shop.

I also realised that a young adult was watching me. He was probably wondering what I was doing there. A bit later, he came to sit next to me and struck up a conversation. He was from Kosovo and spoke a bit of French. He wanted to talk to me and asked me if I spoke English. I told him that I didn't. Nevertheless, he managed to get across to me the fact that he was looking for an apartment but that it was really difficult. He asked me what I was doing on the square. I tried to explain to him but he didn't seem to

understand. He also asked me if I was married, and I told him I was.

Kevin, who is 13 years old, came to greet me when he got off the bus. I often bump into him on the square. He lives in the neighbourhood. He knows a lot of young people and introduces me to his friends. We chatted about school, sport, etc. He also told me also that his older brother had just had his scooter stolen. He left me because he saw his cousin parked on the square in a red car. I watched them and quickly a small group gathered around the young 18 year-old driver. I recognised the girl from the restaurant next door. She hangs around the neighbourhood a lot and yet she is still very young, about 10 years old. She seemed quite independent and got into the cousin's car. That struck me too. A young man in a Mercedes called out to me. It was one of the young people I had met previously in the car-park. He once again complimented me for being present in the street and for my outreach work with the young people of the neighbourhood. He also complimented me by telling me that I was pretty. I smiled and thanked him whilst laughing it off.

Kevin joined me again along with two female teenagers, the younger brother of one of them and the young girl from the restaurant. We chatted and one of the teenagers asked him if I was his mother...ah yes, I'm 40 years old it has to be said! I told them that I was a street worker in the neighbourhood. She told me that she had been living with her father in an apartment on the square for the past month and a half. Her parents had just separated. She talked to me for a long time about it. She told me that she was at a school in Liège and that she would like to be a community health worker. I told her that it was true that her school had a good reputation for preparing people for that profession and wished her all the best for her exams. Kevin invited me home to say hello to his mother. I accepted the invitation and went with him to his house.

Bernadette (Belgium)



Marc is a young 24-year-old man who got involved in crime at the age of 15. The crowd he hung around with brought him into contact with drug addicts and a short while after this initial contact, he, in turn, got involved in this world of illegal substances.

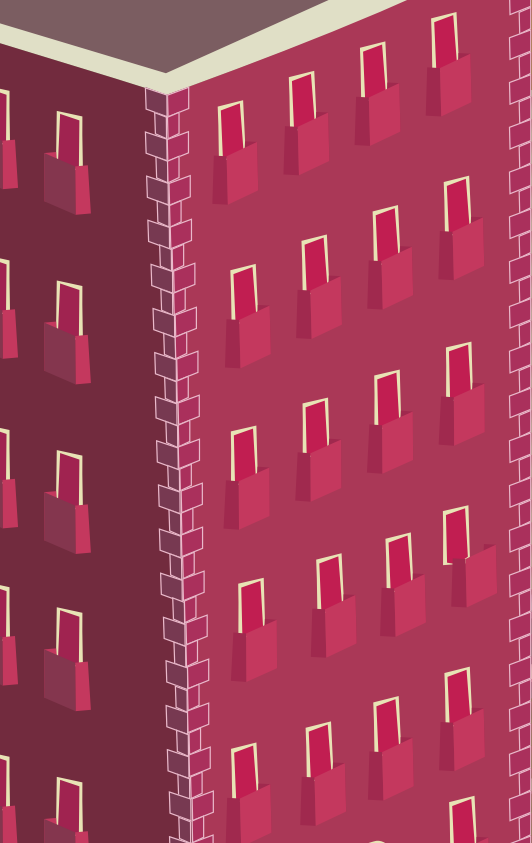
He regularly pops by our centre, just to pick up some material and when his alcoholic or drugged up state allows, he confides in us. He is very often sad and downhearted when he talks to us about his family who have had nothing to do with him for two years. All attempts to reintegrate him have been in vain. Everything was met with refusal. He tells us, though, that we are his only family and without us he doesn't know what he would do. He regularly talks about committing suicide, but by dint of dissuading him he says he would prefer to go to prison and that he will do what he can to get arrested. Not long after this confession, two CLIP workers were patrolling a street and ran into him smashing cars' wing mirrors. He had already done this to about ten vehicles. He told us he would do whatever he could to be caught by the police and go to prison. So what had to happen happened. Marc appeared in court within 48 hours and since it was the ninth time he had appeared in court for various incidents of theft and defacement, and each time the sentences had been commuted to suspended sentences, the court sentenced him to 6 years imprisonment.

The first three months of his imprisonment there was radio silence because he was not allowed to make phone calls during this time. His first phone call was to our centre and his only outside contact is still our centre. He calls us regularly in order to keep in touch with us. To date, Marc has been in prison for 6 months and our not-for-profit association has just obtained permission to go and visit him in prison.

Jean Philippe (Belgium)



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I met a young girl on a square in a small village. Gradually, a connection was made and I was able to listen to her and help her in her journey. Her parents lived very close to the square, and she told me that I was welcome to come by. When tensions with her parents had subsided, she took me to her house. Her parents were alcoholics but managed their drinking fairly well. They were the kind of people who were only too happy to help their neighbours and so there were quite a few people popping by who you wouldn't usually see in the streets and whom I would certainly not have met through street work.

However, they were people who often had difficult stories to tell about their family, drug use, but particularly loneliness and isolation. Marie's parents also provided a listening ear for them and told them about my job and the counselling and possible help I could give them.

The other day, during a visit, there was a woman there. I had already bumped into her, drunk in the street the previous year and she had called me a whore. Since I don't hold a grudge, I sat down at the table and pretended I hadn't noticed. She had been drinking, and stared at me whilst talking part a bit in the conversation. When I got up to leave, she asked if she could go with me. I jumped at the chance because she was somebody I found difficult to approach when I met her in the street. I told her that I would hold on to her, and help to hold her up because she was having trouble walking. We didn't have far to go, but on the way she told me about how tough life is, how hard her life was. She told me that her partner drank heavily and had been hitting her every day for the past fifteen years. She held me tightly and told me that apart from this family, she didn't speak to anybody, she didn't leave the village. I told her that part of my job is also to talk and chat with people. We arrived in front of her door, she told me that her partner had gone to work and that she didn't know when he would be back. She asked me, whilst holding my arm, if I would like to have a coffee with her. I said yes, thinking that a coffee would probably do her good.

So we sat down, and, with a steady gaze, she told me all about her ordeal. I explained a bit about my job to her and the things our service did. One of our tasks is to take in victims of domestic violence but she replied that she never went into town, that she didn't have a phone, that she couldn't. I realised that she felt completely trapped! I told her when I worked and when I was available. She told me that she needed to talk and I replied that I was there whenever she wanted to have a coffee with her.

Suddenly, her partner arrived, I wasn't expecting that! He seemed surprised to see me and I had to improvise some kind of reaction. I was very careful to explain the main duties of the service and just said that I was a street youth worker and that I had run into P. in the street. Since he was a youth worker himself, we talked about our jobs. I tried as much as I could to get him «on side» but I wasn't very at ease. Then he left. I asked P. if it would be a problem for me to be there when he came back. She told me that in any case she would get it in the neck. I had to leave.

One of the aspects of my job is to offer people a listening ear and support, but up to what point? There are risks linked with my house visit and consequences in that kind of situation. Another part of the job is to try to decipher the underlying content of what somebody is saying, but above all to try to give people strength and encouragement, emphasising the fact that they are brave and that they can make progress, recognising their difficulties and sometimes that they are victims, but trying to help them see their worth. These house visits can sometimes put me in the position of a fire-fighter who has been called out, at the request for help or support and sometimes it's just a matter of trying to inject a sense of well-being but, more specifically, identifying how to better handle a situation. Recognising suffering and showing concern for others already has an immediate impact. Allowing people to try to explain their stories or to speak out about something... offering alternatives, without depriving people of their own journey and the trials life brings with it - it is all about raising awareness.

Laurence (Belgium)



From the first time I met Justine, I already had a feeling that we were going to see each other often and that she would be a good «client»! She was very extravagant, often vulgar, violent, knew no limits, was temperamental, a delinquent, crude, etc. She had such a list of characteristics... but I would quite simply say that she was «extra» ordinary!

When I met her she was 11. She is now 16. We hit it off immediately. I loved doing the rounds of the neighbourhood with her, something always happened. All social service providers were afraid of Justine and her mother (she was just like Justine, but an adult). These included psycho-medical social workers, schools, guidance centre, judges, CPS representative, etc. They knew lots of social workers but they trusted us about all of them. It was a very intense relationship that required a lot of energy.

After countless school expulsions, family violence, dangerous situations with older men because of her provocative side, the juvenile judge was relieved to be able to put Justine in a public youth protection institution (LPPJ) just for stealing a mobile phone «for her own protection because she was putting herself in danger». When we went to visit her in LPPJ she told us how she didn't understand why she was in the same institution as a girl who had killed somebody? After the LPPJ, she was placed in a psychiatric hospital and enrolled in a school. She continued to come and say hello to us at the weekend. Now she is living in another region with her family and we keep in touch with each other. Her departure has been keenly felt in the neighbourhood, the rounds are not quite the same, they don't have the same spiciness and the street seems extremely quiet.

I honestly think that I was an adult role model for Justine and somebody that she could trust for all those years. I firmly believe that it was being there every day, regularly in the street, in addition to family visits and the many times I accompanied her places (CPS, LPPJ, Psy, etc.) the excursions and camps (what memories!), that forged this very special close relationship that is so specific to street work.

Anonymous (Belgium)

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I met Koen more or less six years ago during one of my rounds of the neighbourhood. He must have been about 13 or 14 years old. He was introduced to me by one of his friends. We became acquainted and chatted a bit; I immediately explained that I was a street social worker. From that day onwards and for the year that followed, I met him regularly; we would talk about this and that but Koen never made any requests.

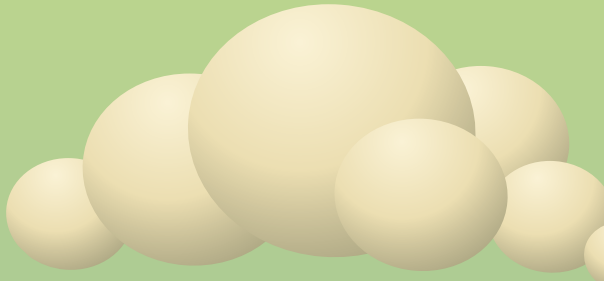

A short time later, Koen disappeared from our radar and through one of his friends I found out that his mother was really ill and that he was now placed with a youth support service. I learnt of the death of his mother a few months later. I didn't know the boy very well but I thought it was important to call him and offer him my support. He seemed surprised to receive the call and took it well. I made that call because I felt that Koen was fragile and thought that it was important to maintain the connection at that particular time. For two years and until he turned 18, we would barely see each other but when he came through the neighbourhood, we would catch up with each other and chat. A few months later, he bumped into my colleague when he was having a really hard time and made a clear request for help for

the first time. He clearly identified the service, support was put in place, housing, Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS), etc. It was quite an emotional time. There was a great deal of affection between us and the young boy. We found solutions but they are precarious.

A few months later, Koen ended up in prison, for petty crime. Keen to maintain contact, we visited him in prison several times. Once again, we spoke about everything, from football to his future or his love life.

When he was released, it was a nightmare ... he came to see us regularly, sometimes with requests and sometimes not. We tried to help him but our «sticking plaster help», because real solutions are rare, often didn't work for him. He had the knack of quickly undoing whatever we put in place. Sometimes it was hard to take but we accepted it without judging him. He's eking out a living at the moment, living here and there. Sometimes we run into him and we always take the time to listen to him and to be there for him if he needs us.

Anonymous (Belgium)



It was Tuesday, first day of the week, 4 p.m. That spring Tuesday the sun finally had its hat on! We finished the weekly meeting quite early and set off quickly with colleagues in order to make use of the extra time on a late sunny afternoon on Place Flagey – there would surely be people around! 5 p.m.: we got to Place Flagey and it was strange. There had been a fair going on for two days but there was no atmosphere. We had a walk around and understood why. Opposite the tram stop all the young people were sitting in silence, at times their mouths dropped open: they were watching the «show» unfolding between numerous vehicles parked on the square itself. Brahim said to me, «it's even worse than in a film». Three number 71 buses and two number 81 trams were waiting because today everybody was getting their turn; it was the STIB inspection day. Nobody could escape: as each new bus arrived, an inspector got on at each door and two waited outside to check the tickets of everybody getting off. There were 20 inspectors! But that's not all, for each individual that didn't show a valid ticket, there were 40 police officers waiting between the benches and the bus stop in order to carry out an identity check. I didn't know that the STIB and the police worked together.

There were five police vans, two of which were from the sniffer dog unit. I don't know what they were looking for but they were making quite an impression. My colleague and I therefore decided to stay put and, like everybody else, we looked on as witnesses or spectators. As each new bus arrived, four or five people were fined and there were already two people in the police van. I wondered what would happen to them. It looked more like a hunt for fugitives than a ticket inspection. What's more, nobody was getting onto the trams anymore; everybody stopped, looked, joined the crowd and asked questions to those next to them. Three young people that I knew had already been inspected and found not to have a ticket; then a fourth got off the bus. I recognised him, it was Saloua's big brother and he still didn't have papers; I was worried. I kept watching; I didn't want to interfere and tip them off. First he was met by the inspectors. He had a ticket but hadn't punched it. He then spoke to the police officers for twenty minutes; he didn't want to give his address, most likely because he didn't want to cause his family any trouble. The police insisted, they said to him: if you don't tell us where you live, we will arrest you; besides, you don't have any papers on you. On a scrap of paper I quickly scribbled down his lawyer's number, just in case. He ended up giving

them an address, I don't know if it was the right one but, phew! They seemed satisfied; they gave him a big tap on the shoulder and sent him on his way. I let out a sigh of relief.

This made me think about the issue of mobility in Belgium. We are forever coming up with initiatives to encourage young people to get around, to get out of their neighbourhood and become more open. The cost of public transport to get across town is also constantly on the rise. The number of ticket inspections are also ramped up (not to mention the rising cost of fines) and now they are further intensified with ID checks. I am alarmed. Colleagues from another not-for-profit stopped to ask us questions too. One of them went to ask the police why there were so many of them. He was told that it was for riot control. I wondered if the lads waiting calmly in the police van had been a threat to public order, or if they were known for their active participation in many riots!

A little later Romeo appeared; a young ten year-old boy – one of many children from the Demiri family that we often bump into. His parents told me last week that they had received a second order to leave the country. They are very anxious at the prospect of being repatriated to Serbia. Romeo was all alone and seemed very proud of himself. He was holding a trophy in his hands. Victoriously, he walked up to the police and showed them a big plastic bag: I found that in the lake! There was a police radio and badge inside! The police officer answered him in a Flemish accent: - What is your name? - Romeo. - Are you all on your own? -Yes. - You need to give me your address so that I can speak to your parents, where do you live? - Euh over there. But I can't tell you. - That's not on, eh, you have to tell me where you live. My colleague saw the scene unfolding and stepped in, explaining that he was a street worker and that he knew Romeo. The police officer pushed him away: I am busy with the boy Sir. His colleague asked Romeo to follow them to show him where he had found the bag. I followed them and, along the way explained to them that I was a social worker from the neighbourhood and knew Romeo very well, and that I was following them to make sure everything was OK. Romeo showed them a place in the water, underneath a willow tree. The police woman bent over and said, worriedly: is that seaweed? Yes, indeed, I think that is seaweed. She must have been scared of finding the body of one of her colleagues. The police officer started to ask Romeo questions again: - Now you need to tell us where you live. -

I don't know, I have just moved and I don't know what it is called. – Well then, you will have to show us, otherwise I will have to keep you at the police station. Romeo's face changed completely, he realised that he had made a mistake; his mother often told him that he couldn't tell people where he lived. He held my hand really tightly. They put him in the police van, Romeo asked if I could go with him and luckily they agreed! I was wondering what to do to calm the situation. It was the first time that Romeo had been in a police van; he looked all around him and cried from stress at the same time. I tried to reassure him but I mustn't have been very convincing, as I was worried too. We did a round of the neighbourhood. The police officers told him that he had done the right thing but didn't seem to understand why he was so on edge. In order to distract him I asked him if he had gone fishing with his father at the weekend; the police officer also liked going fishing. That was good; at least they had found some common ground. He showed them the ramshackle house he lived in. "Oh that's handy, it's next to ALDI!" said one of the old police officers in the van. We arrived at the police station and the police officer asked Romeo for his mother's name. Obviously, she wasn't resident at that address; he was still in a quandary about putting a name on his statement. After thinking about it for 15 minutes I suggest putting my name on the statement, implying that I was with the kid when he found the famous bag. The police officer thought for a bit, went to speak to his colleague and then finally said yes. I saw Romeo smile and relax and I was relieved too. Pffffff... The pressure subsided. Romeo got a tour of the police station; he was introduced as a hero and a future colleague. What a contrast, what a turnaround! They took us back to Flagey in the police van and on the way back he was smiling and sitting up straight – today he had done a good deed! We got out of the

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police van and they set off. We looked at each other and laughed nervously. Romeo and I had had quite an adventure today, one we would definitely not forget. He hugged me really tightly! I too was on the verge of tears. I told him that we would see each other tomorrow, and that he must be careful. On the square Orlando had spotted us; a young 19 year-old Moroccan. He said to Romeo: - You're crazy! When you have no papers, you don't ever go to speak to the police! They are only there to send you packing! Next time, if Dynamo aren't around, you come and see me, OK? Romeo wasn't listening anymore, I think he just really wanted to go home!

When he left, we watched him run along rue Malibran between the passers-by and Orlando said to me: I saw you follow him, I wanted to follow too but I was too scared. I walked around for 10 minutes more before meeting up with my colleague in the café. It was such a surreal afternoon. On the square the children were at the fair, they were enjoying themselves. The tram stop was clear, everything had gone back to normal, as though nothing had happened. I had witnessed a great deal of violence today. And then I played a part in an unusual situation simply because I was there. I thought to myself that in street work, it is by being there and spending long hours outside that we end up being part of the furniture and, above all, we end up seeing situations of flagrant or sometimes invisible violence. It involves sharing aspects of daily life or intensive moments that seem to have come straight out of a film. Before going into the café, I said to myself that I must write this down and share this story, because, as outreach workers we have a duty to bring to light the realities that so many young people, families and individuals are faced with.

Anonymous (Belgium)



## Meeting street social workers and their target populations.



I asked street social worker members of Traces de rue, if I could spend a few hours a day with them in order to share in their experience and get a closer look at the work they do at grassroots level. This was an extremely rewarding experience – please keep reading to hear all about it!

It was a Tuesday, the weather was fine and I was invited by three street social workers to go on a round of the neighbourhood. Outside a special education school, a group of young people suggested having a football match. They included me and I ended up playing goalkeeper. I gave it my all and managed to save a few goals, which were met with shouts of joy, clapping and looks of gratitude. An hour of football and I had already experienced sharing, positive experiences and bonding. The round continued, we met young people, people spoke freely and the relationship was authentic. These street social workers are endowed with such wonderful human and professional qualities, working together with young people on a daily basis to build a time and place where a trust-based relationship can be established. We dropped by to check up on a young person, we rang the bell, his mother called him; he wasn't in great form but would perhaps come to the next event. He went back upstairs. His mother offered us a coffee; she brought out some chairs, biscuits, coffee and chatted with us. Sharing within the community is a great asset for the social fabric of the neighbourhood.

I was very enthusiastic to go to Place Flagey to meet the street workers who had invited me there. They made a few phone calls to young people to tell them that they were available to follow up on their situations. We went up the street and bumped into a young person who needed to talk in order to find solutions to the difficult and complex situation she was going through. She asked for support to help her through the steps she needed to take because she felt emotionally fragile. She went off with a female street worker so that they could come back with some ideas and steps to take.

Another street worker had a meeting with a young unaccompanied minor, or rather, a former unaccompanied minor because he had crossed the borderline, which is a bit of a nightmare for him, from rights to no rights, by virtue of turning 18. He was asking so many questions, unsure of many things, and yet showed bravery and dignity. I went with them to the legal aid office of the youth tribunal but it was closed! We fell back on a legal aid service; spent a long time waiting and then finally the jurist didn't turn up because he was busy in a meeting on the dismantling of legal aid. Obviously it is important to put pressure on the government. We said to ourselves that there would be another time and left. We continued walking round the neighbourhood, Tulipe – Matongé, we met a few young people and others. The evening drew to a close and we had a de-brief with the team. It is all about being there, available, listening and responding to young people's requests for help. It is a daily battle to keep the social bonds alive.

Liège, 9 p.m., in a district where prostitution and drugs are a day-to-day reality for people who are suffering. Handing out condoms, gel, needles and equipment exchange to help reduce risks is of the utmost importance. Meeting these people with a street worker who has been by their sides for over 20 years was a unique experience. He was released from prison this morning and had wandered around all day to make it «home» by evening, to the neighbourhood which had seen his life unfold. Besides, did he have any other «home» to go to? I sensed that he was under pressure, there was too much violence bubbling away inside him, this violence that comes from casting him off into the streets with no money or prospects. He thanked the street worker simply for being with him; he could talk to somebody who knew him, understood and didn't judge him. We met a young person who had become “clean” and that was really important for him. He knew this neighbourhood well and, in fact, it was there this evening it would be because he'd had a fight with his girlfriend and found the female

street worker who knew him better than his own mother and it is good to be amongst "family" on an evening like that. He talked to me about himself, his girlfriends, his children, his troubles and his desire to get away from them. Incidentally, he managed to sort things out thanks to his current girlfriend but after a year's training, he still couldn't find a job, he told me he was going to hang in there! We bumped into some African and Bulgarian women. They asked us for some condoms and gel, complained that the night was very quiet and that the police who are constantly on the beat were making their work take a nosedive. These Bulgarian women were fed up; they refused several clients who asked them not to use a condom. That is just not an option for them but some accept anyway. In Paris there was more work but in Liège things aren't great, they might try their luck in Reims. We walked them back to their hotel.

It is 2 a.m., we did a final round of the neighbourhood and had some final conversations. This was an example of practical cooperation between a street worker and her target population, faced with a system which generates unacceptable situations, leaving no room for respect for human dignity.

Véronique Martin (Belgium)

"I know I couldn't do it, I don't have the patience". "I admire the work you do". "And how do you measure your success? You manage to get the kids on the right path?", "You have a cool job. You go bowling, to the cinema, you eat ice creams...", "Hardcore!". "I want to do something like that but I'm not good at it", "Oh, you're wearing a dress? I thought that you always wear sports clothes." "I never go to that district. With all the crime it's too dangerous".

These are statements people make about my job. Friends, people I meet. Drivers during hitch-hiking, public officials, corporation workers, bartenders. They are free on public holidays, for months they plan their vacations. They pay for apartments on credit cards, rent cars or take guided tours with the travel agency. They wear high heels, wear make-up every day. Not everyone of course, but generally.

Once, when I put on a dress, my friends were surprised. It's rare, I normally wear sports clothes. Instead of the bus or the subway, I ride a bike. Instead of suits and high heels, I wear baggy pants and sports shoes. Instead of an elegant handbag, I use a backpack. In it I have a board game, mineral water, dice and playing cards.

I go to the backyard. Dilapidated, neglected buildings. Dogs barking. A few older looking guys are drinking cheap wine, then the rest of the group appears. Dirty, worn clothes,

holes in their shoes. They were waiting for me on the roof of a dilapidated garage. They run towards me, give me high-fives. "So where are we going today?" they ask. "Where do you want to go?" I reply. They tell me they want to go for a pizza. Today's activities are all paid for. On the way to get a pizza they tell stories about which car they robbed recently and which sucker from another yard they beat up. On the pavement they find a cigarette and smoke it secretly. In a rubbish bin they find a plastic gun, so the fun begins. They run into almost every store on the way as if they are going to rob the place, then run away laughing at their joke. In the shop with the flags, the shopkeeper gives them sweets. Eventually we arrive at the pizzeria. They immediately know what they want. They do not read the menu, do not want to try anything new. I urge them to try something new. I show them the menu, reading out the options. "Okay, let's try this fierce hot pepperoni." The waiter arrives. "Good morning, what would you like?" "Hot pepperoni, large." "Something to drink?" "Cola refills, and we want straws. When will we get our pizza?"

And it begins. Loud belching, shooting each other with straws and throwing ice-cubes around. I wait for the reaction of the other people in the pizzeria, but nobody does anything. Today, social pedagogy is not working. After a while, I take the board game out of my backpack and we start to play. They cheat, changing the rules of the game



to meet their needs, but we play anyway until the pizza arrives. First, they count how many slices there are. Three per person. They proceed to load their slices onto their own plates, so nobody can take more than their share. Whilst eating they argue about the sauce, until they are finished and it's time to leave. "Let's go and play football", they say. Along the way they continue shooting each other expertly with their straws, and even teach me how to do it properly. We arrive to the yard where we play football. Good game, FIFA Street. That means fouls are allowed. Already it's getting late. "See you tomorrow guys, it was nice today. When will you be around tomorrow?" I ask. "We'll let you know," they reply. They each give me a high-five then I ride off on my bike, look around some shops, and collect invoices from previous activities.

This job does not provide me with a pension for when I retire. My salary doesn't allow me to spend my free time shopping

for expensive clothes and toiletries. I don't go to expensive bars and I cannot afford a new car. I live from 'project to project', and I'm often nervous about my financial situation, but it's a conscious decision I have made. I do what I enjoy and what I believe in. I have a great team of street workers, and although sometimes it's hard work, it can also be the best job in the world. Like when the kids, even for a minute, forget about everything, including all their problems, and they become children.

Paula Wozniakowska (Poland)

## 🌀 Private life, need for self-protection

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A few years ago, Yen and I went to meet the young man L. who we often saw on the ferry quay. He was called L. and his friends told us that he was sick. Dusk was falling. The windows and doors of the houses were all closed. Since the path was very narrow, we got off the motorbike and walked. As we got closer to the little cottage where L. lived, the lights inside the houses went out. The dogs were barking. The neighbourhood became increasingly dark. This sent a shiver down our spines; we reminded ourselves that this district was a haven for drug trade and sex workers. Even though our motorbike wasn't worth much, once sold it could provide a whole group with several days of drugs. Moreover, we were just two girls. ..

We began to feel afraid, our legs trembled. With bated breath, my colleague tried to call L. Once; twice. Nobody answered. There was an eerie silence. We felt as though there were hundreds of eyes staring at us suspiciously. We thought about making ourselves scarce but we were frozen with fear. Suddenly, there was a glimmer of light, L's window opened and L told us that he was doing better and that he was going to sleep. Unable to hide our relief, we decided to leave and come back to see him the next day.

Although this wasn't the first time that we had been to visit such a sensitive neighbourhood in order to meet young people, it was the first time that we had felt in danger. It is of course true that we work for the welfare of young people in vulnerable situations, but must we put ourselves in danger to this extent?

Le Thi Thu Thuy (Vietnam)



«N. lives with her boyfriend as part of a group of young people who sleep under a bridge. They chose this place in order to be protected from the police who regularly go around picking people up off the street. N. is HIV positive and pregnant. Like the other young people with whom I work, N. knows where my mother lives and sometimes comes to ask her for help. One day, very late in the evening, she knocked at my mother's door. She was in a pool of blood. My mother took her in hand and called me. I arrived just in time to take N. to casualty. The child was born safe and sound and the mother's life was saved.

However, after everything had turned out well for the young girl and her baby, I realised the extent to which I was putting my mother in danger with her rescuing an HIV positive girl who was bleeding heavily. Because of this situation my mother is at risk of contracting HIV. Since this happened, I have been riddled with guilt throughout my career.”

Street workers must consider how to protect themselves and their families. It is necessary to separate one's professional and private life.

Tran Bach Yen (Vietnam)

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By staying close to the Lagalkhel neighbourhood, they see me often. Their bad behaviour hurts me, makes me feel sad and I shy away from it. When I walk down the street with my family or friends, they ask me, “where do you work?”; “Why do these children call out to you and insult you using such language?”

Salikram Archarya (Nepal)

I have had several conversations with my partner about this new job and its implications. It was good. (...) These conversations with my boyfriend have been really positive. He shows an interest in my job and I find this reassuring because I was a bit worried about it.

Monic Poliquin, « Are the first stages of street outreach work always the same? Are they the same for everyone?» (Quebec)

My visits helped me to make contacts, be seen, and make people curious. (...) But on re-reading what I have written, I realise that I feel a bit as though I am walking a tightrope; I have to be very, very careful, and hang back a bit. I try not to work out if it is good or bad but rather look for the reasons behind these feelings? Fear? Of what?? It is probably necessary to exercise this degree of caution in order to enter into this new universe.

Monic Poliquin, « Are the first stages of street outreach work always the same? Are they the same for everyone?» (Quebec)

Regarding our safety, especially in the beginning we felt unprotected, as there is no legal framework in Greece covering us. No coverage against accidents, nor for attacks against us by individuals who exploit children. For the first few days we felt very anxious that at some point there would be an incident involving verbal or physical aggression. Furthermore our team consists only of women! Gradually we overcame this anxiety, but we did not forget it. There have been cases in which we were the target of someone's rage, either beneficiaries (those that exploit children) or people who happen to be passing by, as well as being met with suspicion from children and those who surround them.

(...) We have to put ourselves in the position of our target group, without becoming emotionally attached to them or considering that their problems are also our problems. We need to show empathy, rather than sympathy!

Pipera Eleni y Koutsina Maria (Greece)

Being a woman on the streets in a rural setting.

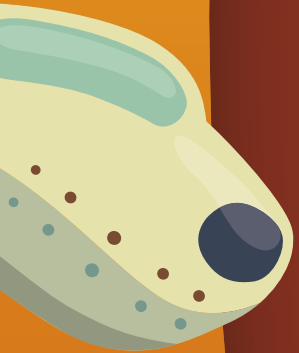
It is not always easy to reconcile femininity and street work. It's all about style and clothing. You must be able to be yourself in order to be effective in your job.

In order not to be perceived as the «blonde» I always work on my appearance. I always wear trousers and avoid wearing a plunging neckline. The big advantage of being a woman in the street is precisely the gentleness that comes with being a woman, in an environment that can sometimes be hostile. Some come up and shower me with compliments, which I don't protest against but which I channel to make sure that it doesn't go beyond the limits I have set myself and which people will start to understand through my regular presence.

Nevertheless, it is important not to awaken jealousies that could become a hindrance to the job. It is important not to be perceived as a rival. For example, I was talking to a man who was explaining his experience to me and his wife was constantly watching us. I made a point of talking to her and asking her how she was doing in order to avoid any confusion.

Being a female street worker is a subtle mix of gentleness and firmness, with a drop of flexibility and strict rules, a well thought-out appearance and a good dose of frankness and good humour, all wrapped up with a willingness to be ready to listen or help at any time.

Marie (Belgium)



# EMOTION & RELATIONSHIPS :



Street social work is all about constantly keeping a grip on your relationships with others and your emotions and dealing with the emotions of others. Trust and mistrust are key aspects of the approach to working with people who are living or working on the streets: observing a neighbourhood and introducing yourself to its residents are key stages that will mark street workers' future relationships with the individuals, groups and communities that they encounter. Street work also requires flexibility and adaptability to contend with the numerous unexpected events that can occur when street workers are doing the rounds of neighbourhoods or running activities. There are many significant challenges to overcome, particularly when street workers are just starting out. Has there ever been a street social worker who has not felt lost when they first start working on the ground? Has there ever been a street social worker who has not wondered about how to manage their emotions – both the feelings of joy but also of injustice and anger felt when dealing with tragedy?

## Trust and mistrust

If we commit to something with the children and then we fail to do what we said, the children stop speaking to us.

Raju Dulal (Nepal)


Street children don't like to get too close to the street social workers and don't have time to talk to them. They walk around, go from one place to another and run in order to collect money. They don't want to listen to a lesson about morals, readings or theories.

Arjun Mohan Bhattarai (Nepal)

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When they first arrive and sit in the big dining room, their faces display curiosity and caution, as they watch and analyse everything. They seek to protect themselves when we reach out to greet or hug them. Then the magic of living in harmony with their peers makes them feel that they are members of a community, with shared goals and that they are moving towards a better life. In just a few weeks, they begin to laugh and to let themselves be hugged (there is a wonderful moment when they come running to greet you).

Fabrizio Caciono Serrano, (Peru)



Once upon a time there was a boy called João<sup>1</sup>. Although he was 13 years old, he only looked nine or ten. I saw him for the first time in 1999 in the Vila neighborhood of Santa Felicidade<sup>2</sup> in Maringá, a city of over 300,000 inhabitants in the state of Paraná in Brazil. (...) Even after so many years, I have a clear memory of what happened on the day that we met, undoubtedly because we met in special circumstances. While we were playing with the local children, I noticed a boy who we didn't know and who was watching us from a distance. He was obviously interested in our games, judging by the way he was watching us attentively. I approached him. I asked him for permission to move a little closer. I invited the boy to play with us and take part in that afternoon's new invention - the game of kiss tag.

With a shy smile on his face, João agreed to take part. We stopped the game for a moment to introduce him and explain the rules that had been set. The aim of the game was to run around the space, keeping away from others, while chasing them. Everyone tried to touch the other players. Anyone who was touched had to stop dead, as if they had turned into a statue. Someone had to come and kiss them on the cheek in order for them to regain their freedom (to run, touch and save others).

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I noticed that at the start, João found it hard to grasp the fun aspect and the individual and group dynamic of the game. He also seemed not to like having to respect the rules that we had set. However, after a little while, he started to identify with the game and had a big smile on his face.

He decided to provoke me. "Nobody can catch me", he said, looking straight at me. And as a youth worker, I interpreted this challenge as the child wanting to make a connection. I ran after João faster than I ever had before, even faster than when I belonged to the handball team and I gave everything to help my team to score. João was very quick. But I was determined to rise to the challenge and touch him. At that moment I realised the real and subjective importance of human lucidity and fun relationships and activities. After a moment, doubled up with laughter and acknowledging my efforts (I was exhausted), João decided to help me out. He gave himself up and allowed me to touch him. Once he was frozen, other children came running to

save him. He started running again once he had been freed.

Once the activity finished, we asked João how long he had been living in the neighbourhood, because we had never seen him before. He didn't answer. We then invited him to come back and play the following Saturday. He promised to come back and did appear from time to time.


We gradually got to know him and find out about his life and life story due to his regular participation and that was how we grasped that he didn't actually live in the neighbourhood and that he wasn't born there either. Since he was a tiny tot, he had spent a lot of time on the streets, under the watchful eye of his mother and sister. He didn't know his father. When his mother died, João continued to collect cardboard with his family, namely his sister, stepfather and the dogs that accompanied him wherever he was living - the mocós. He had never been to school. João had learned to take drugs. He had come across children from the neighbourhood on the streets of the city centre and that was how he had come to know Vila and to establish social and emotional links with the community. He would sometimes spend several days at a time in the neighbourhood, sleeping and sheltering in any available yard. He loved having his photo taken. And he liked doing pirouettes in the air.

However, we then realised that João hadn't come to play with us for several Saturdays. We spent several weeks trying to find him. We found his family, who said they didn't know where he was. Thanks to the trusting relationship we had with other children who lived on the streets near to the city's cathedral, we found out that João was no longer in Maringá but had gone to another town. But where had he gone? Nobody knew.

1. Not his real name.

2. Although the local children nicknamed the area Vila, at the time it was generally considered dangerous by the city and the media. However, we didn't share this view.





Almost two months later, I was in Londrina, a town located roughly 90km away from Maringá, sitting on the terrace of a town centre café. I was keeping a watchful eye on the town's street children and I quickly noticed a boy going around the tables handing out scraps of paper with a message on them. As he came closer to my table, I recognised João. I carried on watching him out of respect for his work. I waited for him to approach me. He was surprised to see me when he approached with his scrap of paper. He threw his pile of papers into the air in delight and started to shout my name. We were both very moved by this unexpected meeting. We hugged each other, out of our minds with joy. We then sat down to chat. We talked for a long time.

All around us, people were looking at us open-mouthed. Some seemed very angry. Others were gesticulating with their hands as if they wanted to say something. João felt that he should explain what was going on and let me read one of his papers. It said - "I am deaf and dumb. Please help me." There was nothing to say. We had something to eat and stayed there a while longer. João promised to return to Maringá. He came back to our games the following week. Time went by and even today, while recalling and describing these memories, I remember this boy with affection. We recently returned to Santa Felicidade on 21 April 2013. A group of girls and boys from that period who had taken

part in the games in the neighbourhood between 1998 and 2005 (and who are now young adults) were seeking the support of the Multidisciplinary Study, Research and Child and Adolescent Defence Programme, the Local Committee of the National Street Children's Movement, the Brincadeiras Project and the Maringá Social Youth Workers' Association, so that the current group of children, many of whom are their children, cousins, nephews and nieces, could also access fun activities and learn how to play an active political and social role in society. We held a first meeting.

On that occasion, when visiting the neighbourhoods' streets and families, I met with some familiar and some unfamiliar faces, and asked one of the young people if they knew the whereabouts of the protagonist of this story. He didn't. Nobody had ever seen him around there again. (...) We hope that João also became a young adult. That he is alive. And that his life is good. By analogy with the book *Il y a beaucoup de mondes dans le monde* by Catarina Tomás, we ask the question: just like yesterday, today there are still many João's in Brazil. Why? And until when?

Veronica Müller (Brazil)



they were provocative. Later in the evening, I realised that they were allowing clients to touch them and that they even strongly encouraged them (directing their hands). As a woman, this did bother me, because in my view (at that time), these women had no self-respect. I will probably get used to it.

Sunday 13 October 1985

I went to St Joseph restaurant (neighbourhood restaurant) and sat down at a small table to have a coffee. I felt quite comfortable and even quite good. There were a few young people in the restaurant, some were having something to eat, others were playing on the poker machine, and were moving between the street and the neighbouring tobacconist's shop. Without being asked, the young chef came to reheat my coffee, I thought that was cool. I could see question marks in the eyes of the young people and the restaurant staff.

I left the restaurant to head to the exotic dancing bar (Le Plaza). I noticed that the dancers had changed. They seemed younger, especially one who was making her debut. There were not many people there. I took my place at the end of the bar in front of the poker machine in order to justify my presence (a lone woman in an exotic dancing bar). A man came to chat with me and spent the rest of the evening by my side... it was less awkward for me to be there.

(...) I left at around 11:45pm to go to Le Vénus bar (a gay bar). There was a party with drag queens and so lots of male clients. I played on the pinball machine while watching what was going on around me.

A personal view: If there is prostitution in the bar, as rumoured, it is more male and maybe even primarily male prostitution, we will see in the future!

Monday 14 October 1985

I'm on leave today. I realise that I haven't done a lot of hours during my first week but things are fine like that. I went at my own rhythm, more slowly. (...) I'm planning my second week. (...) In the future, I would like to be able to organise myself so that I am on the streets some afternoons and in the early evening because I feel that I am missing out on something by not being present at those times (...).

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Tuesday 15 October 1985

Evening team meeting, I put forward my idea of working as a barmaid for 10 hours a week to make things easier and to ensure better coverage (this would legitimize my presence as a woman in an exotic dancing bar). The others liked my idea (...)

Wednesday 16 October 1985

I go for a coffee at Jacques-Cartier restaurant before heading off to do some exercise. I have a nice chat with A, the restaurant dishwasher. I am starting to make myself known among the young people.

After doing my exercise, I head back to the neighbourhood, going to the local library and for a walk along Rue Notre-Dame des Anges (at that time, the road was known for kerb crawling). I don't like this practice at all and I tend to negatively judge the men involved.

I go back for another coffee at Jacques Cartier restaurant. Nothing to report. I end my evening at Le Plaza (exotic dancing bar) with colleagues. G, the bar manager, talks extensively about his bar and the neighbourhood.


Tuesday 21 October 1985

I haven't written for several days simply because it is hard to write every single day, to force myself to do it. In the future, I will write when I have something to say...

For the present time, I'm continuing to go out, observe, chat and play on the machines (pinball and poker), so that I can soak up the atmosphere. Some evenings seem long but nothing dramatic. I think that starting from this evening and over the coming days, I am going to try to walk around more, travel and cover all of my ground.

Monic Poliquin, « Are the first stages of street outreach work always the same? Are they the same for everyone? » (Quebec)





It requires special attention on the part of the social street worker to be able to come close enough to a stranger, especially a child, that they no longer feel afraid of you, but consider you as a friend and even open their hearts to you. On our first few contacts we tried to hide our stress from the children and their escorts. We always had in mind that we should be friendly and polite to create the conditions for building a trusting relationship. This was not easy, because we all have our own personalities, and our own problems which must be put aside. Watching a child may be a pleasant thing to do, but when facing their problems and their family or attendants, you sometimes have to wear a mask in order to keep a balanced outlook when searching for solutions.

Pipera Eleni & Koutsina Maria (Greece)

Living life at the young person's pace, putting your heart and soul into the relationship, being genuine, means feeling their fears, joy and sadness. It means that you feel the violence of their environment. We share, we chat, we have something to eat together, we make light of this feeling of anger and injustice which motivates us, it's about mentally and physically putting words into action, but it is full of contradictions.

I am fond of this girl, I worry about her, and I worry with her when she enrolls at school after six months spent on the streets and in squats. Her reality is so far removed from the 'sterilized norm'. I reassure her, she has the ability but I don't lie to her about how things are, aware of the fact that she is socially excluded and incompatible with institutional life. She is a big shot on the streets but in her eyes I see a little girl asking me for support. In this world, she looks to me to reassure her about her right to exist.

We live out these contradictions. The guy is strolling round and we come across him. He is looking to take revenge on his girlfriend who has cheated on him. He wants to smash everything to smithereens and find the guy in question. We help him to think, he calms down and his eyes turn red, he is now sad rather than angry. He thanked us for spending time with him, "I trust you, you are like friends or more than friends. I like spending time with you but in fact you aren't friends, I don't know how to express myself, do you understand what I am saying?"

Anne Lise (Belgium)

## 🌀 Dealing with unexpected events (situations do worry us – and there are no ready-made solutions)

Street work is a term that designates a little-known way of working.

Street social workers get to know a neighbourhood and its customs, its residents, their issues and concerns. We learn to reach out to people but we also learn to cope with solitude. We sometimes wonder why we are there and question our practices. We have to have faith that time, interaction and trust will work their magic. We have to be innovative and improvise and enable change to happen. We are faced with very different people and situations, we need to be a good listener, informing and developing the patience and dependability that will open the door to interaction.

Street work is a long-term undertaking with many emotional twists, sometimes happy and sometimes sad ones. This job is constantly changing and we can never predict what will happen. Making what is invisible visible and facilitating a forum where people can open up and express themselves, a place where they are not judged and there are no conditions attached. Making the public space dynamic once again, enabling people to take charge of their lives and obtain the resources and tools they need.

Street work is a breath of fresh air, even when the weather is grey and sad.

Nora (Belgium)

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The experience on the streets of Lima is enriching and full of challenges. It is moving, but it is definitely not for everyone. I have met people who were affected and had nightmares due to their head-on collision with street life in Peru's capital city. Children live under bridges, stripped of any dignity, in a city where the temperature can drop as low as 12°C and 100% humidity in winter. Despite these conditions, they still smile. The life stories of those living on the streets are almost always hard and have an uncertain ending. So many children suddenly become adults; young girls become mothers or teenagers who were never truly children.

With the street outreach team, we would also like to go out at night and witness the dynamic of a city without passers-by, see how public spaces become the territory of a handful of people, and how these night-time inhabitants organise themselves. The refuse collectors go round emptying the bins, the children who work count their money on a street corner with their musical instruments at their sides, juvenile offenders walk quickly, scanning their surroundings and with their haul under their clothes (wallets, hats, watches, cards and earrings that they have stolen from public transport users when vehicles were stopped at traffic lights). This is what life is like on the streets at night: you need to know how to fit into this world, how to greet people and how to recognise when someone is under the influence of drugs or has had a bad day, know if the police are nearby hassling someone or whether someone's child is ill. You also need to know if other organisations work in the neighbourhood in order to cross-check information and not duplicate efforts. We have to coordinate with the authorities to tell them that we will be there and what we will be doing.

Fabrizio Caciono (Peru)

During our mission that day, we encounter a mother with her three-year-old baby girl. The mother is a drug user looking for her fix. The baby girl is running and playing amongst the crowd that is gathered around. I worry for the child and I want to yell at the mother that she doesn't have the right to neglect her child like this. I am especially sensitive when children are involved. I feel anger, sorrow and an internal dispute. I let two minutes pass to check my emotions. I glance over to my colleague to signal that I am planning to go over and approach the baby girl. I smile at the girl as I sit down next to her and she smiles back. When I ask her name, she replies, "Eirini". She asks what my name is. Very slowly she comes closer to me and we start to play together. After a while the mother approaches me. She seems worried. It is the first time that she has seen me so she probably wants to see what I am doing with her child. To her I am a stranger, and a possible threat. The hood is a familiar place, as are its people. I realise that this woman isn't as indifferent about her child as I had previously thought; she cares in her own way. We chat for quite a while, and as we are talking, I ask myself who sets the standards for what constitutes a quality life? Who decides between right and wrong for each of us? Can anyone say that this child would be better off growing up away from her mother? Eirini's smile when she looked at her mother will remain engraved in my mind for the rest of my life. For the young girl, the woman is her mother and she needs her. I wonder whether an intervention on my part is necessary. Maybe mother and child have found their balance and their own code of communication. Still, I can't help but wonder if this is truly the case, and whether this is enough. I also find myself wondering about other details of their lives. Where do they live and under what conditions? Do they have shelter, food, health insurance?

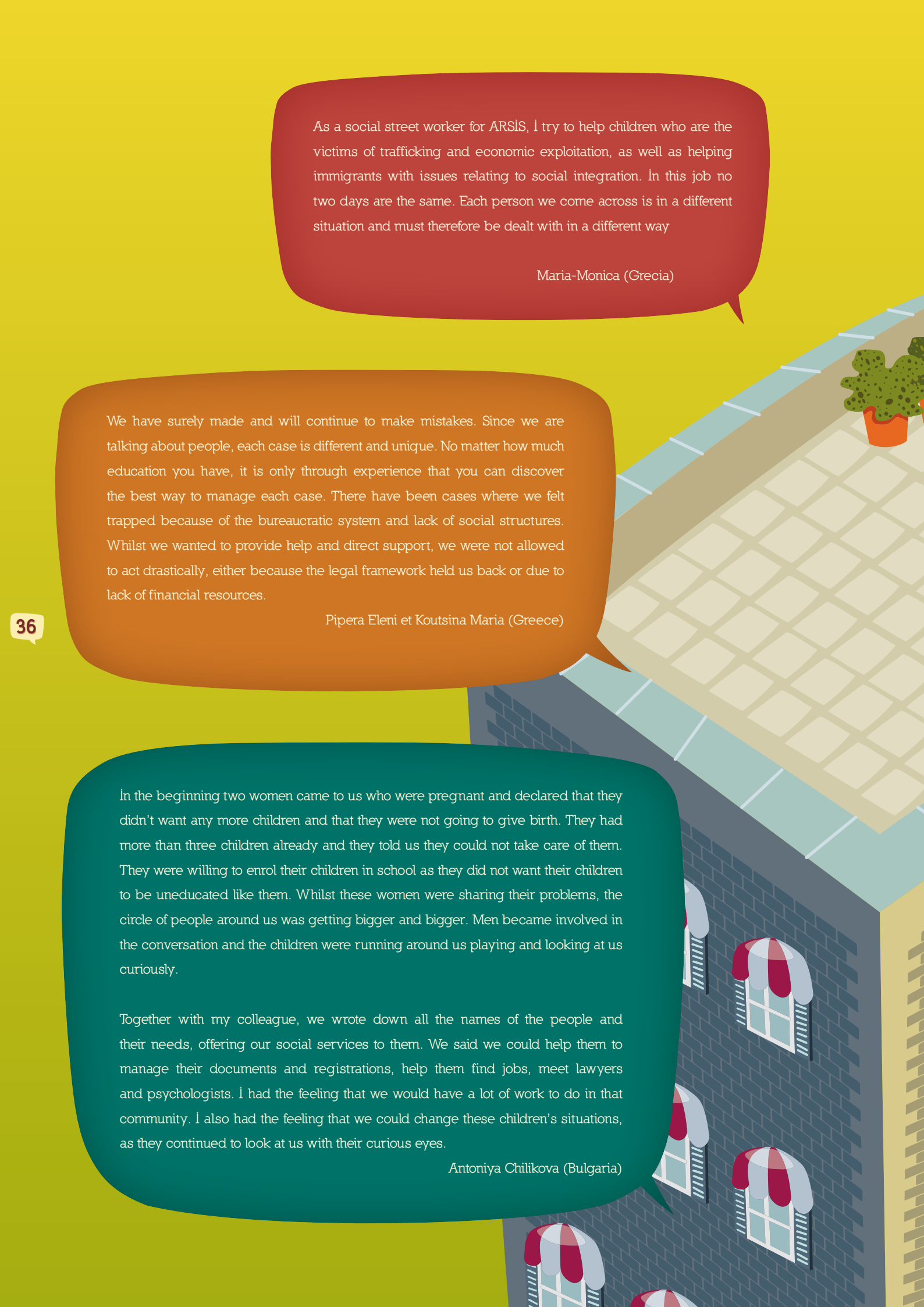
I decide that the best course of action is to get more information on their way of life and how well they are covering these needs. I continue talking with the mother to try and get this information. I learn that the mother is unemployed and that she is raising her child on her own. I also learn that their house has no electricity; it was cut because she couldn't pay the bills. This got me thinking of a programme that provides financial support to families. In addition, there are allowances that she is entitled to as a single mother. She does not seem to have any knowledge of these, and has never tried to apply for them. It could be possible to provide some sort of aid for the mother, some support as to how she can provide herself and her child with a chance to cover their basic needs. I told the mother that she can come to our office so we can talk further. I explain to her that there are certain things we can do to help her obtain whatever aid she

is entitled to as a temporary relief. I hand her a form with our contact information. She thanks me and tells me she will pass by the following week. She looks fairly positive and her initial suspicions seem to have left her.

The farewell handshake is hearty, not like the one when we first met. I hope that the woman will come to our office so that maybe we can share the information she needs in order to improve the living conditions of her and her daughter. In the long term, perhaps we can even refer her to a rehabilitation programme. When working on a case, a long term goal is always in the back of our minds. For this woman in particular, just coming to us would be an important first step. As we give our farewells to the woman, I hear voices. I see a group of three young Roma coming towards us yelling chants that are associated with a far right party. The man 'in charge' of today's intervention signals to us that it is time to go. We say goodbye to the people gathered around us and leave. As we leave, we hear screaming from the nearby park. It sounds like a confrontation is starting. The image of the young Roma chanting far right slogans and cursing immigrants seemed very odd.

The thought that comes to my mind is what Goffman mentions in 'Stigma'; that it is very common for one who is stigmatised to adopt, towards those even more stigmatised, the stance that the ruling party adopts towards them. Stigmatisation and racism between groups that experience exclusion is a common phenomenon. People who live on the outside have the need to create exclusion for others in turn. This is even more pronounced in times of financial and social crisis, like the one we are living in now. Under these circumstances, such patterns of behaviour multiply. We arrive at the office so the team can have our usual debriefing session to discuss what happened. However, I have the feeling that I need a little bit of sea, so I head out. Looking at the endless sea, I think back on my day, beginning with the earlier team confrontation, then Eirini's smile and her mother's warm handshake and also the astonishing chants of the Roma youth. Soon, I get lost in the blue and calm down. My work reminds me of the sea, so unpredictable but still so charming.

Nana Michalopoulou et Yannis Eminides (Greece)



As a social street worker for ARSIS, I try to help children who are the victims of trafficking and economic exploitation, as well as helping immigrants with issues relating to social integration. In this job no two days are the same. Each person we come across is in a different situation and must therefore be dealt with in a different way

Maria-Monica (Grecia)

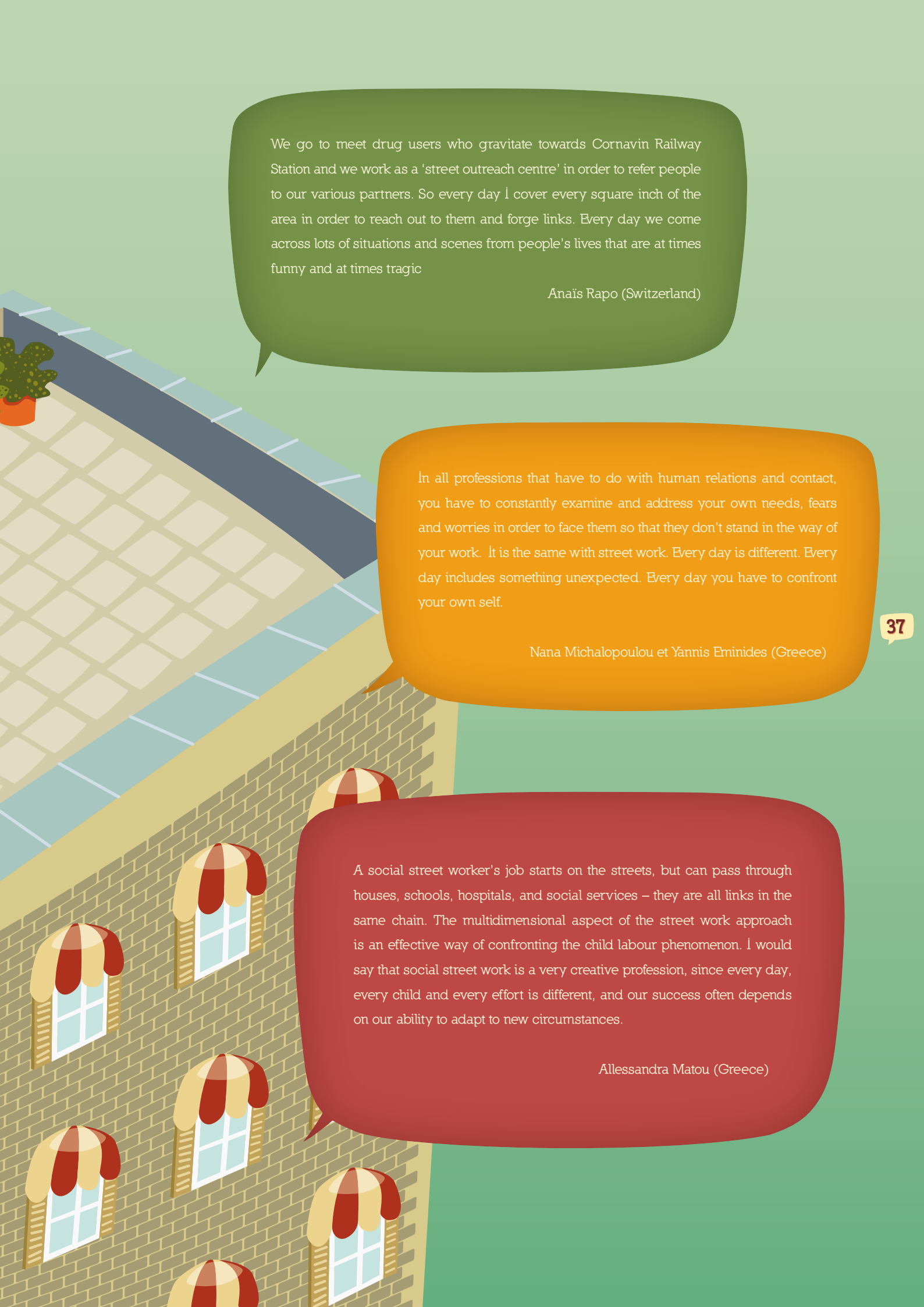
We have surely made and will continue to make mistakes. Since we are talking about people, each case is different and unique. No matter how much education you have, it is only through experience that you can discover the best way to manage each case. There have been cases where we felt trapped because of the bureaucratic system and lack of social structures. Whilst we wanted to provide help and direct support, we were not allowed to act drastically, either because the legal framework held us back or due to lack of financial resources.

Pipera Eleni et Koutsina Maria (Greece)

In the beginning two women came to us who were pregnant and declared that they didn't want any more children and that they were not going to give birth. They had more than three children already and they told us they could not take care of them. They were willing to enrol their children in school as they did not want their children to be uneducated like them. Whilst these women were sharing their problems, the circle of people around us was getting bigger and bigger. Men became involved in the conversation and the children were running around us playing and looking at us curiously.

Together with my colleague, we wrote down all the names of the people and their needs, offering our social services to them. We said we could help them to manage their documents and registrations, help them find jobs, meet lawyers and psychologists. I had the feeling that we would have a lot of work to do in that community. I also had the feeling that we could change these children's situations, as they continued to look at us with their curious eyes.

Antoniya Chilikova (Bulgaria)



We go to meet drug users who gravitate towards Cornavin Railway Station and we work as a 'street outreach centre' in order to refer people to our various partners. So every day I cover every square inch of the area in order to reach out to them and forge links. Every day we come across lots of situations and scenes from people's lives that are at times funny and at times tragic

Anaïs Rapo (Switzerland)

In all professions that have to do with human relations and contact, you have to constantly examine and address your own needs, fears and worries in order to face them so that they don't stand in the way of your work. It is the same with street work. Every day is different. Every day includes something unexpected. Every day you have to confront your own self.

Nana Michalopoulou et Yannis Eminides (Greece)

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A social street worker's job starts on the streets, but can pass through houses, schools, hospitals, and social services – they are all links in the same chain. The multidimensional aspect of the street work approach is an effective way of confronting the child labour phenomenon. I would say that social street work is a very creative profession, since every day, every child and every effort is different, and our success often depends on our ability to adapt to new circumstances.

Allessandra Matou (Greece)

Summer was coming on slowly, and mobile school 'activists' appeared once again at Dendropotamos' Roma community happily dragging their green box of small miracles on wheels. Children both young and old were following the mobile school creating a loud and happy street parade. Mobile school trainers decided to open their mobile school close to the slums, thinking 'Wouldn't it be great for the mothers to see their children playing and succeeding and for us to get to know them?' As it happens, I was the co-ordinator of this mobile school intervention, and I supported this idea of getting to know the mothers of the children better. Usually when I came across the mothers or older ladies in general during my street work in the community, they only approached me to ask for clothes, food or assistance in bureaucratic matters to do with social grants etc... None of them ever talked to me about their children, the difficulties they faced raising them or seeking advice on how to handle difficult situations. They never even asked questions regarding what we thought of their children, us being to some extent their children's educators. So I thought it would be a nice idea to actually be close enough that they could see their children doing well at this alternative school and hopefully feel proud or even talk to us about it. Well, things did not turn out as we expected. And this 'meeting' was harder than expected.

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Soon after the first round of games, she appeared. A grandmother, tiny in size, looking so sweet in her traditional Roma clothes that nobody could have imagined what followed. She walked closer, we smiled at her, then she started screaming and cursing in the Roma language. She raised her hands and in no time she was beating up all the children one by one without any discrimination. Slaps and kicks came in fast, it lasted no more than sixty seconds. She then put everything back in order (according to her) and she left! The only thing I did was try to talk some sense into her whilst she was slapping the children, but she seemed not to pay any attention to me. As far as I understand, she was upset because we were being too loud or something like that. The most impressive thing, but perhaps expected from

a traditional Roma camp, was that none of the teenage girls or young mothers who were there tried to do anything to stop her. It was a very intense moment, since none of the educators knew what to do and we just stopped and stared at the incident. It is not by chance that the children of this Roma community are the most violent of all three camps around the city visited by the mobile school. Following this incident the educators didn't want to return to the camp for the next intervention, and I couldn't blame them. It was a shocking experience for me as well. We had to talk to the children in order to bring them back into the 'street work game'; a game with no rules and no good or bad players. Just different people, in difficult situations and child players in danger.

It's been more or less a year since the incident. The mobile school visits the camp on a weekly basis, but we no longer park as close to the slums. The grandmother has a name, although I cannot remember right now. We met once or twice and I even went to her house but we never spoke about the 'incident'. I realised soon enough that what for me was an 'incident', for them is just everyday life. We talked about her granddaughter Korina and her mother being away. Korina is the most violent and easily distracted kid to visit the mobile school. Her grandmother told me about the difficulties she faced raising such a child. What I realised then was that from violence comes violence. Although 'truths' like this one, or as I would call it a dogma, is not something you can just share with someone then expect it to stop, this circle of violence. It is something which people have to feel, learn and experience as part of their life, in order to respect it. Perhaps this is one of the missions of social street work: To be patient enough to see general and specific truths...become everyday practice!

Mota Marianthi (Greece)



## Challenges and starting out

At first it was really difficult for me to feel comfortable working with the street children. Before working for ARSIS I would look at them sympathetically, wondering about the circumstances that got them into those situations. After spending time with them, as well as attending seminars concerning the best way to work with these groups of children, I now understand and can see beneath the surface. However, I have to say at this point that my education was not sufficient and that further effort has to be made by specialists for a more integrated education. The most important thing is not just to observe, but to talk to the children; to learn their way of thinking in order to gain their trust. For this, my knowledge of Albanian proved to be a useful weapon.

Maria-Monica (Greece)

The children's behaviour towards the organisation and its staff is good. They try to hide the bags they use to sniff glue when they are with me. They share both positive and negative things. Our efforts lead to them coming to CPCS (Child Protection Centers and Services) to take refuge, undergo rehabilitation and benefit from the educational infrastructure in place. Some go back to their families and some leave life on the streets.

My job also has its downsides: there are lots of organisations working with children who live or work on the streets but these children are not keen to come to the organisation, they stay on the streets, use drugs and use bad language when with us. Many friends die as a result of drug use. Some steal and beg on the streets, cutting their foreheads, arms and hands. I try to focus my attention on the risks of life on the streets. Due to a lack of funding, I am unable to meet their expectations (food, etc.) and I am sick of it.

Kalash Rawal (Nepal)

I work on the streets every day. When we work on the streets, things are always changing and I like this sort of challenge which motivates me to achieve my goals. Life is full of challenges: without it, it would be drab and colourless.

(...) However, most of the time, they tell us that we do an amazing job. We can see joy in the eyes of the parents when we bring back their lost child. That's right, this is our job and I feel fortunate to be involved in this line of work and in this sort of organisation.

Shyam Krishna Shrestha (Nepal)

Everything has a positive and a negative side. We sometimes take photos of the children when doing grassroots work: sometimes we have to contend with opposition and attacks, with some of the target group trying to snatch the camera.

(...) Some children are new to our programme and they have never heard of this type of thing before and therefore it is not easy for us to convince them about our programme and get them to come to the organisation. After regular meetings, they understand that we are working so that they can have a great future, an education and food. In this awareness-raising programme, the children sometimes help us to explain to the new arrivals that they have no need to worry and this makes it easier for them to trust our programme and the views of other children. Sometimes the children do not cooperate with us and they are wary about sharing their problems; this happens especially when they use drugs (glue).

Shyam Krishna Shrestha (Nepal)

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When our ambulance meets them, they come and ask for treatment and for their wounds to be dressed, their headaches, abdominal pain, colds, coughs and muscle pains to be treated. I dress their wounds and give them one to two blister packs of suitable medication. They try to take more and we have to convince them that there is no need for them to carry more medication around because we come every day.

(...) When we treat them, all the children get into the ambulance, which makes it very difficult to treat them en masse and means that there is a high risk of air-borne diseases and other communicable diseases for the medical staff. I used to wear a mask to keep safe but one night, one of the children asked me why I was wearing a mask and if it was due to his smell. We ignore them when they ask this sort of question. I try to explain the problem but they don't want to listen.

Lob Kumar Shrestha (Nepal)

I have been a paramedic for four years with the NGO CPCS on a night-time outreach programme. I have been working in Basantpur (Kathmandu) since 7 March 2009 which was the first time I went there. We met 50-60 street children in this neighbourhood. That was at the start of my work. None of the children knew me and I didn't recognize them either. Most of them had a plastic bag and a cigarette in their hands. I was surprised to learn why they were holding these bags and what the bags contained. I had no idea. I later found out when working on the ground. They sniff glue using bags and mix java with cigarettes. (...) Nowadays, they know me well as a CPCS staff member because of my regular interaction with them.

Salikram Archarya (Nepal)



When I started doing outreach work, I used to go to various neighbourhoods where there were street children. At that time, I knew nothing about street children or what they did. When I met them, they would be taking dendrite and smoking. But I didn't know why. I often did outreach work and I used to ask them why they used drugs. At the start, they wouldn't say, but after some time, they did share their problems. They explained that they used drugs so as to forget their problems and sadness.

Bimal Khanal (Nepal)

In the last decades Greece has turned from a country that provided other countries with immigrants into a country that accepts many immigrants. The phenomenon of children begging or working in the streets has suddenly raised in numbers. Our goal is to write down the aspects of this phenomenon and to help our target group resolve their issues (bureaucratic, abuse, survival) when we have the opportunity to act.

We entered the job with enthusiasm, feeling that we could help these vulnerable children and contribute to an improvement in their living conditions. Unfortunately we do not have a magic wand with which to provide ideal solutions, and there are difficulties concerning both street workers as employees and the children themselves, their protection, education and follow-up. As far as we were concerned, we suddenly found ourselves in a field of work which previously we were ignorant of. We had no previous experience and no relevant training.

Pipera Eleni et Koutsina Maria (Greece)

I often take a moment to think over my visits, either for my journal or to mull over my reactions and feelings, which means that I feel that I have spent my week in my work environment.

Monic Poliquin, « Are the first stages of street outreach work always the same? Are they the same for everyone? » (Quebec)

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We had to find ways to reach these children, but ways that were different to what we had known so far. Parents and children who had become hardened by their difficult way of life, children who had lost their childhood but with so much wit and ingenuity, who also know how to manipulate you to get what they want and often surprise or embarrass you with their behaviour. Sometimes you would be shock by their maturity! First you must gain a child's interest...only then can you gain their trust.

Pipera Eleni et Koutsina Maria (Greece)



In April our team started street work in a neighbourhood called Drujba in Sofia, where there are a few blocks of flats inhabited by people who are socially disadvantaged. We approached the neighbourhood with an individual we had worked with before, and he told us about this community and its problems. It was my first experience of street work in such a neighbourhood, and I was pleased to learn that a street work team always consists of both a male and a female. As this was our first visit to the area, we were joined by a colleague from another team who introduced us to some members of the community.

Antoniya Chilikova (Bulgaria)

I have been looking after Nathalie for a number of years. She was barely 15 and was working as a prostitute in Brussels when we met her. Nathalie is now 25, she has two children, her little boy is seven and lives with a foster family, while her little girl is three and lives in Algeria with her husband's family.

Nathalie is pregnant once again, she is seven months gone and for the past few days, she has been complaining about having stomach ache. I have insisted on numerous occasions that she goes to hospital and I have also asked my association's nurse to contact her. These efforts have proven unsuccessful; she remains in pain and refuses to go to hospital.

That evening, like every Tuesday, I was working on the streets, when, at around 8pm, I received a phone call from Nathalie. She was clearly still in pain and asked to see me, so we arranged to meet at 10pm in the car park of a swimming pool in a working class area of the city. I arrived and saw Nathalie there, doubled up with pain. She tried to speak to me but found it very hard, she was retching. I tried to convince her to go to A&E and wanted to give her a lift. The discussion lasted several minutes, she refused to go with me and ended up saying that she would wait for her dealer and then she would come with me. She didn't wait for me to reply and left me standing in the car park. She headed back to the address where she was being put up by some Arab acquaintances. I didn't know the address...a quarter of an hour later, I received another phone call from Nathalie, she was in tears and said "my baby is coming, he's blue, he's dead". I rushed to the car and drove to Nathalie's place, which was a few minutes away from my workplace. An ambulance was parked outside and Nathalie was inside when I arrived. I approached a paramedic and asked him what had happened to the baby. He told me that the doctor was trying to resuscitate him. A few moments later I saw the doctor come down the stairs. She was carrying a small baby in her arms wrapped up in a green blanket. He was dead...

Michèle (Belgium)



Today is probably the day when I have felt most acutely the fine line between life and death. At some point in our lives, we all experience this awareness of life and death but for me it is an endless cycle in which joy and the sadness of a loss are combined and overlap. I think that this is the best experience that a street worker like me can have.

## Life – a child is born

First thing this morning I was planning to go to Hung Vuong Maternity Hospital to visit H's baby girl, born around 9pm on 25 November 2012, weighing 2.67kg. H is the baby's mother's name. She is 19 years old and was born in 1993. An orphan, she came to live in Saigon at the age of 10. At the start, she made ends meet by doing a range of jobs, such as dishwasher, kitchen assistant, newspaper vendor,... She then met and got to know T. They lived together, like husband and wife. H fell pregnant and T left her when she was five months pregnant. H has been living on the streets since then. She used to wander around the city's parks in the daytime and once night fell she would head for the railway station to find somewhere to spend the night. That was the rhythm of her life until we met her.

I work in an independent group called *Travailleurs de Rue* *Cây Mai*. Our members include social workers, volunteers, sociology and social work students. We primarily endeavour to provide help and educate people about HIV/AIDS, STIs, giving birth, sexual health, and more generally, to teach life skills to the young people who live in the city's parks, stations and markets, particularly targeting young pregnant women and young mothers.

We met H. in P.L. Park and helped her to find housing, to eat and to pay for her antenatal appointments up until the birth. We taught her life skills and encouraged her to read books about motherhood and children during her time at the house that we rented for her.

I went to visit H in hospital this morning. She looked at me and said, cheerfully, said "I feel better, sister!" Her happiness and huge smile were contagious!

I honestly can't remember the names of the babies of these street girls who I have helped since I started this job...they may well number over 200... How many first month and first birthday parties have I been to? I really can't remember!

I experienced a feeling of happiness and tranquillity when I heard H talk about her child with such

satisfaction. I still remember the words and advice I offered her, "you have been on your own until now, but now you have your child, you must try to feed her and not let her have the same life as you have had. At least your daughter has someone in life, and that person is you, her mother." And seeing her so happy, I felt reassured, especially when I handed back her baby so that she could cradle her in her arms. She hadn't dared to hold her baby since the previous evening because she was so tiny! Now H no longer needs to worry about covering costs relating to her baby or food and accommodation. After all, she's got a family, hasn't she? She has us!

I lifted up the baby. Since yesterday nobody, not H nor L, my group's social worker, had dared to lift up the child, because both felt that they lacked the experience to do it. The baby was howling because she was hungry, maybe because her mother didn't yet dare to breastfeed her. So I gave her a bottle. I showed the mother how to feed her baby, even showing her how she could pat the baby's back so that the milk that she had just given her would go down. I gave her a lot of advice, without forgetting to add: "nothing beats breast milk." Additionally, breastfeeding her baby means that H will not have to buy powdered milk when we are no longer around to help her.

Having sorted out everything for H at the hospital, I quickly made my way to help another girl who is also called H. She was not in hospital, but instead in TD funeral director's, located in Truong Chinh street in Tân Bình.

## Loss – a child leaves us

His name is P and he is just 16 months old. P is the second child of a young couple who live on the streets. I met them after the birth of their first child in early 2005. We have followed their progress during years of trials and tribulations.

I think back to mid-March of this year. I was really surprised when I received a call from P's mum. She said that her child was in A&E at Nhi Dong Hospital because he had concussion. The child had fallen out of bed onto his head a week previously. H didn't take him to hospital, as she thought that there was nothing wrong with him. P became unconscious a week later. I reassured the young mum and headed quickly to the hospital. I saw that the child was hardly breathing and was hooked up to loads of wires, I prayed for him to be well cared for and to get better soon. My wishes were granted. The child recovered and the doctors allowed him to go home following a long period of observation.

Time went by. That morning, I was on my way to Hung Vuong Hospital to visit a new arrival, when I received a message from H on my GSM: "Sister! My child has died!" I was stunned, "how, what has happened?"

I ran to the morgue. H and her husband weren't there, as they were undoubtedly busy completing the formalities for the cremation. When I went in, I was faced with an incredibly sad scene. The child's body was covered on a table, with his clothes in a bag on one side, and a vase of white chrysanthemums towards the front of the table. On a plastic stool beside the table, a rice bowl was used as an incense stick holder. In the distance, a man was assembling the planks that would make up the little boy's coffin. I asked him if the coffin was for the little boy. "Yes», he replied. I stayed beside his body and in my head I prayed for him. He must have felt cold. I quickly called H and her husband to get them to come back and be with their dead child. I didn't want him to be alone at that time. H arrived in tears. I took her in my arms and consoled her. She said, "I still have my family, but nobody pays attention to me or my child. Not even my father. When he heard that my child had died, all he said was, "I told you so...you should have got him adopted, but you didn't listen to me." And that's all he said. I am so sad, sister! Why does my family not help me, when other people, like you, have done so much? My family likes to help others but not me."

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"Sister! Will there be someone to feed him where he is going? Sister! Will my son go to heaven? Sister! How do I close his eyes? Sister! We have only got 100,000 Dong, what should we do?" She had lots of other questions too, all starting with "Sister!"

While H was talking and passing her hand over P's eyes, his eyes closed. P was then placed in the coffin for the funeral. H turned to me and asked "Sister! Why is there no monk here to pray for him?" I didn't know what to say. I wasn't going to say "because you have no money, monks usually get paid for

praying..." However, a woman who was standing a few metres away answered for me, "there is no need to pray for small children, only adults need it." A good job too, for poor people like us!

Before closing the coffin, H suddenly remembered that she had forgotten her dead baby's bottle "so that he can have his milk up there...» Her husband went to get a bottle to put in the coffin. I left having ensured that the funeral was running smoothly.

It was a day of contradictory emotions; I went from being happy to being in tears. A gift received with happiness and a loss that sickened me. A baby was born and immediately another one left us. Two children, two situations and two snippets of life over the course of the same day, left me with two diametrically opposed feelings. That's life! Who am I? What stance should I take? What can I do in this situation? I had so many questions going round my head.

Luong Hong Loan (Vietnam)





Ce matin sur le chemin vers l'hôpital Hung Vuong,  
je reçois un message:  
« Sister ! Mon enfant est mort ! »



Quand je suis entrée, l'image qui m'a été imposée  
fut d'une tristesse infinie ! Le corps de l'enfant se  
trouvait voilé sur une table, d'un côté ses vêtements  
contenus dans un sac, et, vers l'avant de la table,  
un vase avec une fleur blanche de chrysanthèmes.



A côté de la table, sur un tabouret en plastique, un  
bol de riz servant à y planter les bâtons d'encens.



« Sister! Là où il va, y'a-t-il quelqu'un pour  
l'allaiter ? »



« Sister !  
Est-ce que mon fils peut aller au paradis ? »



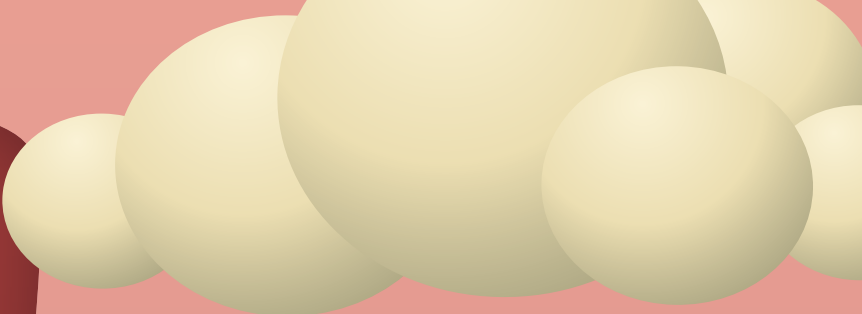
« Sister ! Comment faire pour fermer ses yeux ? »

# SOLIDARITY

(relationships within the team,  
between associations):



46 With street work and the harsh reality with which street social workers are confronted on a daily basis all too often going unappreciated, a supportive working environment is a key factor in terms of worker motivation and mobilisation. Team work, the chance to debrief and to talk to others about the situations encountered helps to prevent street workers from feeling isolated. Working with other organisations and institutions that are in contact with people living or working on the streets is also vital to facilitate the flow of information and enable effective multidisciplinary support. However, sometimes these partners still need to be convinced about the merits of the work done by street outreach workers...



Other organisations say that outreach workers hand out food but CPCS does not do that.

Kalash Rawal (Nepal)

Most people think that it is positive that this type of NGO looks after needy children because we do not make money at the expense of children through trafficking or selling them. (...) People sometimes ask questions about our reasons for helping (why do you look after these children?) and our action (what do you do with these children? Do you really care for them or is it just a pretext to make money?). We hold a large number of awareness-raising workshops about the street and the street work programme.

Shyam Krishna Shrestha (Nepal)

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We coordinate with the public, politicians, the police, local clubs, local NGOs, international NGOs and the state. All of these actors help us. We sometimes have to contend with difficulties because people do not understand the programme and have distanced themselves but we have managed to convince them of its merits.

Nawaraj Pokharel (Nepal)



Two years ago, we ran a women and children interaction programme. I was involved through CPCS, with the other stakeholders being representatives of governmental organisations, the police, civil society representatives, women and children living or working on the streets. At the outset, the stakeholders kept each other at arm's length, with the police and people who live and work on the streets seeing each other as enemies. The programme aimed to get them to work together in order to help change mindsets. When inappropriate behaviour occurred, there was tension between the police and street children. The children were in a highly critical condition, the atmosphere was bad, with even social organisations being prejudiced.

Political and civil society leaders and even the police exploited the street children who were still involved in political demonstrations at that time. The children were happy to fight and pelted the police with stones. People were afraid of the children.

The police would ask the children for their ID for no reason, would arrest and detain them for two or three days and make them wash clothes, clean out the toilets and do the garden... then the children would be released. The children therefore saw the police as their enemy. I feel that the interaction programme enabled a balanced relationship to be achieved between them. Organisations have also rolled out this programme on two and even four occasions. It was difficult to build bridges between the police, the community and the street children.

Two to four meetings created a more favourable environment and enabled good relationships to be established. Gradually, everyone endeavoured to understand that the street children were just like any other children. The police and public gradually started to collect used clothing for the children. Ranipokhari police force also distributed clothing once a week. We have held drawing competitions on two or three occasions and drama based awareness-raising in a number of locations. The rules were too rigid for the street children.

These activities cannot be run by a single person or organisation. Other organisations, society and the community need to be involved. Working together helps reduce the risks and avoid problems with the children. We receive support and cooperation from the following bodies: governmental organisations (CCWB, CDO, DCWB, SWC), social organisations (CWIN, VOC, SARAH, SATHA, BALBATABARAN), leaders (who provide suggestions and advice).

The major challenges and problems that emerged during the programme:

- A constantly negative social approach to the children, work done to obtain money but not for the benefit of the children .
- Ten years ago, there was a shelter in Kalanki where the children used to spend the night to get some rest. We used to raise the public's awareness on the road leading to the shelter, but people would ignore us.
- Governmental organisations and the police: two boys were arrested by the police in Balambu two years ago and were detained for no reason. Police officers told me that the children had not committed any crime. We frequently visit the police station because of these situations.

Bijesh Shrestha (Nepal)

Three years ago, we met with government officials to talk about street children's drug and glue use. Initially, they had a positive attitude towards us but they then asked us to approve a concept note on the problem of street children in Kathmandu. We submitted the document, confident that we had made our position clear, but the government maintained that it had other priorities and did not listen to us. They also told us that they could not tolerate street children in the capital and that NGOs must provide a solution to the problem. The government officials and employees asked about the number of street children in the city and blamed the organisation.

(...) In some cases, government officials were very positive about our work and asked us for our ideas on how to address the problem of street children and what should be done by the government. They believe that NGOs must solve the problem. A few years ago, I took part in an NGO meeting at which NFE was discussed in conjunction with the children. I suggested talking about street children and their NFE but the participants were not convinced about my idea of providing street children with an education. They were focused on providing these children with a general education.

One day, I met a member of a club interested in working with an outreach worker to address the problem of street children. He told me that the club in question worked with social workers to try to solve the problem of street children and delivered an awareness-raising programme to the street





children in the local area. However, I never heard back from him and he didn't answer his phone.

Going out into the community enables us to gain a better understanding of this special society and we are therefore able to carry out our visits more quickly and collect more information from different people and see the reality that the children experience. I often speak to the media that focus on the issue of street children in the city and the numerous NGOs that look after them. However, the media also say that nothing has been done for these children and that the problem

persists. These media outlets have a negative view of the NGOs and their practices.

The police and security personnel who are in contact with the social workers talk about the situation of the street children and the efforts made by organisations. NGOs have the solution for saving street children.

Arjun mohan Bhattarai (Nepal)

It was a hard day to begin with. There had been disagreements between members of the team. In particular, a disagreement as to which members would participate in a mission to an area of Thessaloniki that had become a ghetto inhabited mostly by Roma people, and a place where drugs were part of everyday life. From the start, the men of the team preferred that the women did not participate, thinking that the neighbourhood would be too dangerous.

The women of course disagreed, and the result was a very tense situation. It is hard being a female street worker, especially when working on issues relating to substance abuse, as users are more often males. In addition, female drug users are often stigmatised, being seen as an object to be exploited. This, as a fact, influences male street workers. They feel the need to protect their female colleagues, and this creates an unequal relationship. As a female street worker, you have to constantly prove that you can do more than just take a passive role or stand by as a 'reserve'.

These were my thoughts during the confrontation. Fortunately these thoughts and the anger I felt towards my male colleagues were no longer on my mind during the intervention that followed. If you make the mistake of trying to prove things all the time, you lose sight of your goal. The tension had to be subdued so we could carry out our work. In the field, working as a team is very important. You need to have trust and feel safe with your team, otherwise you can't work. Luckily we were able to find a way forward and make peace. The team has been through some hard times. With different people from very diverse backgrounds, each with their own ideas and views, confrontations are inevitable, but we work hard to iron out our differences and have even found a way to integrate and make the most of our diversity in our everyday lives. Just as a family sometimes has disagreements or arguments but remains a family, we can't change the fact that we are a team.

Nana Michalopoulou et Yannis Eminides (Greece)

Generally, I would say that it is going well, I feel good, I am relatively comfortable. I can't wait for the next team meeting to find out the other street workers' first impressions.

(...) Tuesday 15 October 1985 Evening team meeting (...) The meeting does me good, it enables me to relax and find out what others are feeling.

Monic Poliquin, « Are the first stages of street outreach work always the same? Are they the same for everyone? » (Quebec)



Our job is not limited to the streets; it also comes down to a child's house and family situation. Recently, a child was injured by a passing car while he was playing outside his house. The neighbours, having seen for a long time the conditions under which the boy lived, felt obliged after his injury to call the Public Prosecutor for Minors in order to take action. The Prosecutor contacted Social Services, who then contacted the ARSIS streetwork team, to arrange a visit to the family's house. The children were spotted one year earlier on the city's streets, and we prompted the family to enrol the two older children into a school. Since we already knew the family our visit, with a representative from Social Services, was considered "a natural extension" of our cooperation with them. The parents did not view this visit positively. The social worker, noting the poor living conditions, raised the possibility of removing the children from their parents. The mother reacted strongly saying that she did not understand the reason why all this was happening, as they loved their children and many children get injured whilst playing outside.

The social worker saw four children being raised in a dirty flat with scrap metal in the yard, the parents screaming about how much they love their children in Bulgarian. On the other hand, the parents saw a stranger in their home "threatening" to take their children away. The streetwork team however, saw at one side the family, who had taken steps towards improving the lives of their children...It had been a year since they enrolled their children into a school and the two older ones, due to the attendance at school were clean and well-presented. Most importantly, they were no longer working on the streets, but were inside the classroom where they should be, along with other children their age. On the other hand, the street work team saw a social worker trying to decide what was in the best interests of the youngest child, as required by law.

We began to work as the middle-men between the family and the social worker. As a street work team, and knowing the family through regular visits, we tried to explain that the phrase "I love my kids" means much more than providing for their basic needs (shelter, food, cloths etc...) The family felt at ease talking about the difficulties they faced and the street work team tried to offer solutions to the families problems. We took over and found a teacher to go to the children's house and help them with their homework, as neither parent was able to do it. We visited the school's Principal and the children's teachers in order for us to both keep track of their progress and to inform them about any difficulties the children faced with their family. We kept offering medical support, accompanying the parents and the children to hospital for the necessary medical examinations and vaccinations. We helped them solve the bureaucratic problems they had due to lack of documents and certificates. Finally, we focussed our efforts on finding the right technician to fix the Health and Safety issues identified in the family home.

Alessandra Matou (Greece)

We used a semi-structured interview guide with questions focusing on citizenship and city of origin, age, sex, any children, reason(s) for travelling to Bergen, way of travelling to Bergen, accommodation in the city, special needs etc... We spent about two weeks in active fieldwork, getting in touch with the target group, collecting information and mapping their situation. In total four fieldworkers were involved, but most of the surveying was done by a Romanian person and an experienced street worker. We always went in pairs. The fieldworkers had different backgrounds, and spoke English, German, Spanish, Italian, Romanian and Hungarian in addition to Norwegian.

The survey was ordered by the local politicians. The intention was to get more information about the target group and to use that information to establish collaboration between the city of Bergen and a city/region in Romania focusing on the minority, the Roma population. One of the staff members in the administration in the commune of Bergen was the contact person during the survey and also made a field visit. The same person was also responsible for taking further action once the survey was completed. It was crucial to involve a person who spoke Romanian/Hungarian.

In addition this person also knew the Romanian culture. She was not educated within social work/outreach work, so it was necessary to work together with an experienced street worker. The ultimate solution would have been to involve a person with Romanian Roma background, but this was not an option at the time that the survey was implemented. We did not involve the target group in the preparation, procedures or evaluation, the reasons for this being that we had very little information about the target group, and no formal network existed amongst the Roma population in our city. It was also necessary to involve local politicians and the city administration.

Camilla Fonnes Haaland (Norway)

When I started my job as a street social worker, I started out in a role with which I was unfamiliar and in a district that I didn't know at all. Several difficulties arose. Apart from the fact that I had to teach myself the methodology behind street social work, I had to position myself as an observer in order to understand the various social, economic and cultural challenges faced by the beneficiaries with whom I would be working.

Having done some reading on the subject, I used a tool developed by our association – mapping – in order to meet the various grassroots stakeholders in our area of action who work with our target public. These various meetings enabled me to make myself known as the new street social worker, to tell them about our organisation and my job, and also to build up a trust-based professional relationship, going beyond the institutional framework and leading to a personal relationship. This relationship gradually enabled me to make myself known and be recognised by these stakeholders and subsequently to get into contact with their target public. Person-to-person contact was also established. Once these contacts had been established and the relationship forged, the importance of nurturing this relationship by being present and visible became clear to me. Indeed, as street social workers, we have to go to and revisit different places, stakeholders and resource people in order to be and continue to be known, recognised, accepted and legitimate.

Gradually, thanks to these formal or informal meetings, I realised that I was carving out a place in the district's non-profit landscape. These meetings with stakeholders led to them introducing me to their target groups and explaining the vision underpinning their work. The public also started to recognise me thanks to my regular visits to the associations, community centres, schools and strategic places, and started to talk to me in order to find out who I was because I am not from the area, because they had seen me hanging around with my rucksack, because they had been told that I was a street social worker.

For the time being, people simply ask for information or need me to put them in contact with others or for prevention purposes and I am able to do this thanks to the groundwork I outlined above, which was the first phase. Some, while they knew how much they could trust my predecessor, are still unsure as to what extent they can trust me, which means that I am still being tried out. I believe that it is only by being present and available at the scheduled times, i.e. when they know and therefore expect to see me, that I will gain more legitimacy in my job and in the public's eyes.

Olivier Bernard (Belgium)



# RESILIENCE, EMPOWERMENT

(developing the power  
to take action) :

Empowering people living and working on the streets via the support and backing provided by outreach workers is the proven method for lifting them out of the cycle of discrimination, exclusion, poverty and street living and working. Taking advantage of their own unique background, meeting up with young people who received support and have overcome their difficulties, and knowing that they are on the right track, are all key to street social worker motivation. This is the best kind of acknowledgement of the need for and usefulness of their outreach work and demonstrates that they have played, and in some cases continue to play, a vital role in the life of these people.

## 🌀 Situations turned around; the ability to offer something new

I was born in Albania but have lived in Greece since I was four years old. Although some people feel that my Albanian nationality isn't something to be talked about, for me it was actually the key to taking my first steps working in the sociological environment. I studied sociology at the University of the Aegean in a town called Mytilene, graduating in 2010. Upon graduating I began searching for a job relevant to my degree and, after lots of effort, I was finally given a five month contract with an NGO called ARSIS, for which knowledge of Albanian was a mandatory requirement. Thanks to my second nationality, I can now share with readers some of my experiences.

Maria-Monica (Greece)

## 🌀 Little rays of sunshine, moments of grace

In the Balaju neighbourhood, there was a boy called Shakti Rai who had been using drugs for three to four years. He used ganja, TT, tab and cigarettes. When I met him, I tried to convince him about the harmful effects of drugs and he was willing to come to Balaju Day Centre. He learned to drive and passed his driving test. He is now self-employed.

Kalash Rawal (Nepal)

We have to contend with threats and insults because of our work with children. This makes for a more stressful but also a more joyful job.

Salikram Archarya (Nepal)

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When I first came to Greece it seemed it would be impossible for my family and I to adapt to this new world. We not only had to learn to communicate, but also find a house and jobs in order to survive. Thankfully my family was lucky, and after many years of vicissitudes and hard effort, we managed to live decently in a foreign country. As an immigrant I have experienced some similar situations to the children that I come into contact with through my job as a street worker, and I often think that my life would have been easier if someone had come to me in those early days to ask my family and I if we were in need of anything. I am really proud to belong to the ARSIS team of street workers, and I can be the person who tries to heal those children's souls, however I can. Finally, I would like to say that even if at first the job seemed difficult, after four months it is really no more difficult than discussing problems with your siblings.

Maria Monica (Greece)

Léa is a 23 year old girl. I helped her to access vocational training and to look for housing. She hardly came or didn't come at all to the youth organisations in the district, however she did do sport and was involved in associations outside the area.

When doing my rounds, I ran into her with several of her friends whom I had never seen before. We had a short chat and Léa told me that she wanted to organise a women's football tournament in the neighbourhood with her friends. She asked me to help arrange it as, in her eyes, I was the best placed person to help with organizing the tournament. The idea seemed interesting to me and I saw it as a chance to forge closer links with these other young girls. However, I suggested that they get in touch with the district's youth worker, who was finding it hard to establish links with the neighbourhood's girls. The local girls did not come to the youth centre and were not seen regularly in public areas.

The project was therefore set up in partnership. This was an opportunity to highlight the wishes and needs of the district's young girls, as well as their ability to actively engage, with many of them getting involved in the tournament. The tournament brought together girls from other areas of St Nazaire and created a festive atmosphere for the day, as it was held in the middle of the neighbourhood.

Following the football tournament, I was able to offer individual support to several of the girls, and they also saw the youth worker as a facilitator for their plans. At the start of the next academic year, they wanted to arrange hip hop lessons, which were subsequently incorporated into the community centre's activities and opened up to other participants.

This initial encounter took place three years ago and the women's football tournament has taken place every year since then on the first Sunday of July. Each tournament has brought together the local residents and has offered the inhabitants of St Nazaire the chance to really get to know this area which has a bad reputation because of crime.

The youth workers and specialised prevention educators helped out and supported the first two tournaments. The idea was to provide the girls with guidance about the administrative formalities, approaching partners and how to organise this sort of event. At the same time, the girls set up their association - So 'cœur - so that the funds raised could be used to organize future tournaments more independently. On 7 July 2013, So 'cœur will be in sole charge of Le Petit Caporal district women's football tournament. While they are organizing it themselves, all those who enabled these young girls to set up this event, eagerly awaited for by all of the neighbourhood's residents, will be participating and keeping a watchful eye on events.

Karine Josse (France)



Norman is one of the (ex-) heroin users I work with. He always hangs out at his usual corner. Norman is always up for a serious talk but also some good laughs. Years ago he traded off his seedy habit for three sickly sweet doses of methadone a day. In the course of time, Norman learned to accept this reality; this less expensive, less fun, less illegal but equally dangerous state-sponsored addiction.

This was not the only drug Norman indulged in. He drank a lot and that was becoming a big problem. Norman knew this and we talked about it a lot over the the years. One day Norman went to his doctor with complaints of abdominal pains and shortness of breath. The doctor told him quite frankly that he would die if he did not stop drinking. Norman was so flabbergasted that he did not ask the doctor what to do. He just stood up and walked away. Of course, this was a game- changer for Norman, so he swore to himself a very serious oath to quit alcohol and better himself and his life. I was honoured to be there on the day that he took this vow. There stood before me a proud, lucid Norman, with a can of soda in his hand. He did not want any help from anybody. He was going to do this alone. He was going to embrace the horror and face his cold-turkey. I told him it might be better for him to seek professional help. I would help him find it and walk him through the process, all the way to the end, no problem. But Norman stayed stubborn and determined.

He kept his promise for longer than he himself had foreseen. He did not touch one drink, but was every day surrounded by his friends who were drunk all the time. During his period on the wagon, every

day was about resisting temptation, and I could see he was proud of himself. Norman probably knew just as well as me that all his aches, nausea, agitation, tremors, fears and migraines would probably stop just after one drink, just 85 cents for a cold beer to release himself from the pain and craving that filled these sober days... Norman's struggle lasted for 3 whole weeks, which for Norman was a long, long time. The day he gave up I saw him standing with his beer.

When I approached him I saw that he turned his face in shame. I told him not to feel shame. I told him that I was proud of him. He lasted a very long time, and quitting alcohol is not a walk in the park. And if he could do this alone for so long, imagine the possibilities in the future with some professional help. I remember the intense stare he gave me when I uttered those words. In his eyes I tried to find some of the courage he took from all talks we had. Norman stood up and walked away. I called out that Rome was also not built in one day, hoping he would still hear me. He turned around, smiled, raised his thumb and touched his heart with his right hand, in the sweet way that Arab people do this. He took another sip from his pint, which probably tasted so sweet, so good. He cried out he would try again, with help, but not now. Norman knows I'm there when that moment comes. He knows I'm there if it works out, but also if it doesn't.

Joris Sabo (Belgium)

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My own thinking, discussions with my colleagues and other professionals and everyday encounters with 'people' have enabled me to reflect on what a street worker should be and what they need to be careful about in order not to become a 'shepherd' that guides their 'flock' on the right path.

Outreach workers are non-formal education stakeholders in a community setting. They make a contribution that can help young people to grow up by their very presence and what they do.

Street outreach workers must be clear-sighted about their educational aims and not focus on law enforcement. They must remain clear about their role within the community and, more specifically, with young people, with the aim being to forge links and maintain a trusting relationship so that each young person's personal development can be supported, while being attentive to their involvement in society, as Berthe Reymond-Rivier so rightly said, "(...) (a) strict interdependence (...) connects self-awareness and awareness of others, our self-development and the recognition of others as an alter ego. People develop within the relationship they have with others. There is no I without you, no me without you."

Street outreach workers are additional people in young people's social circles and must act as partners. They are not there to meet State expectations but to take an interest in the community's needs and requests. Their presence helps to enrich the young people's day-to-day lives by being a new adult figure and through the different social, sporting and cultural experiences that they help to generate.

Gaëlle (Belgium)

As part of our street outreach work, we wanted to make use of a building located in a forlorn area of the town one afternoon each week. We use the building to help the people we meet on the streets and whom we haven't been able to help directly due to their complicated situations. The young people also know of the building and know that if they haven't bumped into us on the streets during the week, they can easily find us at this outreach session.

It was during one of these afternoons that the Elias project was born, named after a 19 year old who had been coming to our non-institutional association for several years. While at the outset he primarily came for individual support, he then started to come to the building to talk about the neighbourhood and his life.

For some time, when we bumped into him on the streets or at the outreach session, we noticed that this youth was particularly upset with the public authorities as he felt that they had abandoned the neighbourhood. He complained about the lack of infrastructure (playgrounds, activities for teenagers, a place where they could meet), the dirtiness of the neighbourhood and the fact that there was an increased police presence, there was nothing for young people. In Elias' view, all of these phenomena caused younger people to get involved in crime, as they copied the example of older people because there was nothing for them to do apart from hang around.

One day when we saw him out and about, we stopped to chat with him and the discussion once again centred on his grievances. As we know him well, we decided to use a different approach. We told him that we totally understood what he was saying, but asked him what he, as a local resident, could do to change things as he had seen that nothing was changing and was not likely to change. His initial reaction was as blunt as our words to him. He was visibly angered by our comment and retorted that it was not for him or for the residents to do the local council's job.


A few days later, Elias approached us when we were near the building and we invited him in. He said that he had thought a lot about our last conversation and that he agreed that something should be done to compensate for the lack of activities for young people. He told us that he was going to put on sports tournaments and he wanted to apply to use a neighbourhood contract building for the young people as a base for activities, film screenings and improvisation lessons. He had loads of ideas and seemed somewhat swamped by all his suggestions, so we offered him our help in structuring his project and with training in order to show him how to design a methodology for the project.

After a few months of work, the initiatives set up by this young person were attracting an entire group of young people from the neighbourhood. Although, in principle, our work is not really a collective undertaking, it has a collective impact: by supporting a local young person, who is obviously more legitimate in the eyes of the other young people than us, we are reaching out to a whole group of young people.

Medhi and Christopher (Belgium)



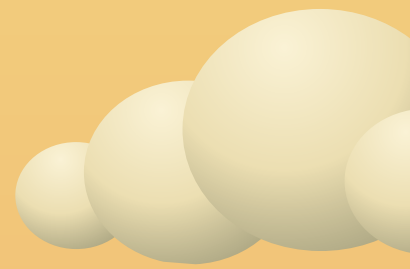




Once upon a time, long ago, in the capital city of Poland, on the right side of the river, there was an association called GPAS Prague North, and in this association worked a few brave souls who had not been terrified of dark yards and gates. Oh yes, many people were afraid to look into these gates for fear of losing ducats or even their life! But the people of this association didn't believe that an evil and supernatural power had captured the gates and courtyards. So, they bravely and confidently went into these gates and they discovered the treasures. The terrible powers proved to be ordinary people, sometimes just lost, torn by the claws of addiction or not able to find their own good paths. Among them were kids. The Brave Souls from GPAS decided to reach these Kids and spend some time with them. One day they came up with an idea for a project, 'The Whole World in Warsaw'. Together they began to explore places in the city that looked like they were from a completely different country, or even continent. They were looking in books for a variety of photos from around the world and acquired various items from abroad. With their knowledge and imagination it appeared that the beach by the river could become the Egyptian desert, the cemetery at the Orthodox Church could melt into the atmosphere of Russia, and under a palm tree in the city centre, they could move to Hawaii. All these situations were photographed. One day the kids and brave soul went to the zoo to find a place that would allow them to appear as if in Africa. There they found a tiny turtle. Suddenly on one of the boy's shoulders sat an imp, who whispered into his ear that he should throw the tiny turtle into the jaws of the crocodile, and little boy did it. A brave soul, who that day accompanied the children, quickly responded to the situation by telling the boy that he had done the wrong thing. When they came out of the zoo, they decided to tell the rulers of the animal kingdom that little turtle was in danger. They called the authorities and said, "A small turtle is in the cage with Californian crocodiles".

The sun rose and set several times. Another Brave Soul with the same group of boys went to the zoo. He already knew the story about the tiny turtle and the Californian crocodiles, so as soon as they came close to the pond where they boys found the tiny turtle last time, Brave Soul quickly ran up ready to protect the turtles, but the pond was empty. Brave Soul guessed that the turtle family had moved to a warmer place as winter was on its way. He sighed with relief. After a hilarious walk through the animal kingdom, Brave Soul and the Kids came out of the zoo and decided to go to the riverside. On their way they saw the apple tree, and since they were hungry, they ran towards it to pick up some red apples. After a while the kids ran out and showed to Brave Soul what they had found amongst the apple trees. It was a turtle! Poor thing! It didn't want to come out of its shell, even though the boys (again, at the command of an unwanted imp) tried to burn the turtle and spoke to it the magic words...words reserved only for adult, but turtle remained firmly in his shell.

Brave Soul offered to go with turtle to a magic doctor who specialised in helping such beings, and the boys agreed. The magic doctor investigated, examined, and tapped the turtle and said, "This 10-year-old female turtle, she has a frostbitten tail and shell, and now she needs a lot of warmth and care." He added that it often happens that bad people toss various zoo animals away when they don't want to keep them anymore. Brave Soul and the kids were wondering what to do with turtle. They decided to give it to the King of the GPAS Association, and so it happened. The King took care of the turtle properly, fed it sweets and gave a lot of his heart to it. The next spring, when the King, Brave Soul and the Kids were sailing on the vast waters of Zegrze, they began to remember the adventure of the turtle. Suddenly the kids confessed: "But you know...Brave Soul...we didn't find this turtle in the apple tree...in fact, we stole it from the zoo..."



Some 15 years ago, Guillermo Descalzi, who at the time was a CNN journalist, came to Lima to make a documentary about the city's street children. He got in touch with our institution and found out about our work: from the initial first contact on the streets, motivating people to change, taking part in the residential programme, progressing through the various phases before the final reintegration into society. Descalzi also visited other projects but he developed a special fondness for Mundo Libre's work. Once back in Miami – the city where he worked and lived – he decided to make what he believed to be each child's dream come true – visit Disneyland. He obtained an invitation for all of our programme's residents!

A fantastic and unique adventure started to take shape. At our end, we had to obtain plane tickets and visas, which obviously involved a great deal of work, in addition to the logistics involved in organizing 40 children. The trip and the whole experience were a success; everything went even better than we had hoped for.

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The children stayed at Disneyland, they enjoyed the magic of the place and came back filled with emotion and memories. People were still talking about the trip when I joined Mundo Libre as a volunteer, at which time a boy from the 'Disney generation' was still around. You could still feel the sheer joy when he told you about the trip.

As a volunteer at that time, I was involved in supporting street outreach work. I subsequently secured a place on the team and was primarily involved in street outreach. We work a lot in the historic centre of Lima, which is a meeting place for those who live on the city's streets. One afternoon, while I was playing with a group of young people, a youth of an uncertain age (he could have been 16, 18 or even 20) appeared; he was obviously heavily under the influence of drugs. His clothing, nails, mouth area and body odour led me to believe that he was a glue user. He hadn't washed for several days. He was shaking, partly due to the drugs and partly out of excitement. He obsessively pointed to my blue jacket. He was shouting "Mundo Libre, Mundo Libre" and wanted me to go with him a few metres away from my group. The situation became tense because the young man started to become aggressive. I decided to go with him. There were five boys of around

his age and some of them were also under the influence of drugs. He finally calmed down a little when we arrived and I could actually understand what he was saying. He asked me to tell his mates that he had travelled to the US and had met Mickey Mouse in Disneyland. He needed me to confirm the story that he had undoubtedly told them hundreds of times and that they had always mocked. I told them that, although I wasn't there myself, Mundo Libre had indeed organised the trip a few years ago. They looked surprised, incredulous and truly staggered. One of 'their own' had travelled abroad on a plane to the US and had been to Disneyland! To this day, I think about the surreal nature of this revelation for all of them.

My new friend had been vindicated after who knows how many years. His story had been confirmed and since then, his mates viewed him differently. The next day, I looked for him in the photos and was able to identify him. He was very different, a child with a big smile and a transparent gaze, a black hat with ears and Mickey alongside. He had stayed on the streets, we had lost sight of him and his neighbourhood had been completely changed due to the construction of a ring road.

I still think back to that experience with fondness. It has taught me that the effort of leaving just a glimmer of hope in the broken hearts of children is really worth it. It has taught me that even if they follow a different path in life, they take with them our words, hugs, affection and respect. It has taught me that, just like people say, life on the streets does not pay. I remember that some dreams can still come true and despite the hard times, we simply cannot afford to stop.

Fabrizio Caciono (Peru)





# VIOLENCE



Violence, in its many forms, is omnipresent in the street. It is a daily part of life for children, adults, drug addicts, prostitutes and people living in extreme poverty. It is also a reality that street social workers are faced with when people in street situations turn violent on themselves (suicides, self harm, drug use, etc.) or on others (insulting street workers, etc.). Violence can also be structural, manifested in the approach adopted by institutions or the police. It can also be visible or invisible, insidious, or dramatic. Whatever form it takes, it causes suffering.

## 🌀 Violence against self (drugs, self harm, etc.), group violence and violence against others (street workers, etc.)

The majority of the children use offensive and vulgar words with each other, which has a negative impact, particularly when used in the presence of women in the neighbourhood.

(...) During our night work, we are confronted with vulgar and offensive language but not physical violence. We cannot, however, be sure that that will never happen because day after day the number of young people in the streets is increasing and they are addicted to various types of drugs and alcohol. When they are feeling positive, they are polite with us but if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they don't even talk to us. These kinds of users trust nobody, they are never responsive.

Lob kumar shrestha (Nepal)

It is difficult to talk to street children. They use obscene and indecent language with us. They smoke and sniff glue. They fight amongst themselves. However, by virtue of our respectful behaviour, they respond and talk to us. (...). When they are under the influence of drugs, they don't want to talk to us.

Raju Dulal (Nepal)

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I know a young person who was involved with two other friends in stealing another young person's phone. It was a violent robbery, a complaint was lodged and charges pressed. The young person, whom I call Bouba, started to be hassled by other young people from the gang because he allegedly gave compromising information to the police. One of the two other young people involved asked for a copy of his statement to show it to the others and prove that he had not ratted on anybody. Bouba was constantly harassed in the neighbourhood. When in the area he shut himself away in his father's house. His parents were separated and had joint custody so he was fine when he was with his mother but stressed out when he was with his father. The gang of youths also set upon the house of his father and, in particular, his sister.

They put bangers through the letterbox, the father's car was vandalised several times, and the sister constantly hassled. We spoke to the whole family in order to try to arrange a meeting between the parents and the young people concerned. The few parents of the young people with whom we had contact were either not much help or had repeated meetings with us. In short, Bouba's father felt that we were not helping his son at all and that we should adopt a more repressive stance by calling the police. We frequently spoke about this with the young perpetrators but they replied that they hadn't much to lose as minors. The situation has been going on for several months already and does not seem to be going away. Recently, one of the young people who had been involved in the theft was caught by the police trying to flog some counterfeit notes. His father told me that, ever since, it seems like his son is afraid and doesn't leave

the house as much as he used to. This young person had been one of the instigators of hatred towards Bouba. Now it seemed it was his turn to be persecuted.

I noticed that the most troubled young harassers all went through a rough patch in school. Some were dismissed several times. They had spent months around Place Flagey in Ixelles without being schooled or included on any school reintegration programme. We had helped some of them to find another school and had therefore earned relative respect from the gang members. It is a fine balance to strike and the person who tips the scales must pay. In so doing, he or she breaks the tacit contract of silence and an example needs to be made of them. This balance seems to be an outlet for all these young people's frustrations and when we talk to them, they seem to be very poorly informed as to the extent of each other's involvement in the affair. The collective safeguard is to fight

the individual who decided to squeal on the group of peers. We are working on a group project with Bouba and every time he is involved in an activity, we have to be on our guard. When we go away on camp with him, we go to collect him at home to avoid any problems. When we run activities with him, we hold them in areas where the others won't pass by. It is particularly annoying for organising activities. I believe there are several factors that contribute to this kind of situation: repeated school expulsions that lead to a drop in the young person's self-esteem; parental divestment, leaving children to roam the streets, without going to school, or having anything to do for many long months; the relationship between the police and young people; lack of adult supervision in public areas. The appeal of money in contrast to the precarious conditions some families live in.

Anonymous (Belgium)

## 🌀 Stigmatisation, violence from the general public

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For some «meninos Joãos» with whom we played in the streets and squares of this neighbourhood in the past, the present is still a daily fight for survival, a matter of resisting in the face of police violence and arbitrary imprisonment, keeping constant watch for threats and dangers of death...and some have already gone.

Veronica Müller (Brazil)

People from the communities think that children are thieves and that they are not hygienic. The communities threaten them. If the children put a foot wrong, they are beaten. These people not only criticise the children but also the organisation. Most communities are not interested in our shelter.

Kalash Rawal (Nepal)

Sometimes we might be enraged and infuriated by people's attitudes towards these children, but if you let these feelings affect you, you risk losing control of the situation.

Pipera Eleni y Koutsina Maria (Greece)

In connection with our work with children in the ambulance, the local population and the police watch what we are doing and ask us include the children in our organisation in order to help rehabilitate them as part of a programme. They ask us to look after the street children and try to change their behaviour.

(...) The police arrest them for no particular reason and their freedom is dependent on what information they can divulge.

Lob Kumar Shrestha (Nepal)

We always play out in the open with street children and the public watch all our activities. Sometimes, if the children steal public property, people catch them and are angry with us too. They talk to us impolitely and it is very difficult to take. Although some people tell us that we are doing a good job, there are others telling us the opposite.

Raju Dulal (Nepal)

## Police violence (or even police indifference)

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Sometimes our job leads us to work on family reintegration but during these family visits, we are faced with numerous problems: families or the children themselves as well as the local population and the police. We seldom have any trouble with the children, unless they have not been sincere about their story and take us for idiots. Parents always tell us about their financial problems and cannot cater to the needs of their children in the way that we do in our organisation. The police and the public do not cooperate with us.

Shyam Krishna Shrestha (Nepal)

Once, when we arrived in Basantpur, there were some children playing cards. We started to talk to them and then suddenly, a police car arrived. The officers hit and threatened the children. Most of them fled and the police stopped us. We showed them our ID cards. We tried to convince the police but they didn't listen to us. The police officers told us that because of our organisation, the children's attitude wasn't getting any better and that they were involved in worse things; they told us to leave immediately. The police threaten us. These are some of the downsides of grassroots work.

Salikram Archarya (Nepal)

When I go out into the field, I see the police and the public treat them really badly. They are therefore aggressive and don't want to talk with us; they feel sad and depressed. Personally, I feel really bad seeing these kinds of problems. I make a great deal of effort to curb them and I think that in order to attenuate the problem of street children, the government should establish a robust policy and both the police and the public should behave properly.

Bimal Khanal (Nepal)

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These Nigerians, who are singled out and stigmatised by a large part of the region's community, are primarily seen as drug dealers. The fact that some can be seen dealing arouses in the public a sense of impunity and they wonder what the forces of law and order are doing about it. The police are therefore under pressure but the constant checks against people from West Africa (Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Republic of Guinea, Senegal, etc.) very seldom lead to conclusive results in terms of drugs seizure. After all, the difference is that the same people have been the last (high risk) link in the chain of street dealing for several months or years.

For experts on policing issues, this type of intervention takes place primarily as a type of marketing (show their colours and sound the siren), leads to population displacement, causes a scene and provides no lasting solution to problems in society. On the contrary, the tendency to view «the foreigner» as a criminogenic factor is gaining ground within society and the number of people with an irregular residency situation has only been increasing since the implementation in 2006 of a new Federal law toughening up on asylum policy in Switzerland.

For users, since addiction (often of a pathogenic nature) is usually associated with a criminal act, the situation is getting worse, in particular due to the withdrawal of any kind of specialised healthcare system and the reinforcement of their social isolation.

So these kind of «racial profiling» spot checks are consistently carried out anywhere that Nigerians can be found. On the day of the drowning and, in fact, for some time since they had left the area around the station or other places where they would hang out (including cafes and bars), they went towards the beach (by the lakeside) in search of peace and a kind of refuge. However, here still they are subject to checks and those who show the smallest sign of irritation are systematically handcuffed and taken to the police station.

Vincent Artison (Switzerland)





## Violence and mistreatment experienced by people in the streets

I carry out grassroots work at night with street children. Most of them are alcoholics, or sniff glue, smoke cigarettes, and some of them claim to take narcotics. The children stay in different places, and have their own gangs and leaders. In Thamel (tourist district of Kathmandu), most children beg from strangers and people driving around in luxury cars. At night, in the car-parks of Thamel, children break windows and ask for money, showing the bandages on their hands, legs and forehead.

(...) When we talk to them about it, they say that they cut their hands because their girlfriends cheated on them. In serious cases, they need to talk about it to the leader and can only come to the clinic with us afterwards.

(...) The majority of children are good-humoured. At night, there is no point in holding awareness-raising workshops for them because most nights they drink alcohol, etc.

Lob Kumar Shrestha (Nepal)

At the beginning we didn't know the subject of our work. Our subject is children that work and/or live in the streets, children that beg and/or sell for their family income. Children that live in very poor conditions and are forced to help their families working in the streets. The majority of them are from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. In the last decades Greece has turned from a country that provided other countries with immigrants into a country that accepts many immigrants. The phenomenon of children begging or working in the streets has suddenly risen in numbers. Our goal is to write down the aspects of this phenomenon and to help our target group resolve their issues (bureaucratic, abuse, survival) when we have the opportunity to act.

Pipera Eleni et Koutsina Maria (Greece)

What issues do our clients deal with? Avoiding school, difficult relationships, all sorts of conflicts, family problems, drugs, sex, lack of work, misuse of social benefits, housing problems, antisocial behaviour...it can be practically anything.

Martin Holis (Czech Republic)





Jim is a tall, muscular, physically-attractive man. He is probably between 35 and 40 years old. According to some of my colleagues, his way of interacting seems to be based on intimidation and confrontation. He gives the impression of being sure of himself. I had very little to do with this user. In and around the station, our exchanges went no further than a glance, a smile or a hand gesture. My first real conversation with him happened by chance. In fact, it happened when I went to visit one of his peers in hospital. We had come out to smoke a cigarette when a husky voice interrupted our conversation, calling out for my «partner»...it was Jim. He was coming out of casualty after having «fallen from Quay 9», he said (Quay 9 is the local place for shooting up; so by that he meant that he had overdosed at Quay 9). We spoke for a bit, and then I left them. I am realising as I write this that afterwards, under the rotunda «place for all kinds of high-level business», Jim had shouted across to me one day: «I wanted to thank you! It was you who called the ambulance when I fell in the street, wasn't it?» I told him that it wasn't. That did, however, tell me that he seemed to have overdosed several times. I didn't see him for some time after that.

Every Thursday we organise excursions, sports or cultural activities, so that these people can leave the station area and have a bit of fun and enjoy themselves without necessarily having to take drugs or alcohol. We arrange to meet behind the station, in front of an old double-decker bus. That day, I was suggesting going for a coffee with one of the beneficiaries whilst we waited for the other participants to arrive when Jim appeared beside me. He was doubled over in pain, his jeans were bloodstained and he had tears in his eyes. He explained

that he had just been beaten to the ground by seven police officers and that he was suffering terribly. He thought that his ribs were broken and was struggling to stand up. I suggested taking him to casualty immediately. He thanked me but refused, saying that he would go on his own. I could only nod and agree, not entirely convinced that he would actually go. Ah yes, the road to the hospital is full of major temptations. A few days later, we were organising the Spring festival in the Galiffe park - every year we prepare a meal for this event. At the end of the evening, when there was hardly any food left, I saw Jim arriving with one of his sidekicks. I don't usually have the time to taste any of the good food provided, but I had succumbed and was holding a plate of food in my hands. What a happy coincidence once again! I was able to split it in two and share with them so that they could eat something hot. Jim was shivering, we settled him onto a bench under the tent, and wrapped him up in a blanket. He told me that he did indeed go to hospital but that the care given to him had seemed rather expedient - this is a recurring problem when it comes to access to healthcare for this type of population (inside I was seething with anger!). We decided to call UMUS, the social emergency mobile unit. Whilst we waited I could only admire the concern his peers had for him. Some rubbed his back to try to warm him up; others spoke to him and encouraged him. In spite of the immense physical and human suffering, it was a very special, moving moment. This great big fellow, who was usually so proud, seemed defeated. I would later learn that he had just separated and was suffering a great deal. Apparently, after this break up, he had smashed a shop window with his fist and was then stopped by the police. The UMUS arrived, and they took him inside the bus. At his request, a street worker stayed with him. After hearing about Jim's situation, the medical team decided to take him to casualty. I felt reassured knowing that my colleague would not just leave him at the entrance, but would stay by his side and make sure he was given adequate care. The UMUS team reassured me, as did my colleague, and told me she had made the same request. Finally, he was in good hands.

A few weeks later, when handing out coffee in the very same park, I saw Jim coming towards me. «I wanted to thank you for everything you have done for me». And there, he told me about his new decisions, plans, the different places he was going to and his drug use. «Did you notice? I have put my piercing back in, cut my hair, and started going back to the gym.» It was true that he seemed like a brand new man. What good news! I congratulated him on how far he had come. He wanted to speak to me for a minute. We stepped aside for a bit. He explained to me that he had things to collect from where he was living before, but that his former home was about sixty kilometres from Geneva, and he hadn't any means of transport. I agreed to take him. At that very moment, my boss came towards us and spoke to Jim, «So in the end you came directly?» Jim had phoned him during the day to get my telephone number; but had no luck, as people are entitled to a degree of confidentiality and respect for private life. My boss had suggested he call back later on the same number, when I would be there. Jim explained to me that in order to help his grieving process, he would really like to be able to make

this trip as soon as possible. So we decided upon the following Monday at 10 a.m. We all agreed to avoid meeting at the station and that we should meet close to the place where he had to pick up his treatment the same day.

On D-day, I was running slightly late, so I sent a message to Jim at 9 a.m. to say that I would be there at 10.30 a.m. I got no answer, but it was relatively rare that I would get one. I left, picked up the association's bus, and had a feeling that today was probably going to be full of unexpected events. I arrived at the pick-up point at 10.15 a.m. and sent Jim a message to tell him exactly where I was. At 11 a.m. there was still no sign of him, so I lifted my phone, dialled his number...and nobody answered, it went to answer phone. I left him a message, saying that I was waiting for him and could he contact me to tell me about his plans for the day. Time continued to slip by. I spoke for a bit with a user that passed by on the street. Then two parking inspectors arrived and ordered me to leave if I didn't want to get a fine. So I jumped in the van, drove a few meters so that I was out of sight of the «forces of order» and tried to contact Jim again. It was 11.20 a.m., and the call went to his answer phone quicker than it had done the previous time. I left him another message, explaining the situation and telling him that I was going to leave, unless he called me back within fifteen minutes, and then I could turn back. I didn't hear anything from Jim. I therefore left the neighbourhood and took the minibus back.

That evening, I was working in the Pâquis area. When leaving in the bus with my colleagues, we passed by the front of the station. And there, suddenly, my dear colleague said to me, «Look, it's... oh, I can't remember his name...you know, the one with the white Bermuda shorts?» The sun was in my eyes, I couldn't manage to identify people's faces. On top of that, the description was so

vague that I couldn't figure out who it was. But then came an important clue, «But yes, you do know – the one who told us he had been struck by the police!» Ah yes, Jim! And to say that I had nearly walked off to offer second-hand clothes to people hanging around the station...What a great coincidence! Any longer, and dear Jim would have lived through a long moment of solitude seeing me arrive!

We know from experience that in supporting this section of the population, the process is never one-dimensional. And I experience this regularly, when I suggest an excursion, they are all enthusiastic, promise with their hands on their heart that this time they will come, but on D-day, it can be a different story. For them, they continually struggle with the ambivalence of wanting to escape, to get away from this place of belonging...and the reality of deprivation, of the fear of coming back too late and not being able to fuel their drug habit in the evening. One day, when I suggested to one of them going away to do something, he replied, «But I don't have time, you know, I have to go to work! I have to beg in order to buy my stuff and be sure I can get through the night!» Not to mention that after all the broken promises and missed meetings, they are stricken with guilt, «I am worthless, I can't stick to my promises, so I am not going to make any more.» Given that their self-esteem is already at rock bottom, these kinds of guilt trips only magnify the way they see themselves. Of course it makes me think of Jim, amongst others...When we met in the park and he shared his request with me, I'm sure he wanted to have everything ready to be sure to turn up and go through with his decision. But other temptations took priority and were stronger...I'm sure we will bump into him again soon.

Anaïs Rapo (Switzerland)

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