

Protecting children from the dangers of living on the streets

A project of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA)



TIKONDANE

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2010 REPORT



"It is better to light a candle than to curse the night" (Peter Benenson, 1961)

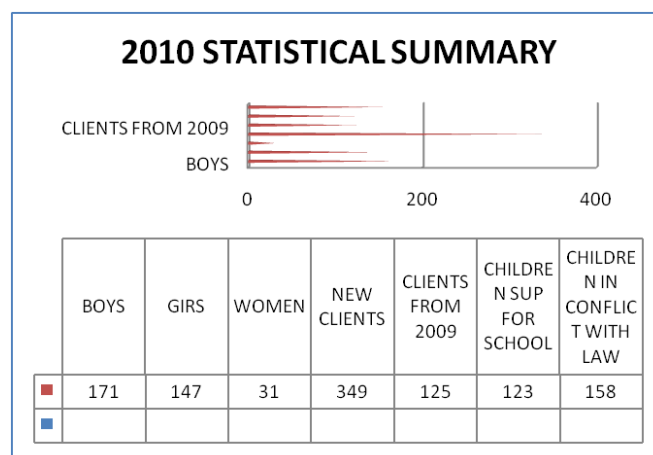
Tikondane Care for Children in/off the Streets (hereafter referred to as TCCS) is a Faith Based Organization (FBO) whose unique contribution is the "hands-on" care and protection of abused, neglected, vulnerable and marginalized children. The project was initiated by the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA) in the 1990's in collaboration with the Diocese of Lilongwe and will this year clock 14 years of service to the children on the streets.

In 2010 children's stories reveal once again dramatic and lasting experiences of grief and trauma resulting from: the death or divorce of parents; physical, sexual and emotional abuse and ill-treatment; trafficking; and accusations of witchcraft. Many children living on the streets found themselves in police cells, either because they were in conflict with the law or as a result of 'sweeping exercises' and in few cases they are victim children in need of protection.

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2010 in Figures

In 2010 the project has reached 720 clients in total, and of these, 349 are new clients. The number of children in conflict with the law that we have dealt with has increased to 158, because of our intensified efforts to reach out to those that are in police cells.



External Factors Influencing the Work of the Project

In a controversial move, the former Minister of Gender, Children and Community Development announced that all children on the streets would be removed by force and put into reformatory centres, which are meant for children in conflict with the law. TCCS, in conjunction with other human rights organisations, intervened to stop the move, and suggested alternative ways of working with these children. In the last quarter of the year, UNICEF also intervened, offering financial support and training to street Social workers of relevant organisations through the District Social Welfare Office.

In May, a measles outbreak hit the town of Lilongwe. Children living in the streets were not spared and TCCS responded by informing the District Health Officer (DHO), and in collaboration with Onesimus Ministry 30 children were mobilized and immunized.

Another event that caught our attention was the shooting dead of a 16 year old boy in the streets by the Police. TCCS had known this boy, and joined hands with other stakeholders to try to ensure that justice on the matter prevails. Furthermore, TCCS helped to trace the boy's family and also calmed down the large number of angry children in order to stop a backlash of revenge.

TIKONDANE WORK AND ACTIVITIES IN 2010

2.1 Activities of Component Teams

Street Outreach Team

During the year under review, the team approached many children and established good relations with them. Newcomers were quickly identified and helped while 'old timers' were empowered through street education and ongoing encouragement to search for alternatives to street life.

The 'sweeping exercises' regularly conducted by the Police service result in larger numbers of children in the police cells of Area 3 Police Station, sometimes leading to congestion. Our team visits them to speed up justice and offer advice, counseling and food. TCCS also traces the families of children who are released without charge, and organizes an escort back to their families for re-unification and re-integration.

Tikondane tries to ensure that children who are charged with offences and placed on remand are not kept in custody for longer than 24 hours. Working with children

in the police cells has been a good opportunity for counseling, educating children on their legal rights, and offering the diversion program. Sometimes we accompany children who have been convicted of offences to the reformatory centre.

The Shelter Team

The team has managed to provide safe shelter, a friendly environment and protection to children. We also provided love and psycho-social support for children with difficult behavior, re-socializing them before escorting them to be re-integrated into their families. Furthermore, we have provided the much needed psycho-social and intellectual support to children who operate from the shelter to attend classes at the nearby Lilongwe Girls and Boys Primary Schools.

In the area of health, all sick children were attended to and referred to various hospitals for treatment. Medical care was also extended to children who live in the street; they could come in and out of the centre when they needed assistance.

Boarding and Day Schools Social Worker Team

During the 2009 – 2010 academic year, we have supported 123 children to attend school; among them 60 are registered in boarding schools (primary and secondary) and the rest are staying in their home environment. Four children are supported at college.

Family Re-integration Social Worker Team

These Social Workers helped a total of 406 children to re-integrate successfully into their families, and 531 follow-up visits were made. Most of the children we received at Tikondane were categorized as being difficult by their parents and/or guardians. Thanks to our intervention, many parents have come to understand better the needs of their children and their responsibility towards them. In consequence, many children have settled permanently and are able to cope with the new situation. During escort and re-integration, we managed to offer psycho-social support to the parents/guardians, instilling parenting skills and conducting awareness campaigns in child related issues in the family and occasionally in the local community. Through our efforts, some families have been helped to go from total dependency to self-reliance through Income Generating Activities (IGA). Today, they can now stand on their own two feet and are able to look after their children.

This year we have successfully followed up cases of child abuse through the courts as part of preparing the children for successful re-integration within the extended family context.

The Drivers

A lot of our work has involved travelling both short and long distances. We were able to drive clients, escorted by Social Workers, to the required destination and trace the homes of clients even when it was difficult. No major accidents happened during the year.

A NEW DAY HAS COME...

Sasamba John, 12 (not his real name) is one of the very many children we have worked with during the year 2010. He was the youngest among the boys in the street. After an initial individual interview, Sasamba revealed that he was being abused in different ways by the older boys. He was pressured into smoking drugs, sent to beg, and was even sexually molested. Sasamba came from Blantyre where his mum used to be a commercial sex worker before she died. During that time, he accompanied her everywhere. He, therefore, started frequenting the streets in Blantyre even before moving to Lilongwe. When he returned to his village life was not kind to him either. He was accused of stealing amongst other things. He didn't bathe and therefore had a strong body odor. Because of that, older boys found reason for beating him up. He felt that the only option left for him was to flee to the streets. Later on his uncle went to collect him from the streets so that they could stay together. He actually enrolled him in school. Unfortunately, he did not last in school because he could not cope with that type of life. He was already used to street life and show delinquent behavior. To correct him, his uncle beat him up as punishment. Eventually, he escaped his uncle's home and joined other boys in the streets of Lilongwe. Our Social workers found him on the street. Several attempts at reintegrating him with his uncle proved futile. Tikondane therefore decided to keep him at its transit shelter for intensive child psycho-social support and counseling. He stayed for several months during which another uncle was identified. After interviews and assessment of both the physical and social environments, it was agreed that this uncle would take Sasamba and give him another opportunity to restart school. Today, Sasamba attends school and is in Std 3. He appears settled and seems happy in his new social environment far away from the dangers of street life.

Challenges and lessons learned

Through our Street Outreach Team, TCCS has established that there are four categories of children who are on the streets:

Old timers: These are children we have worked with in the past years, whose re-integration was not successful, and who have passed our upper age limit of 14 years.

Newcomers: These new arrivals in the streets have been found by our street social workers, or have been directed to us by the Victim Support Unit (VSU) or by well-wishers.

Children begging in the streets: These are sent (and at

times accompanied) by their families to beg on the streets and the pressure from parents/guardians makes them very difficult to work with.

Children used by differently able parents as a guide: These children are easy to reach for dialogue but the parents are not open to dialogue. We only managed to re-integrate one child from this category into the village.

We have observed that unstable and broken families are still forcing children to fend for themselves in the streets. Furthermore, witchcraft accusations against children prove to be a push factor, driving many children out of their homes to live on the streets and consequently making re-integration difficult. We feel challenged but also ever ready to cooperate with different stakeholders to think of new perspectives in protecting and promoting the best interest of marginalised, rejected and abused children.

Outlook and thanks

Future plans

We have not planned many changes, but rather are



searching for ways to reinforce the existing strategies and activities. We want to continue to encourage the parents/guardians to support the children in whatever way they can, and to diminish the dependency syndrome. This social work perspective helps people to create ways of solving their own problems rather than handing out to them what they need. However, we need to treat each case in isolation.

We are still hoping to get hold of the promised school building, so that we can start the refurbishing work and have more room for our activities.

Thanks to our Sponsors, Donors and Friends



We recognize that it is the commitment and generosity of many people that have enabled TIKONDANE to light a candle in the life of all the children and families whose lives we have touched this year. We extend our sincere gratitude to all of you who have contributed in so many ways, through capacity-building and motivating the staff, advisory and consultancy services, technical support, and, last but not least, through providing us with the necessary funding and material support. Many children have had access to their rights to care and protection, and the quality of their lives has been enhanced thanks to the good collaboration we enjoy with our partners and stakeholders.

LETTERS FROM THE CHILDREN TELLING THEIR SUCCESS STORIES

Dear friends and sponsors,

Tikondane is doing a lot of things in our life. I have received food, shelter, clothes, sending us to schools etc.

May you continue helping us and good God will reward you. When I grow up I want to be a police woman so that I can protect many children.

Fainess Mayawa

Thank you for what you have done to me, my name is Andrea, now I am in form 1. My ambition is to become a Bank accountant. I want to study hard so that I can help my family which is poor.

Andrew

My God is my answer ,

Thank you for your love and caring you show to us. Now I am in standard 8. I am aiming high to become somebody in life. When I finish school, I would like to be a nurse and a social worker in order to help people who are suffering physically and spiritually.

May God bless you
Thoko stick

Thank you very much Tikondane for your support you give to me. I was once in the street. You have started helping me since I was in standard 2 but now am in form 1. When I finish school, I want to be a nurse.

May the almighty God bless you so that Tikondane should continue helping other children?

Thank you very much. **Loveness January.**

Thank you Tikondane administration for your recommendable job. May God bless you. As I have been helped since 2003, now am in form 2, I would like to be a politician when I grow up open many orphanages and day cares where I will assist the needy as the commander of orphans and poor of the whole world. These dreams come because of the assistance I receive from Tikondane.

Yours Turnis

When sad and dramatic events happened to me and my family in 2002, it was Tikondane and its staff who came into my life and gave me hope. The start of my meeting with Tikondane was very humble but the impact is still felt up to this day. All this has been possible thanks to the help, which sponsors give to Tikondane. Through your help, many children who find themselves in desperate situations are able to see light at the end of the tunnel. When I look back, I feel happy and grateful to Tikondane and all the sponsors. I have been working successfully for one year as secretary after graduating in Secretarial studies. I am now independent and am able to support myself, my mother and other siblings. Many thanks to Tikondane who paid fees for my studies. Please, continue helping other vulnerable and marginalized children. May God reward you with many blessings.

Yours, Mwai wao

