

They think we are children with a ‘street-mind.’
Report on participatory workshops with children living on the streets of Durban



“They think we are children with a street-mind, but they don’t know the boy in the street didn’t come by his choice, like myself, I had a big problem at home ...”

**Glynis Clacherty
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Thousands of children live on Southern Africa's city streets. These children have commonly been referred to as 'street children'. Although South African NGOs and human rights organizations asked for this phrase to be rejected as negative labelling during revision of the Child Care Act it has been retained but a specific description has been appended.¹ The children arrive on the streets due to a perceptible array of social problems, most of which tend to be directly or indirectly attributed to poverty. However, social research and especially studies on child labour, have shown that families do not necessarily collapse under the stress of undefined 'poverty,' nor are children from poor families inevitably abused, abandoned or discarded; cultural understandings have been little explored in relation to this phenomenon (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003).

Street-life can be devastating and extremely traumatic. The possibility of sexual abuse, rape and commercial sexual exploitation are high, and hunger, violence and disease are ever-present. Sniffing glue becomes an escape from the harsh realities of life. Some children lose their lives and many find themselves 'in trouble with the law' for minor misdemeanours such as loitering with intent, petty theft and vagrancy, or they are forced into crime.

For the outside observer, living on the streets seems to be a hopeless existence and yet one which children opt for in preference to returning home or accepting services formally rendered by Provincial Departments or non-governmental organisations. The general public often, and typically, stereotypes children on the streets as victims or villains and assumes that all adult-led programmes are benevolent. There is evidence, however, that the children have often been unable to access services or have experienced poor or hostile service delivery (Mathithi, 2006). Moreover, a child abused at home and who goes to the street is no longer seen in the first instance as an abused child but as one who is evading adult care and supervision. The pull of the streets seems incomprehensible in light of the abuse and deprivation to be faced there, yet theories of situated learning indicate that certain of the child's experiences on the streets can be positive in terms of personal growth (Swart-Kruger 1997, Swart-Kruger and Chawla 2003).

These are not an ordinary group of children but are defined by their extreme vulnerability, which is heightened by the failure of the general population and public services to recognise them as 'children'. All too often they are regarded as a problem that needs to be solved, primarily because they are seen as a public nuisance. Urban planners have often commercialised public space

¹ 'street child' means a child who-

(a) because of abuse, neglect, poverty, community upheaval or any other reason, has left his or her home, family or community and lives, begs or works on the streets; or

(b) because of inadequate care, begs or works on the streets but returns home at night (Child Care Act 38 2005 ch.1)

excessively, leading to the exclusion of the poor, the disadvantaged and unaccompanied children, including street children. The term street children itself, is stigmatising and invokes reactions that identify the children as delinquent.

HIV/AIDS has added to the complexities of the issue of children who live on the street in Southern Africa. With a projected figure of 42 million AIDS orphans by 2010 in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF) there are widespread fears that the number of children living on South African streets will increase despite family networks absorbing many South African children without parents. (Adato et al. 2005).

Social anthropologist Rachel Bray (2004) who specialises in research with children and youth urges precaution in anticipating AIDS impact outcomes on children in southern Africa and on society more generally, in view of the fact that extant literature on the topic reveals a

scarcity of reliable empirical data and the alarming reliance of a few, localised studies in supporting arguments on a more general level. The information available shows that orphaned children and children living with sick carers are rendered more vulnerable in a raft of social, economic and psychological aspects through AIDS, but that these vulnerabilities are neither new nor unique in the South African context. However ... we do not yet know enough about the medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic, and therefore cannot substantiate the argument that AIDS orphanhood leads to social breakdown [though it appears] ... often in the media, in policy debate and even in academic writing.

The fact that the argument suggests that children orphaned by AIDS will be without role models, and therefore become street children, engaging in 'anti-social' behaviour, and even crime, creates a negative and threatening image of children and the youth they will become. Not only is this an unfair judgement without basis in evidence, but it has repercussions on the way we respond to these young people. For example, images of anti-social or delinquent children are likely to inform, even if unintentionally, the design of policy and programming to meet the needs of children affected by the pandemic. Clearly, if the focus is on the potential for delinquency, such responses are likely to include efforts to control or contain these young people, for example, by placing them in institutions. There is ample evidence of the problems encountered by children growing up in institutions, including their difficulties in re-integrating into wider society when they reach leaving age.... At a time when greater recognition is being given to the role of stigma and discrimination in reducing the quality of life of those affected by AIDS, it is particularly important that we reflect on our role in this process.

Ennew and Kruger (2003) likewise urge great circumspection in academic and other generalisations regarding so-called needy and unfortunate populations from which many children living on the streets, come.

Census data for children and adolescents living on South African streets is not easily available. In 2004, a census survey was conducted by the KwaZulu-Natal Alliance for Street Children (KZNASC) in seven localities (Durban, Howick, Ixopo, Mooi River, Pietermaritzburg, Port Shepstone and Richmond). This revealed 5,964 children in shelters, drop-in centres, and on the streets. Even in small towns throughout the province, groups of children are found living on the streets. In such settings responses from local authorities vary considerably in approach but are not necessarily based on child and youth justice and personal development principles.

The HSRC national conference on street children in 1993 (Schurink, 1993) heralded an attempt by the NGO and social welfare sector to explore issues and service provision at macro, meso and micro levels. Since then there has been a concerted attempt by various government departments, NGOs and academics to create therapeutic and development plans for children at an individual level and to implement prevention and continuum of care programs that strengthen communities as well as children.

Inadequate financial support has contributed considerably to failure in the implementation of therapeutic and developmental programmes or programmes associated with family counselling and the reintegration of children into their communities; insufficient staff have been employed resulting in burnout amongst staff, crisis management, and frequently, public hostility. These observations were aired by NGOs during the period of public consultation on the Children's Amendment Bill.

Institutional life leaves children without the life skills necessary to re-enter community life once they become adults (Bray 2004). Creative approaches that identify and act on the real needs of the children and the reasons why they have chosen a street life are needed. Furthermore, it has long been acknowledged that programmes need to recognise and tackle physical needs such as HIV, substance abuse or malnutrition within a sequence of care. An evidence base is needed to enable service providers, stakeholders and authorities to develop strategic approaches within multifaceted programmes, within which shelters play an important role.

The recently introduced Children's Bill 38 (2005) and Children's Amendment Bill 41 (2007) in South Africa recognise that there are children with exceptional needs. These bills make provision for exceptional approaches to identifying and helping them, while still trying to protect their interests and basic human rights. The Bills require children to be consulted in regard to service provision, through participatory mechanisms, to ensure 'best practice'

in their treatment and care. Their right to participate in decisions that affect them is thus officially assured².

While some considerations in the statutes are controversial, for example, the lower age of consent for HIV testing or to access other services, they do provide necessary and essential mechanisms to assist children. However, there is presently only a draft national policy on the services and resources needed. There is no integrated policy for children living on the streets in KwaZulu-Natal to guide the Departments of Social Welfare, Education or Health and a Child Protection Technical Team has been convened in the province to navigate these needs.

1.2 A situational analysis of the physical and psychosocial health of street children in Durban

This report forms part of the situational analysis of the physical and psychosocial health of street children in Durban undertaken by the Centre for Maternal and Child Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of the situational analysis is to provide objective data regarding the health and psychosocial well-being of children living on the streets of Durban. The research will be used to inform the development of effective strategies for children in danger of living on the street and who are living on the street.

Specific objectives of the situational analysis in its entirety

- To document the reasons why children and adolescents resort to living on the streets in Durban and to note especially the influence of HIV/AIDS in this decision, where relevant
- To document children's street experiences and the reasons they give for not returning to the homes which they left
- To produce basic demographic and health data such as malnutrition, stunting, substance abuse and TB status of street children in Durban
- To estimate HIV prevalence rates among street children in Durban
- To document the services and resources available to assist the children
- To describe children's perspectives and experiences of the above services
- To develop a generic analytical approach and tools for comparative research that will inform intervention initiatives for other cities in South Africa and countries in Southern Africa.

The situational analysis consists of a number of components:

- Interviews with children living in different areas of Durban
- Interviews with service providers and stakeholders
- A set of participatory workshops with children living on the street in different areas of Durban.

² Children's Bill 38 (2005) Ch.2:10 – Child participation: Every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participate in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration.

This report concerns only the information gathered from the participatory workshops with children living on streets of Durban.

Aims of the participatory workshops

- To document the reasons why children resort to living in the streets in Durban;
- To note especially, the influence of HIV/AIDS (where relevant) in regard to the choice of a street lifestyle;
- To document children's street experiences, both positive and negative;
- To identify the reasons children give for remaining on the streets and non-return to their homes of origin;
- To document the psychosocial well-being of these children including their resilience and coping strategies
- To describe children's perspectives and experiences of the services offered to them

2. Research approach

2.1 Participatory research

Ennew and Kruger (2003:10) have charted and appraised the progression of research and intervention approaches with children living on the streets over a number of decades. They conclude that child-centred participatory research is critical to the process of exploring and understanding issues related to street life since

'theories of space and time, of social agency and the deconstructionist approach of discourse analysis, have all led to acknowledgement that children are capable social agents who construct meaning and subvert power, as well as understanding that they are not ageless and genderless.'

Accordingly, the research processes had to allow children to reflect on and recount their life experiences (*cf.* O'Kane, 2000). Children's participation in research gives us access to essential information that we could get from no other source and which we need to make sense of their worlds (Ivan-Smith and Johnson 1998, p299). Additionally, the opportunity of engaging in active research enables young people to explore specific topics through 'primary, self-generated data' (Kellett 2005:1).

It is vitally important to remember when consulting with children that their developmental levels must be taken into account and all ethical protocols must be followed. These requirements are important at all times but particular care must be taken when interacting with children who are especially vulnerable (Boyden and Ennew 1997, Schenk and Williamson 2005).

In this research we ensured that all procedures and interactions were carried out in accordance with the highest ethical-standards, that the activities were appropriate to the age and stages of development of the children, and that they were relevant to the children's particular context. These provisions are described below.

2.2 Doing research with children who are living on the street

The research process was structured to take into account the itinerant lifestyle of the children and the fact that many of them had not been involved in focussed activities such as drawing and talking for some time.

The workshops took place at a venue close to where the children live and work (but far enough away to be private). It was a place well-known to the children, one which did not threaten their daily existence and one where they could feel relaxed and comfortable. We worked largely on a carpeted floor, which allowed the children to fall asleep when they wanted to (day time was, for many of them, their sleeping time) and there were plenty of breaks with lots of physical activity such as soccer and games. In addition, we made sure the children had a healthy snack before we started, a good hot lunch and a packed supper to take home (with extra for the group members who had not attended the workshop – to make sure there was no conflict in the group).

A very important strategy that we adopted in consideration of the life-context of the children was to emphasise throughout that they could choose to attend or not attend. The children were recruited before the workshops through a visit to their place on the street with a local NGO fieldworker who knew them. The fieldworker introduced the researchers to the boys and girls and they in turn explained what the research was about. The children could then choose whether they would attend the participation workshop. Those who chose to attend were taken by the NGO transport to the venue, which was close by so if they decided to leave during the day they could do so. The workshops ran over 4 days. Each day the children signed a consent form saying they were happy to be there that day. During the workshops some children did exercise their right not to attend and either left during the day or did not attend on a particular day.

Researcher's reflections

On the last day we sat in the sun having a break and the girls decided that my hair needed braiding. So I sat while they braided my hair. They discussed how they were very good at it.

I'm good in doing hair.

R: Yes you are. What about you others?

I'm good in English; I'm too kind and friendly.

I'm kind, friendly, warm-hearted and willing to help others.

I believe I can do anything that others do as I have strength.

R: Ok.

I'm good in plaiting people's hair and laughing.

R: That means you are a people's person.

And playing ball.

I'm good in everything.

In dancing.

R: What else?

Speaking English and singing well!

I realised that this was the first time they had talked about positive aspects of themselves. It gave me another piece of the picture about them. I was grateful for the chance to have this discussion as it created trust and added a dimension to my understanding. It also gave me a chance to affirm them. I realised just how important it was that we had created an informal research situation where we could gather data while braiding hair.

2.3 Ethical issues

The University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee approved the research approach and workshop activities. The issue of ethics was very important, particularly as the children we were working with were likely to be emotionally and physically vulnerable because of their situation. Additionally we had to be very careful not to place the children at risk through their involvement in the research process.

The duty to protect the physical, social and psychological well-being of those you study and work with is central to the researcher's role. It is essential to assess the risks to individuals and groups which might be entailed in participating in your research, and to weigh these up against the benefits you hope to achieve. (Save the Children, 2004:30)

The concern that children would be victimised because they had participated in the research was taken seriously. No photographs were taken of the

research process. Children were able to choose a fictitious name and all names and identifying features such as street names have been omitted from the report. Young and Barret (2001:133), in their paper on the ethics of working with children on the street, point out that

Careful thought must be given to the use of anecdotal evidence which may clearly identify particular children or events.

This was taken into account when reporting on things like the spaces the children occupy in order to make sure that 'no harm' comes to those children who participated in the research workshops.

The issue of protecting the children psychologically was also taken seriously. Research activities were set up carefully so that any discussions of difficult issues were done only once we had got to know the children. Care was also taken to make sure there was time to contain any emotions that arose from the discussions and to lift everyone's spirits before we said goodbye at the end of the day. The researcher did not probe difficult issues such as sexual abuse or the death of parents but allowed the children to choose how much they wanted to say about these issues. Activities were also structured in such a way as to allow for emotional distance, for example, children could talk about a hypothetical child similar to them rather than about themselves directly.

Researcher's reflections

On the third day of the workshops with the younger boys we did an activity about our 'Life journey'. They used drawings to show all the different places they had lived and then painted in colours on each house to show how they felt there. I could see that this activity was particularly painful for many of them as they remembered the home situations that had driven them to the street. It was necessary information for us as we wanted to try and assess how much HIV/AIDS had played a role in their moving to the street. As a researcher I was caught between my need to gather information that would help us understand how much HIV/AIDS had played a role in their migration, and the need to protect them emotionally. I decided to work very gently (in spite of the researcher voice in my head saying 'get the information!') and did not probe at all. I allowed them to choose how much they wanted to say at every point. I did not ask about feelings very much. Some of the children told me about their lives in some detail but others gave very brief accounts and I just accepted this.

I put yellow on that house because it was nice there and I was a little bit happy for a little time. Then there were some bad things happening.

R: Do you want to tell me what the bad things are?

No, I don't feel comfortable.

R: OK. Tell me about the next house.

Then I moved from that house to this one...

At the end of the day I could see that they were very tired and sad. We played some happy, funny games, they sang me funny songs and then they went home. Sthembiso and I left feeling very sad too. I was worried that I had asked too much of them and wondered if we should have included the activity.

That night I got a phone call from the fieldworker who had been to visit the boys at their place on the street. He said they had just had a long animated discussion with him about how much they had enjoyed the workshops and how good it was to talk about their problems, 'we need to meet and talk every week!'

This confirmed for me something I have noticed before, that if they can talk in a safe space, children find it a relief to share their sadness. But I also knew that if I had probed and pushed too much and not allowed them to be in control of the process of telling, they would not have wanted to 'talk every week'. I could so easily have shut down the communication by listening to the 'researcher' in my head.



Provision was made for the referral of children who needed emotional support during and after the workshop process. A qualified social worker who had no links with any of the services the children accessed was introduced to the children at the beginning of the workshops and she was available throughout the process for debriefing or to help with any follow-up issues. She subsequently liaised (with the children's permission) with local services on follow-up issues.

In addition, a set of general ethical principles based on a number of guidelines (Schenk & Williamson 2005, Boyden and Ennew 1997, Clacherty and Donald 2007) was applied. These included the following:

Attempting to capture the authentic voices of the children through

- reducing the power imbalance between adult researcher and child
- using developmentally appropriate research activities
- the use of non-verbal reflection activities

Informed consent was gained through

- giving a child-friendly explanation of the purpose of the research
- applying the principle of ongoing consent by creating an environment in which children could withdraw or choose not to talk about particular issues

Confidentiality was kept through

- having a 'no name' rule – no one was to mention the name of a person they were talking about, for example someone who beat them
- not using names and other identifiers in the report
- safeguarding of raw data sources

Minimising harm through

- not probing around difficult issues such as sexual abuse

- using silhouette figures (hypothetical children) when discussing difficult issues so children could talk with some emotional distance and keep confidentiality
- looking out for children with particular problems who may need referral
- structuring activities so they were not emotionally difficult

Benefit to participants through

- making sure that the research was necessary and would be used in the implementation of a programme that would benefit all children in the area
- dealing with the issue of expectations by explaining what the researchers could and could not do

Feedback to participants through

- NGO staff in the field will give children (those who participated and other children living on the street) a summary of these report findings for them to discuss.

2.4 Sample

The children were recruited through purposive sampling from a number of different areas of Durban through a local NGO working with children living on the street. Not all of the children were accessing the services of the NGO, though some were. All of the children had accessed the services of a street child organisation at some stage when they were living on the street.

The following table gives the numbers, ages and sexes of the children who participated. Note that numbers fluctuated as a few children came in and out of the workshops but this table represents the number who participated consistently in all of the activities.

Boys/age	Girls/age
10	13
11	14
12	14
13	15
15	16
15	16
15	17
15	18
15	18
15	18
16	19
16	19
16	
16	
17	
17	
18	
19	

Total 30 (boys: 18, girls: 12)

2.5 Limitations of the research

One of the main limitations was the amount of time we had to spend with the children. An aim of the research was to understand why the children were on the street and why they stayed on the street. Previous research with children living on the street, (for example Swart 1990, Donald and Swart-Kruger 1994, Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003) suggests that the reasons why children come to the streets are multiple and complex. It was not really possible to get a detailed life history from each child within the four days we were able to spend with them. For this reason, although the information we do have is richly textured and provides powerful insights into their world, this report does not give as comprehensive and complex an understanding of why these particular children are on the street as would be possible with longer-term interactions.

Boyden (2003), referring to children affected by armed conflict, points out that deciding what to tell adults can be a powerful survival strategy used by children. Children living on the street are adept at knowing how to control an interview situation so that the outcome is favourable for them. This dynamic was obviously present in this research and constitutes the 'impression management' which social science researchers periodically encounter. The participatory approach, however, allows for cross-checking data through the inclusion of the voices of many children in an open conversation. In addition, the exploration of the same topic through different activities and across four groups allowed for triangulation of information. This, together with the fact that different children in different groups consistently reported certain issues independently means that we can be reasonably confident of the reliability and validity of the data.

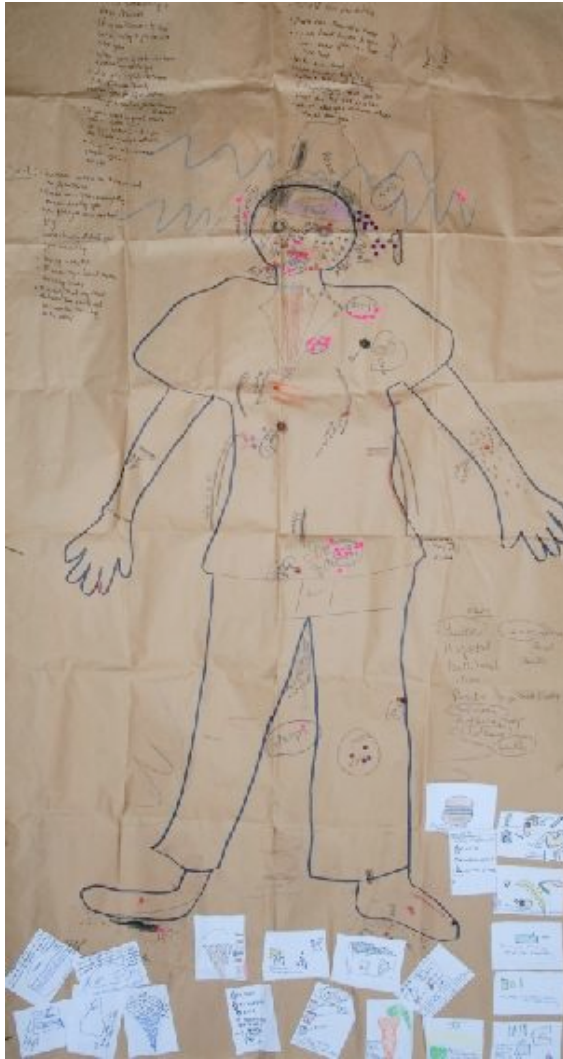
2.6 Participatory workshops

A participatory approach is one in which children take part in a set of activities to 'construct a representation of their social world' (Woodhead 1998:22). Once this has been done, the researcher is then able to ask about the topic of interest within the context of the representation.

In this research study children participated in a number of different activities over four days. These activities all involved discussion. The four-day period allowed the children to gain trust in the researchers and confidence in talking about their lives and concerns.

Children worked on drawing activities they do in a day, the problems they face and their ideas for interventions to help them. We also engaged in a number of activities that could yield qualitative assessments of psychosocial well-being.

One of the most effective activities was a large body map that allowed the children to talk about their physical health problems. This body map was also used to help the children articulate the psychological impact (as they understood it) of their life on the street. We were able to quantify particular physical symptoms and injuries as children used stickers to indicate if they had experienced that particular problem.



Use was also made of a set of silhouette figures that allowed us to discuss difficult issues like sexual abuse and harassment in the third person.

Researcher's reflections

An important principle in any research is to avoid 'experimenter error'. In qualitative research using techniques and tools that allow respondents to describe their own experiences in as unedited a way as possible reduces the level of error.

One of the important principles underpinning this research was that the researcher did not lead the children in any way – to avoid putting words into their mouths. Care was taken to give non-directive instructions when introducing activities. The activities themselves were designed to be open-ended so that they did not pre-empt the children's responses. Questioning during the discussions was kept to initial open-ended questions and then to questions of clarity. In this way we made sure that what we were collecting was the children's authentic experience. The example below illustrates the use of non-leading questions of clarity.

R: Tell me about the problems you face in your day.

It is dangerous in the showers because they even beat you up; they say you are stealing their possessions.

R: Who beats you up?

The people

*And the police. (All speaking together).
R: What do they say you have done?
They say we are stealing the bags.
Even if you did not steal! (All speaking together) (YB)*

2.7 Recording and analysing the data

The workshops were all conducted in isiZulu, the children's home language, which the support facilitator interpreted for the researcher. All the discussion in the workshops was recorded and then translated and transcribed into English. These transcripts formed the data and were subjected to thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires a specific 'code'. This may be a list of themes ... A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations ... Themes may initially be generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research (Boyatzis 1998:vii).

In this research the data were encoded into themes. These themes were generated inductively from the raw material i.e. they were allowed to emerge through reading and re-reading the transcripts. Once themes had emerged all quotes from the data related to a particular theme were clustered under this theme.

3. Findings

Notes about quotations

- i) researcher comments and questions begin with R:
- ii) a new child speaking is shown through the use of a new line ;
- iii) quotes are identified in the following way
 - (OB) = Older boys group
 - (YB) = Younger boys group
 - (OG) = Older girls group
 - (YG) = Younger girls group
- iv) names of children, service organisations and any other names are designated with an initial rather than the full name – often these initials have been changed to prevent them being identified;
- v) details about certain places have been changed to prevent identification of a group according to the place.

Note about terms used to describe police

The children used very specific descriptions of the different policing agents they met on the streets. To protect the children we have referred to all of these agents as 'police'.

The findings are presented under the following emergent themes:

- Living on the street - what we spend our time doing
- Places we stay and the groups we are in
- People who abuse us on the street
- Our reasons for coming to live on the street
- Services we access
- Our physical health
- Psychosocial well-being

Theme 1: Living on the street – what we spend our time doing

During the workshops the children and young people were asked to do a drawing of all the things they do in their day. This was then discussed in the group. Most of the information in this theme comes from these discussions, though some is drawn from other discussions such as those on problems the children face on the street.

There was some difference between boys and girls and between older and younger boys - these are highlighted in the discussion below.

Personal hygiene

In their drawings of their daily activities the boys all drew their day beginning with washing. This was always mentioned as one of the first things they did when they woke up in the morning. One group of boys said one of the main reasons for living where they did was that they had access to public facilities like the showers. Other groups of boys used water taps near where they stayed for washing.

Here I am washing my face when I wake up. (OB)

This is part one (pointing to his drawing of his day) I am waking up and stretching myself. Here I am taking a shower. I go to play football. I go ask for small change. I had something to eat and then I go to sleep. (YB)

The issue of keeping clean was often a challenge.

It is dangerous in the showers because they even beat you up; they say you are stealing their possessions.

But you will be washing at that time.

R: Who beats you up?

The people

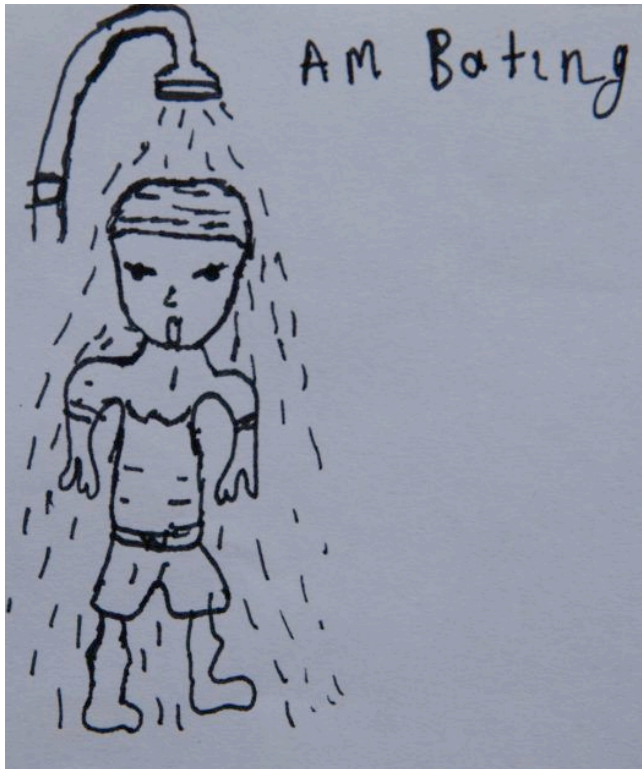
And the police. (All speaking together).

R: What do they say you have done?

They say we are stealing the bags.

Even if you did not steal! (all speaking together) (YB)

This picture shows a problem. Here I am showering and the police riding on horseback will chase us. (YB)



They also spent time washing their clothes. Again the challenge was to find places to wash clothes but another challenge was that many of the children only had one set of clothes. In addition, if they washed their blankets and left them to dry they were sometimes burnt by city police (see Theme 3 below).

We are washing our clothes at the beach so we can dry and while we wait we play football. (OB)

When you have done your washing and now are drying your blankets up there the police will see and burn them. (YB)

One group talked about how being clean and having clean clothes was a rule in their group. This was partly a survival issue because if they looked like 'street children' they would be chased away from their place, which they liked very much because it had access to washing facilities, and was also a beautiful place (see Theme 2 below).

The girls also talked about washing and showering; this was also how all of their days began. Most of them accessed the services of NGOs for this. They also spent time during their day washing clothes and blankets. In addition many of them also washed the clothes of boys who were part of their groups, most often for money.

Here I wake up, bath, eat and go and have a smoke. (OG)

Here I'm sitting down, here I've washed my body, here I'm playing netball, here I am watching TV at the centre (local service organisation) (OG)

My day



Some (boys) would say please wash my pants, I'll give you R3.

R: Oh, so you wash things for the boys.

A lot! (YG)

In the discussion around the body map which looked at physical problems faced by children on the street, girls and boys talked a lot about the physical problems they had because they could not always keep clean.

Lice, because you cannot wash your hair, you don't have soap or water. And also we get these sores in our armpits, from not washing.

R: How many of you get these sores here (in the armpits)?

Me.

Me too.

Me.

All of us (6 of the 12 boys) (YB)

I have this rash on my arms. It is very itchy. I cannot wear sleeves, it is worse when I cannot wash enough. (YG)

R: What other things happen to the body of a boy who is living on the

street? What else can we draw on this body? (referring to the body map drawing)

A rash here and here (points to his stomach and legs).

Yes, from not having soap. (YB)

Itching, itching, itching when you cannot wash here on your private parts. (YG)

Finding food

Much of the boys' time was spent carrying out various activities to find money for food, glue and cigarettes. What is clear from their accounts of their days is the extent to which they live 'hand to mouth', collecting small amounts of money, using it and then collecting more for the next meal or next cigarette.

Here I'm sleeping. I wake up in the morning and wash my face, wipe it off, put on my clothes and go to dig-out (beg) at the robot and buy food and tobacco and smoke. After smoking I go to the garage to dig-out (beg) for money for bread. After that I buy my tobacco and my food and I eat and then I go to sleep as I would be feeling some headache. (OB)



The younger boys begged for money from people in cars at robots or on the street.

R: What are you doing here in this picture?

Smoking cigarettes.

R: Where do you get cigarettes?

When I finish asking for money from people at the robot I go and buy cigarettes and some glue.

R: How much money do you make at the robots?

It depends where you go or maybe you stay until late so that you can get more money.

R: How much money would you make?

On Fridays there is a lot of money.

Maybe R50 if you are lucky.

But only on Thursdays, Friday and Saturday

On Sunday you can get but not so much. (YB)

R: How are you getting money S?

Donations, when someone comes we ask for a small change to buy something to eat. (YB)

Sites for begging belonged to particular groups and if a boy from another group trespassed there would be a fight.

If a boy from one group asks first and then the person from the flats gives him money but he doesn't belong there, then a boy who belongs shows up, he would start a fight. (OB)

Most of the older boys said they could not beg as no one would feel sorry for them and give them money.

You can't beg when you are older. When you are older people think why are you not finding yourself a job because everyone gets money out of working. (OB)

Boys also parked cars and carried shopping for people for money. Some boys had had jobs handing out advertising flyers.

Some other times we do some parcel-carrying jobs, there at [the supermarket].

We also give people papers - adverts.

You get paid R20 a day.

Sometimes we work from 8.00 till 4.00 and from Monday to Friday. (YB)

Many of the boys described how they painted their faces white and then did mime on street corners to get money from passers by. The boys who had access to the beach made sand sculptures and asked for money from admirers. The younger boys had all sorts of creative ways of making money including selling their shoes.

R: What other work do you do?

Paint our faces with a white clay soil and stand like a statue, so when somebody throws some money we dance. Maybe some other times you see my white shoes were expensive so some white people liked them then they exchanged them for takkies and money. (YB)

We do art.

R: How do you get money from art?

*We dig the soil and make a sculpture in the sand.
I do that and this one too. I stand and look after it and he makes it.
Then people give money when they look at it. (YB)*

The older boys sometimes managed to get piece-work on a building site or at a scrap yard. They did say though that it was very difficult to find jobs like these because people knew they lived on the street and assumed they were therefore untrustworthy (see Theme 3 below). Often this meant that older boys turned to crime.

They are robbing for money to buy food and clothes because big boys can't beg for a small amount of money. (OB)

I used to beg from the people, but now I work with T. T is a person in charge at the scrap yard. When others are looking for work you find that there is no work to do and they see that they are too old to beg so what are they going to do? (OB)

The money earned from these activities was used mostly for food and glue (if they sniffed glue). They did have other strategies for getting food. When there was no one to beg from they looked in dustbins for food. This seemed to be done only if there was no other choice and the boys did not like doing it (see the discussion on sniffing glue to make it easier to eat from dustbins in Theme 6). The laughter when talking about it and the special terms they use for looking for food from the dustbins suggest that they find ways of dealing with it through distancing themselves from it by joking.

*R: Where are you getting the food you eat?
It's a struggle.
R: What's the struggle?
The struggle is picking from the dustbins. (YB)*

*Sometimes we get NM food. (they give the acronym of a local street child service organisation and a man's name)
R: What food is that?
That's how we call it. The driver of the car that brings the food is called M.
R: Does he come everyday?
ALL: No!
If he is not coming we are going to Steers to look for left-overs.
We are going to scrape the dustbins.
Sometimes J (another service NGO) arrives (with food).
No you are lying sometimes J does not come and the NM does not come.
Then we struggle, we scrape the bins, we 'Karabha' (scrubbing).
R: What is Karabha?
It is to get into the bin with your head and scrape.
When you have come up with the food from the bin we call it 'Karabha'.
We bite. Getting into the bin is 'Diza'. (They all laugh)*

Sometimes restaurants gave them left-over food or kind people they knew bought them food.

*Different people help us.
Those who pass by they preach about God.
R: What do they say?
They say we must love God.
They pray with us in the afternoon.
They give us bread.
We feel happy.
They also give us blankets. (YB)*

Some of the people already know me when I see them coming in a car. I just stand up and they stop. They ask me what I want and I tell them that I want food and they give me money so that I can buy some fat cake and tea. (OB)

They also got food from various street child service projects. In fact when describing their week, their activities were organised around food deliveries from the various projects. They got food at a local church a few times a week, although they had to join in a prayer service first, but most said they enjoyed the praying and singing.

*At church they tell us about God so that we can know who our God is. First of all they give us food and they give us bibles to read and after that we pray for the food because other people don't get food so it's only God who brings us food.
R: How many times do you go there?
Four times (in the week).
R: Is anybody else going to that church?
Yes, all of us. (OB)*

One project sometimes delivered food to them on the street in an informal way and another handed out food three times a week at a regular time and place – the children's activities were organised around this food delivery. One of the NGOs working with the children always had food at the beginning of the day and the children who accessed this food said they valued the regularity of it though they did get tired of bread.

*The J guys do help us with food.
But actually when they feel like doing so.
But with N we know for sure it will be there.
But the bread is sometimes hard. (YB)*

Food was obviously very important to all of the children, but particularly to the boys who talked a lot about lack of food and being hungry as a problem. They also said that the times they felt happy were times they had been able to

wash and to get food.

R: Can I ask something? Is there a good thing about living on the street?

No, there is no good thing about living in the street, it's too difficult.

R: So there's nothing good ...

Even us, we don't like living on the street, it's the situation that force us.

R: There is not even one thing that makes you happy?

Only when we get food and then the stomach will be full and when we get money.

And some days you get lots of money and buy things. (OB)

R: So is this boy who you drew happy or sad?

He is happy because he has found money and food and clothes. (OB)

When your stomach is full it is good but when you are hungry it is bad.

(YB)

It is good and bad on the street.

R: What are the bad things?

When we are hungry, when you have nothing, no clothes and no money it's bad to be on the streets.

R: What are the happy things?

When there is sun, when we are staying together, when we have food, when we have washed. (YB)

Though the girls also organised their days and weeks around food deliveries from various service organisations they did not mention lack of food as often as the boys did (possibly because the issue of protecting themselves from violence was more pressing, see Theme 3). The girls did access food services from NGOs and they also begged. But it was more difficult for them to beg as men asked them if they were selling their bodies.

But last week when me and my friend M went to beg there by the shop so while we were begging, one man came and we asked for money, he is old you know, he is like a father to us. He asked us, 'do you sell?'

R: Sell what?

He asked us, 'do you sell your bodies?' and we said we don't sell our bodies. He said I was going to give you a lot of money but because now you are not selling I won't give you the money. We just said leave us alone. (YG)

It also seemed that the girls got money from boyfriends for food so did not have to spend so much of their day trying to get money for food. They also shared what they had with each other (though the boys also did this, see below).

R: What do the girls do to get money?

We get it from boyfriends.

R: So if you don't have a boyfriend?

You better go (leave the street) but if you have a friend who has a boyfriend you get food from her.

R: So you share with each other?

Yes.

R: So do you need a boyfriend?

I don't have a boyfriend.

R: So what do you do?

S, P and the other girls call us when they have something to eat.

Other girls get money from plaiting hair. When I have money I would call P to do my hair and give her some money. (YG)

Yes. Here I'm running away when another one is chasing me for my money

R: Who is chasing you?

The girls (laughing)

R: The girls? Do the girls ask you for money?

Yes

R: Are those girls from your group or ...

It's my girlfriends when they want some money and I would tell them that they are not going to get money from me so I run away.

R: So you do a lot of running away?

I won't give girl money for smoke that I can give for food. (OB)

It seemed that asking boys for money for food had consequences.

If I want R1 from the boy I would go and ask and he would say I must go and buy cigarette and come back and then we smoke together but then he want to share at night too. (YG)

Fun activities

Apart from the search for food boys spent most of their time playing soccer with their friends or swimming. A few went skateboarding when they had money to hire a board.

Here on this picture I feel happy I am playing my favourite game of skating but I don't get a chance to skate because there is no one to help me. I don't have a skateboard, I need to pay.

He is good! (OB)

Some of the boys also went to a local games arcade. Sometimes to play but most often to shelter from the rain.

Here I am in the games place (points to his picture). I chose white to show my happiness.

R: Why are you happy?

The games make me forget my worries.

We also go to hide from the rain. Eve if we do not have money to play we pretend as if we are playing while we know that we are sheltering ourselves from the rain. (YB)

The boys also talked about going to the beach to swim and play on the sand.

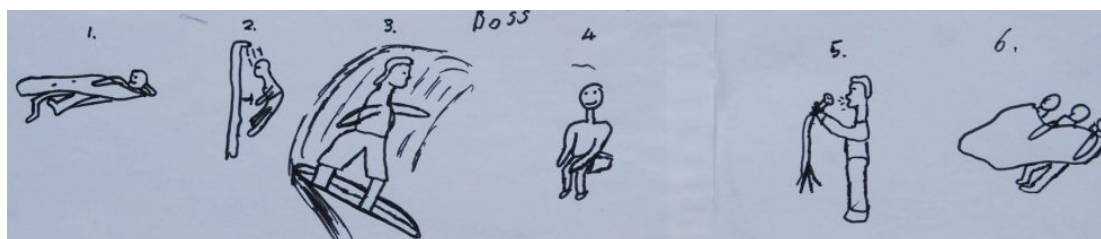
When the sun is hot I go to the beach and it's so good to get some fresh air.

R: What if the beach wasn't there, what would you do?

I would feel so bad. If there was no beach my life would be more difficult. (OB)

Many boys also organised activities with one of the NGOs and their day was structured around these activities.

This is me sleeping in the morning and that is picture number 2 it's me going for a shower and then picture 3 this is me doing surfing at the N (local service organisation) surfing club. That is me begging for money after surfing. And picture number 5 is me doing rap songs, I'm singing and I'm doing it with A my other friend. Our producer is S (a community worker from the service organisation) (OB)



The girls spent time with friends but did not take part in many group activities and were less involved in the activities offered by local NGOs, although some did say they did bead work and art work at a local street children service organisation.

Ok, when I wake up in the morning, I fold my blankets, after that I go take a shower, then I wash my clothes and then after that I just go and smoke with my friends, have a cigarette. After smoking I eat, after eating I go back to smoke with my friends and relax with them.

We then do some activities at the centre, some bead-hand-work.

R: Oh did you make those? They are beautiful.

C: Yes. We do some bead-hand-work activities after that I eat and go to play with my friends. After playing at night we smoke and smoke and go to sleep.

A few of them had got involved in physical activities with the NGO staff but most seemed to be much more sedentary than the boys. Their relationship with the boys in their groups also seemed to affect how involved they got in activities.

We were doing surfing before but most of the girls didn't like it and it was only two girls who were doing surfing so we stopped. I like it. It broke my heart to stop. We also did singing but the girls did not like it - so no more singing.

R: Why did you stop?

If you sing well they tease you. This thing starts with the boys, when the girls are singing happily the boys would come and tease. They would say, 'why are you crying, what do you want?' they were just doing the discouraging stuff and we just give up.

Sleeping

At night the children often spend time with the group around a fire talking and joking. Girls and boys said they enjoyed this if there was no fighting. Though they also worried about what would happen later once they went to sleep (see Theme 3 below).

At night we sit together and chat about past things and remind ourselves and laugh. Sometimes we just play ball.

And they smoke (boys)

And we smoke. (YG)

This picture shows us playing cards. After playing cards we had a fun time and after that we slept. (YB)

Sometimes it's nice at night. The other thing at night you can't have friends (boys). Because then they think they can sleep with you.

Yes. I sleep there by the corner to protect myself, I am scared. If you are asking for something during the day, maybe they are eating some chips, they will say, chips are going to talk at night (like you'll pay back at night). If you say to the boys 'skeiff' (can I have one puff from your cigarette) he will say no, you are running with your body at night, (laughing) if you don't give, they don't give and if you give, they give. (YG)

All of the groups had particular places where they slept at night (see Theme 2 below). The biggest issue for all of them was rain. Most of the places where they slept were not sheltered from rain.

R: Where do you sleep?

At T.

R: Every night?

Yes, same place.

All of us (refers to the other members of his group).

No, if the weather is not okay, we look for another place to sleep.

When it rains we go to the park. There is a shop there. Even there sometimes the rain comes inside but not as bad as this place. (YB)

One pattern that emerged in the descriptions of their days was how dependent the children were for their happiness and ease on the weather.

When it rained they were sad and worried about where they would sleep and how they would dry their blankets. When it was sunny it was easier to do things with friends such as swimming in the sea and sitting talking on the beach and forget about their worries.

Here during the raining season, my clothes get wet. I am also very scared of thundering, because a long time ago my granny told me stories about the thundering. I am scared when the rain comes, then my blankets are going to be wet and I think how I am going to sleep with wet blankets. (YB)

*The rain is coming in August.
We will be killed by fever, although now it is not raining but it is coming in August and we will be tortured. (YB)*



Theme 2: Places we stay and the groups we are in

The children who participated in the research came from a number of different areas around the city. All of the boys belonged to a group that was defined by the place where they 'lived'. This 'spatial identity' is commonly described in the literature on street children (Berman, 2000, Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003, Hecht, 2001, Swart 1990). This living space was the place where they slept and kept their spare clothes and blankets. They all had strategies for protecting this place and their possessions.

R: So this is your place?

Yes, if someone comes we hit him.

R: Why?

Because some of them steal our clothes and ...

They steal our money.

In this place we keep our things.

Not all of us sleep at the same time, you can think these fools are asleep, but one is not asleep, he is just pretending to be asleep. When an intruder comes he will wake us all up.

He is a guard (laughter from the group).

R: What happens if he falls asleep by mistake?

He can't! (All together).

We take turns.

Maybe others come here and beg in our place, when one sees that intruding person, they wake us all and we start to beat that person.

R: Does this happen often?

We are troubled by the people who are stealing our blankets.

And the police! (All speaking together) (YB)

There was much anxiety about their possessions, especially blankets. In the one group the boys expressed the fear that while attending the workshop no boys were at their place guarding it. The main fear was that the city police would take their things and burn them (see Theme 3 below) but they also worried that other groups of children living on the street may take their possessions. The main concern was for blankets as these represented warmth at night. Being cold was something that made all of them worried - it was one of the main reasons children gave for smoking glue (see Theme 6), so their blankets were very important to them.

One challenge that we are faced with is - we are happy to be here (at the workshop), but by the time we get back we would find out that the municipality have taken our belongings and removed them. Everything would just turn upside down. We will be upset and that is the sad thing that we normally experience. (YB)

All the young girls are left alone there and I am afraid that they (police) may burn our clothes. (YB)

Researcher's reflections

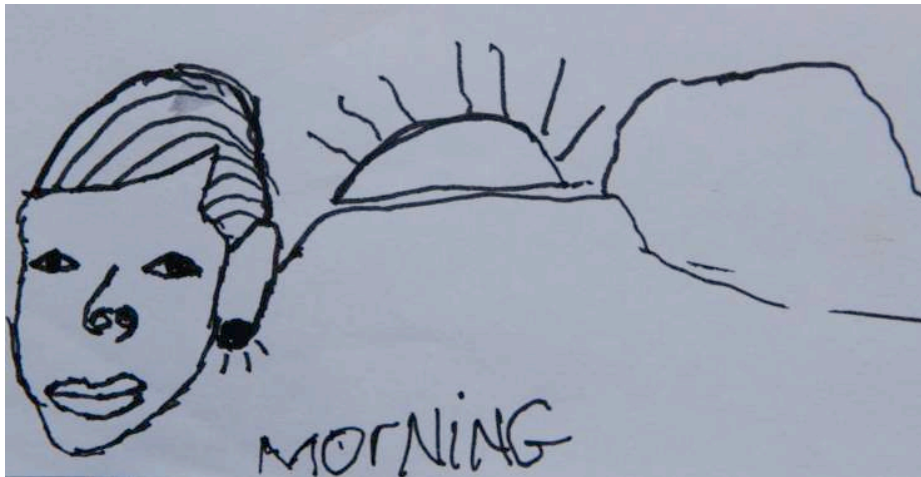
On the last day of the workshop the boys were tired and very jumpy, small fights had erupted all morning. They seemed more anxious about their place and were also perhaps acting out because they knew their time in a safe space, where they were accepted as they were, was about to be over. They all had to put the street persona on again soon.

As we ate lunch on the last day a community worker from one of the service organisations working with the children called me over to tell me that he had just had a call from another fieldworker to say that the city police had visited the boy's place that morning and loaded up all their blankets and clothes into a municipal skip and thrown them away. We discussed how we would tell the boys.

After lunch we sat in a circle in the sun and S told them what had happened. They seemed more sad than angry but wanted to get back immediately so they could find out what had happened to the rest of the group. The transport from the service organisation was not available so I took some of them back so they could find out what had happened while the others walked. When we arrived at the site the girls from their group were sitting in the open space with nothing. I dropped the boys off and we talked for a while together about where they would sleep that night. They knew the service organisation would help them in some

way. I turned my car around and drove away, looking back at them silhouetted against the sky - they looked very young.

In the way the boys talked about their place there was a sense that it was their home. Boys staying in one area talked a lot about how much they liked it because it was open and beautiful and had a view of the sea. In their drawings of their daily activities they often showed themselves waking up and watching the sunrise. They also drew the beauty of the place in their painting of life on the streets. It was something that made them happy about life on the streets. When we discussed it many of them said they did not have such a beautiful environment in their home places. They were quick to point out, however, that they did not live on the street because it was beautiful – it was because of problems at home (see Theme 4).



This is me. Everyday I watch the sun rising over the horizon. I like it.

Here I've drawn the sun and sea. When the sun is rising on the horizon it has a beautiful colour.

I like it when the sun's rays are reflected on the sea.

Me too.

Where we stayed in Umlazi we did not see this.

And at T Road the buildings obscure the view.

So this is why we like staying here.

But there are other reasons.

R: Okay. What?

All of us have different problems.

At home. (YB)



I like it when the sun's rays are reflected on the sea.

I put a flower here because I find this happiness at our place.

R: What did you write underneath the flower.

'I don't like to stay on the streets, but I stay because I don't know what I'm going to do.'

R: So it is a mixture of feelings?

Yes. When the sun is out it is nice but when it's raining it's bad. (YB)

That is me (pointing to his drawing of his day). The sun is coming up. It is early in the morning. Then during the day sometimes it's raining and the sun is shining. Have you seen that?

R: When I was a little girl we used to call it a 'monkey's wedding' when that happened. (The boys laugh) (YB)

These boys described the pride they took in their 'home'. They kept it clean. Partly out of pride but also because they knew if they did not the city police would move them away. Another group of boys described how they also tidied up their place after sleeping so that their things were safe.

If you wake up in the morning you must pick up the papers so there is no littering around.

R: Why?

Because if the police come and find papers they will chase us away. (YB)

We know the owner. We are able to go and sleep and smoke our tobacco and dagga there. When we wake up we have to clean otherwise our clothes will be thrown in the rubbish bin. When we finish cleaning we would go to N (service organisation) to take a bath, thereafter we play the ball and then go and watch movies. (OB)

One group valued their place so much that they had strict rules that enabled their group to stay there. This is an example of a sophisticated survival strategy.

R: Talk a little bit more about your group.

We protect each other.

We feel like a family.

R: How did you become part of this group?

You must wash.

You must wash your clothes.

You must not like fighting and quarrel.

You must not smoke glue.

You must not smoke dagga.

Must not smoke drugs.

If you smoke drugs you belong to older groups you must leave us.

R: What if this boy is smoking glue?

We will send him to other groups like at L road.

R: There are a lot of rules in this group. Who decide these rules?

We decide amongst ourselves and agree on those rules.

Somebody will come up with an opinion then we will agree on it.

R: Do you think other groups have rules?

We don't think so.

Because they are using drugs.

R: Why is your group different?

Drugs disturb the mind.

We want to have access to the beach. (YB)

That is why as a group we have decided to make rules to always wash and be clean.

Another decision we took is to do away with the glue and drugs, because where we are staying is an upmarket area. There are tourists who visit the place, unlike T (referring to another area) where there is drugs and crime.

It is easy here to attract conflict and police beating. We need to look decent. (YB)

Other groups stayed in a particular place because there was shelter there and the local people living there accepted them and even allowed them to use a tap for drinking and washing. This group also had a strong sense of belonging to this place.

This is our place because there is shelter here. It is owned by a foreigner and he lets us stay here. We sleep there at night and when it rains we shelter in the day. (OB)

Another group stayed close to the service that offered showers and food. There was less sense of belonging to a place in this group and their identity did not seem to be as closely bound as the other groups to their 'place'.

It was clear that there was some migration from one space to another but it seemed that the children only moved their places reluctantly. Harassment from the city police was one of the main motivators for moving.

We did live there by the beach but the police chased us and so we live here now. (YG)

We did stay there by the verandas. The police chased us away and took our blankets. We left there and came to N as we are still staying there even now. (YG)

The girls did not have as much of a sense of belonging to the place on the street; for them home was still the places where they had come from.

This is not my home.

R: Here on the street?

Yes. My home is with my sister at her place. Here is not a place to call home. I just stay here because of the problems but my place is home. (OG)

A few of the girls did not belong so closely to the group and seemed to sometimes sleep in other places, with a friend in a nearby flat for example. The girls also talked in the workshops about how they knew girls who used men and possibly also sex as a strategy for finding a place other than the street.

I know someone but I won't say her name. She is not living with our group but she doesn't have a place to stay. She has lots of phone numbers in her pocket, all for men, so if she wants to sleep she will use all the numbers and see if he is going to phone back or she will phone and say to them, 'come and fetch me from a certain place.' (YG)

R: Where is K today?

She slept at her friend's flat last night she will come later. (OG)

Dynamics of group living– boys

As stated above, group identity is related to the space the group occupies. A lot of information about how the groups operated emerged from the workshops with the children. The boys were very clear that you had to live with a group to survive.

It feels good when you have friends.

We protect each other.

There is no one beating us.

There is no one poaching among us.

We feel like family. (YB)

It was also clear that there was a definite hierarchy in some of the groups, with the older boys being the leaders. In some groups it was the toughest boys, very often boys who had been in prison, who led the group.

He is the leader everyone is afraid of him. He has been in jail. They are scared of him. (YG)

Control by the older boys in these groups was very tight with boys and girls who were part of the group having to follow a set of rules developed by the group. In one group the rules related to glue sniffing and cleanliness (see quotes above). The rules for this group were largely expedient and designed to make sure the group could stay at the very favourable place they had identified as theirs.

Some of the groups had weaker leadership with a more fluid decision-making process.

Researcher's reflections

One of the groups that attended the workshops had a very strong group identity and ethic that was controlled by the older boys.

Observing this group in the workshop was very interesting, as they regulated each other's behaviour. If anyone got out of line with too much joking or if a fight looked as if it was about to start, the others brought them into line. At one point the older boys decided that too much was being said (about sexual abuse of boys). After a group discussion about this issue, as they were going outside for a break, the leader called the group together and told them that they had said too much and must not say any more.

We reflected after this session that we needed to respect the group dynamics as we really were outsiders to the group. We made the decision to probe the issues but not to push the boys to talk about the issue of sexual abuse in any way.

It was clear that there were areas of cooperation between the boys in the group. In the activity that looked at problem solving (see Theme 7 below) many of the boys identified fighting between members of the group as a problem. This was one problem they felt they *could* solve.

We do solve the problems of fighting in the group.

R: How?

We talk.

Yes we talk until we understand who is right.

We try to stop those who are fighting and we manage. (OB)

The children reported that there was often conflict between groups. Boys from one group would steal from another. This meant that the boys had to guard their things at all times, even at night.

This picture shows the problem of when I am sleeping the other guy comes, maybe he hates me. He wants to beat me with a stone.

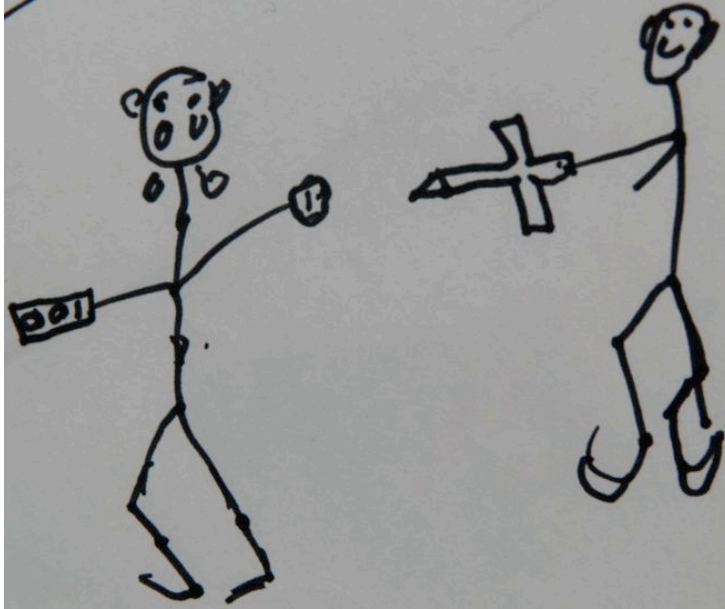
R: Is he from your group?

No from another group.

Here I am crying for other members of our group to wake up and help me.

If you are walking with your friend somewhere the guys from T (another group) will attack you.

(YB)



Maybe at 5.00 you are asking for money at the robots and then the other boys from other groups come and take your money. (YB)

Within the group a few boys had particular friends that supported them or that they had known for a long time. Concern for each other was also apparent in the discussion about health issues. When one boy said he had a particular problem like headaches the other boys often confirmed it and told how they looked out for each other when they were sick. They also talked about how they could not trust all the boys in the group, however.

(I get) big headaches sometimes.

Yes, he does and then we find food for him and bring him. (OB)

This is S my friend and he is here. Even when I am asleep he is watching over me, nothing can ever happen to me when he is around.

This is my other friend G he goes to the shops for me and I also go to the shop for him we are doing one another favours. (YB)

*R: I have noticed something, none of you have put people from the group on your drawing of people who are important to you, why is that?
We can't trust each other.*

R: Why?

Because others when you have money would come and take it while you are sleeping while when you have food they would say, 'ha my friend, my friend' then you give him your food and he runs away.

R: Is he right, do you agree?

I have a true friend.

R: Who is that?

This boy. (he points to a boy in the group)

R: So sometimes you do find someone who is a true friend that you could trust.

Yes.

Who else has a friend that he could trust in a group?

Mine is not true.

I used to trust one but he was not my friend.

R: So it's quite difficult to have a friend in a group.

Yes, you must thank God if you have a good friend. (OB)

One issue that emerged from the boy's groups was the sense of ownership that they had over the girls in their group. Some of these girls were 'wives' to particular boys. In one group the boys saw these girls as belonging to their group.

R: We were talking about why is this group different from other groups, now tell me what if a girl was to join the group?

She must not be a bitch.

She must not be a prostitute; she must not sell her body

She must be well mannered

She must not have a boyfriend outside this group

R: What about the boys, can they have a girl outside the group?

The boys can have a girl from other groups and bring her to our place.

R: Can the girl choose?

If I have feelings for S not M, I have a right and I can make my choice.

(This comment was made by a girl from the group who had joined the workshop for a short time). But I know I can only choose from the group.

(YB and 1 girl from the group)

In another group the boys said the girls went from one group of boys to another depending on who had money.

R: So tell me more about girlfriends, are there girls on the street?

Yes

R: Are they living in a group or ...?

In a group, there are lots of girls.

Like you have a special girl in a group like a wife.

R: For how long?

As long as you like.

R: Is she only yours?

No, no.

Some of them when they see you having money they come to you but when the money is finished they run away and find other boys.

R: So they don't like to have one boy?

Yes. In the group the girlfriend is for everybody?

Yes, because they change from this one to that one and the other one.

*She goes from this group to another.
She leaves the ones from the group that have no money. (OB)*

Dynamics of group living – girls

The girls did describe themselves as belonging to a group though they did not have as strong a spatial identity as the boys – they did not define themselves in terms of the place where they lived. They had a definite sub group within the group of boys sharing food and money for food, dagga and cigarettes.

We have to share things here on the streets like if you have something and N doesn't have, you must give.

R: So you learn about the rules of the group.

Yes. On the streets you don't have your own thing, if you have something, you have to share whether you like it or not. If I have come with bread, I must share or even get only two slices even if I'm the one who bought that bread. If you take four slices and give them one slice they will complain, you can't keep any and say this is for (me to eat) tonight.

R: Tell me, where did you learn that?

We just learnt it over time.

Even with clothes, if you don't have a jersey you just get it from some of us. You just say, today I'll wear that, you don't borrow, you just come and say, tomorrow I'll be wearing that, just bring it and I'll wash it. (OG)

Nevertheless, they did not completely trust each other. When asked to draw the people who were important to them all of them drew people from home (see Theme 7 Social networks). Even their best friends were from home; none of them mentioned girls in the group as someone they trusted. We did observe a fair measure of support in the group, though, so the fact that they did not mention friends on the street as part of their social network puzzled us. This is an issue that will need more time to explore.

*My best friend lives next to my home, she is studying, but everything I tell her she keeps confidential and I only see her when I've gone home.
(OG)*

There was also a sense from girls that they belong to the bigger group of boys and girls. But they also felt under threat from the boys.

We share everything together you know, boys and girls we are like a good group before they (boys) start doing their things.

R: Oh you're like a group.

Yes, like if I want some R1 from the boy, I would go and ask him and he would say I must go and buy a cigarette and come back then we smoke together but at night, we can't share (giggling).

No more friends at night.

R: No more friends at night! Are there some good boys?

Yes they are good boys but at night; oh even at night there are some good boys.

Yes, there are good boys even at night. Even if some start doing their 'malgaju system' (see quote below – rape while sleeping) and a good boy see that, he would say, 'no stop that'.

R: Ok they are protecting.

Yes some are protecting.

Not all of them...

A few.

Two girls described their strategy for protecting themselves from the boys in the group. They do not ask for anything from the boys during the day and they stay awake through the night in case they get raped.

The other thing at night, we don't have friends...

R: Like the boys?

Yes. I sleep there by the corner to protect myself, I am scared. If you are asking for something during the day, maybe they are eating some chips, they will say, chips are going to talk at night (like you'll pay back at night). If you say to the boys 'skyf' (can I have one puff from your cigarette) he will say no, you are running with your body at night, (laughing) if you don't give, they don't give and if you give, they give.

R: They give something to get something.

If you normally smoke alone and then run out of cigarettes and then ask, they will say, you smoke alone, so we can't give you.

R: It's like you must think about something you can give all the time?

Yes

R: But you don't want to give sex.

I wait for everyone to sleep before I sleep.

R: Why are you doing that?

I'm scared

(Another girl affirms that this is what these two do).

They do that both of them, they just sit and talk

Because we don't have 'boyfriends'

R: Is it because you are scared?

Yes

R: So that's the strategy to protect yourself?

Like at night as I was sitting with the boys, I waited for them all to sleep. The other one said 'come and sleep with me in the comfort' the beautiful one I said no.

They would say 'my blanket is clean, it's comfortable, come'

R: They want you to join them.

Yes but we don't, even if their blanket is new or what, we don't care.

I better sit for the whole night and sleep during the day so no one can rape me.

It's not nice.

R: That's the big problem.

The problem is only at night. (YG)

Other girls in another group talked about how they make sure they do not drink or smoke dagga so they can protect themselves.

You know on Saturday they (boys) would say, 'I ate, I ate a lot yesterday' they all say that. You know why they say that?

R: Why?

It's because the girls were drunk on Saturday so the boys took advantage.

If a girl is drunk and sleeping carelessly they take a razor blade and cut her trousers and panty and start doing the thing. That's why I stopped drinking and smoking.

R: You don't do that anymore

Yes, I don't drink, I don't smoke; I'm just me

R: It's too dangerous

I stopped cigarettes, dagga and drinking alcohol. (OG)

Often all the boys rape the girls not just one boy.

R: So what do you do when you see them raping another girl and you want to help?

They will come to you...

...they will say, 'hey, hey you are next, we will come to you'

Sometimes they will sleep with you all of them even if you are not drunk, do you remember T? They held hands and opened legs and did it. If all of them have finished while you were holding, they will then hold for the last boy for his turn and I don't think they use condoms. If you scream and say, 'mom, mom' they will say, your mom is not here. (OG)

As the quote above shows the girls are almost completely powerless to protect themselves. In fact they seem to be completely in the control of the boys and have to make sure their mood reflects that of the boys or they will be in danger of abuse.

Sometimes it's bad (in the group), sometimes it's nice, it changes and sometimes everybody would be laughing.

Sometimes one has to cry. They never did that to me because I always laugh if they say funny things. If they say funny things and you don't laugh, they say you are stupid. If you look unhappy, they are going to start threatening you by saying they will catch you.

R: You have to feel like they do?

When they are teasing you, you must laugh even if you don't like it but you have to laugh.

They always say funny things and swear but you just have to laugh, just pretend as if you don't care. With K yesterday, there's a boy called C who was teasing her and K didn't laugh. He carried on teasing her until he said he is going to hit her.

They always tease her, she talks too much (laughing) and she also likes teasing too.

R: You have to behave in a certain way then.

Yes. In a day you must change like weather, if they are all happy, you must be happy. (YG)

Given this situation we asked why the girls stay in a group with the boys. Again their sense of powerlessness is apparent. Note too the comments above in Theme 1 about how the boys laughed at the girls when they were singing - this is linked to the same powerlessness.

R: So if it's such a problem with the boys, why do you stay with the boys?

There's nothing to do.

There is no any other way.

R: Couldn't you just stay as girls alone?

They are going to come. If someone finds me sitting with N alone, he will come and they will end up coming and then we sit as a group. (YG)

Some said that the only way a girl could survive in the group was to have a boyfriend, preferably a tough one.

We stay there at G (she refers to a park), that's where we sleep.

R: Are there boys in your group or is it only the girls?

Ah it's girls and boys and it's scary, very scary!

R: Scary! Why?

You know the boys have 'the malgaju system' – that is what they call it. What happens is; when you are fast asleep, they come and pull off your pants softly and rape you while you are sleeping. Some of the girls do wake up but some don't so they will tell you in the morning that we did this and that to you then you would have nothing to say.

R: Are these the boys who are also living on the streets and you know them?

Yes we live with them.

You know if you have a boyfriend there and they are scared of him, they won't do anything to you even if you are sleeping so they won't touch you.

R: So you've got to have a boyfriend then?

Yes you've got to have a boyfriend whether you like it or not.

R: And what kind of a boyfriend would be the best one?

The one that they are scared of. (YG)

The problem for the girls is that these boyfriends abused them too, often very violently. There was also evidence that the girls had no choice in who they had a relationship with in some groups.

This is my boyfriend. He is the boss everyone is scared of him so they leave me alone. He is not too old but he has been in jail. I was scared of him. I didn't want a relationship with him.

R: Were you forced?

Yes. But I got used to it. It's not something I wanted, I never had to choose and I never had a choice (sadly). It's something I had to do

whether I liked it or not. I got used to it. I pretended as a person who liked it you know. I don't want to talk about it because it's hurting me.

R: Why didn't you want to be in a relationship?

It's because I didn't like him and I thought he is older than I am.

R: And the treatment, how was he treating you?

He is not treating me nice; on Friday I must know that I meet his girlfriend, on Saturday I must know that I meet his girlfriend and on Wednesday I meet another one, the different ones you know.

R: You meet the girlfriends with him?

Yes, sometimes they come to me.

R: So have you ever talk to him about that, about the girlfriends?

Never! I can't. As soon as I try I get beaten, once I try to talk, he beats me so I better shut my mouth because he hits me. You see here, my hand is not working well, I can do other things but when I'm washing, it pains. You see here...

R: The scar?

Yes, on Saturday I tried to talk about it and he hit me. He was hitting me, using everything he finds, the blocks about three blocks and the other thing he did was jumping over here.

R: Jumping on your chest?

Yes

R: If he beats you, who helps you?

Some boys around

R: Some boys around?

Yes, they are scared of him but they try, only one or two who try. If they are not around, he will hit me non stop

Another girl: Why are you not running away?

How can I, how can I? C: Sometimes I do run if he hits me but when he catches me...hah he's going to hit me so that I can't see, I'm scared now.

R: And you say you don't have a choice?

Yes I don't have a choice because that's the reason I was beaten on Saturday, I told him that how about we get separated and then he said ok but then he hit me.

A few girls said they did not want boyfriends because of the abuse but then they had no protection from the rest of the group so they had to resort to survival strategies like staying awake all night.

Researcher's reflections

There is much discussion about the need for research to benefit the children who are participating. While the girls were doing the activity with the stones in the basket and discussing how one of the biggest stones was the abuse from boys on the street I was asking myself 'is this kind of discussion beneficial, doesn't it just reinforce the sense of powerlessness that they have?'

One of the girls joined us only for that afternoon session as she was working in a nearby flat looking after children for someone. After the session, as we said goodbye for the day, she asked if she could speak. She stood up and made a formal speech with much bowing and clapping and laughter from the rest of the group.

Thank you for letting me come this afternoon, we had fun, played games and I want to

share something with you. What helped me to get rid of the stones on my back was to share with somebody else.

Places of arrival

Van Blerk (2005) talks about the importance of 'spaces of arrival' – the places children come to when they come to the city. Looking at places of arrival helps in understanding why children come to live on the street. It also gives some understanding of how children come to adopt the identity of 'street child'.

We briefly explored the idea of places of arrival with the children who attended the workshops; when they first came to the city where did they go to, how did they end up being part of a particular group at a particular place?

A number of patterns emerged. It is important to remember that the decision to come to the city in all cases was related to problems at home so the accounts here are about arrival rather than why the boys decided to come to the streets. The most common was that they knew someone from home who had come to a particular place on the street. Often this person was a member of a group. When the problems at home became excessive (see Theme 4) this relationship was used as a means of escaping the problem at home. The child was then initiated into street life through their friend.

I left because my mother fought my father and my father left. I ran from home to the street. There was another boy from next door who was living on the street. I quit school and joined him on the street. He was a neighbour boy, We were attending school together so he told me about the street. I used to go to Ethekwini (Durban) to buy clothes and then I got used to it. One day I illegally rode in a train without a ticket. I went to the T where I met my friend, the one who was living next door to my home. (OB)

The second was that they just arrived at the beach as they had visited there before and knew there were groups of children. The children they met on the street assisted them and initiated them into street life.

I was visiting the beach. I walked from Kwa Mashu. Then I met these gentlemen (points to the group) and they showed me the place and invited me. (YB)

In Durban I went to Fun World. This guy asked me if I had money, then I told him I had R2 in my pocket and he said we should go to the machines for 50c and then we went there. When we finished our money we went to another place where we met a group of other guys smoking glue, cigarettes and dagga. There were a few guys who were not smoking just like me. I stayed there for two weeks and I started to smoke cigarettes although I wasn't that good at it like other guys. I left the cigarette and continued to dagga. I smoked dagga and went to glue. We moved to another place where I did not know very well. At this place I

started sitting alone because I did not know most of the guys there and I had problems with other guys... When I was sitting alone and smoking my cigarette, a big guy came over; he asked me what I was looking for here. I told him I wanted a space to stay. He then said I should come with him. He showed me a lot of big guys with very few small guys, that is I how ended up in this group. (YB)

Some came not intending to stay and did.

There was a person who gave me a job and said I will work in Durban so I came here. The man that promised me a job in Durban never showed up. I met this boy here and stayed with them. (YB)

Another pattern was that some of the children had come to the city from surrounding townships to beg over weekends, some with grandparents and sisters and had ended up staying for longer periods on the street. The identity of 'street child' was adopted over a period of time. Many of these children returned home quite often, phoned home and still had links to home.

I was going home and coming back, like up and downing. (YB)

In fact one pattern that emerged is that many of the children, especially the girls, still had strong links to home. For some of them this was because they had children at home who were being looked after by grandparents or sisters.

Theme 3: People who abuse us on the street

One of the biggest problems apart from the problem of everyday survival was the abuse that boys and girls experienced on the street everyday.

Police harassment

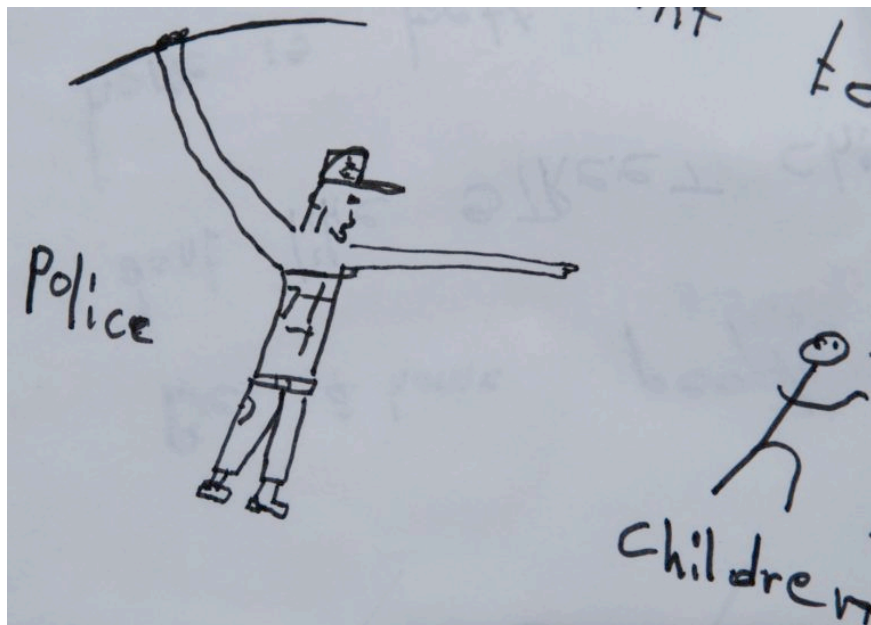
The main problem identified by the boys when asked about problems they face on the street was the harassment they experienced from the city police.



*R: Tell me about the problems in your day.
We are troubled by the people who are stealing our blankets.
The police! (All speaking together).
Yes, the police trouble us a lot.
You see they are also burning our clothes.
They beat us.
They just come and beat for nothing.
We pretend to be sleeping while we are watching every move they are making. (YB)*

*R: Show me on your drawing the times when you have problems in your day.
When the police come in the morning to wake me up and harass us. The securities also harass me when I am begging for money. When I am washing the police are chasing me away. It's the same sleeping and waking up, there are problems; it's a painful experience being chased away.*

The abuse by local police and security staff was so dominant in their lives that being chased by police was described as an integral part of their lives as if they had come to accept it as normal if you live on the streets.



*R: Tell me about your picture S?
This is the morning. In the morning the police come and arrest us, when we are still asleep. Then I go to shower and then we play football. (YB)*

*(Describing his drawing of his day)
We then play at our place and some white people give us money. In the morning we would go and look for some scones (cakes) in the rubbish bin. On Sundays I don't do anything. A police would come and abuse us*

while we are busy begging at the robot. They would tell us to get away; we are not needed there while we are not even troubling people but only begging. Here I am going to take a bath at the centre, when I finish I go to play a ball still at the centre and the watch movies. Here I'm going to beg and then just stroll up-and-down and go to my places like workshop and market. (OB)

Here, I'm going to beg and here, it's where the police is coming and chasing us away, here is where I'm swimming at the pool and after that I go to N (local service organisation) to eat. (OB)

Here, I'm waking up in the morning, brushing my teeth and take a bath. Here the police are coming and taking our blankets, hitting us on our backs and when we try to run away with our blankets, they spray us with tear-gas. (OB)



R: How often does that happen?

From Wednesday to Friday and even yesterday they came and took our things.

R: What are they accusing you of?

A police just come and spank you and when you try to grab your blanket and run, you'll feel a punch on your buttock.

We end up having eye problems and that makes it difficult to see properly. (YB)

In the activity that looked at stress (see Theme 7 below) the boys' groups all identified abuse by police as a major stress in their lives. The quote below is of an animated discussion as they were putting the stones in a basket that symbolised stress in their lives. The extent of the emotional impact on the boys is obvious here – they are angry and sad.

Police are abusing us here.

*This must be a very big stone. It is a big problem.
 Yes, they put us in jail for what, we don't know.
 They are saying we don't want kids on the street for 2010 so they put us in jail.
 They keep us there for 30 days.
 They wanted us to pay some money to get out.
 They take us to Westville.
 We need to work so they won't take us there.
 Yes we need a job before 2010 comes because if we don't have a job we will go to jail.
 People do illegal things and the cops think it is us.
 If some people are playing cards and then see the police coming they run away and the police would think it is us and beat us, chase us, spray us with tear gas.
 They say we must wash police cars, work in the garden there at the police station.
 Sometimes the police put our clothes in the dustbin
 They call us kaffir.
 Yes those police took our clothes that the social worker gave us and put them in the grinding machine including our under-wears and the machine went grrrrrr.
 When we are sitting at the park and the police chase us away and then when we speak out and said we have a right to sit at the park they spank us and take us into the police station and lock us in a cell.
 R: When they put you in the cell who else is there?
 Every street child. They call us thieves.
 R: How does that make you feel?
 It feels bad because we also like to feel like other people.
 Yes. I wish I can do what is done on Sarafina (a movie); pour petrol in a bottle, shake it, throw to the police and kill all the police so that we can go to jail for what we know. The police have already badly abused us really. (OB)*

It is important to note that the boys did not paint an untruthful picture of themselves – they admitted that they sometimes stole things but what upset them was always being accused, the constant assumption that they were bad.

*It is dangerous in the showers because they even beat you up; they say you are stealing their possessions.
 But you are just washing.
 R: Who beats you up?
 The people.
 And the police (all speaking at once).
 They say we have been stealing the bags.
 Even if you did not steal.
 We do steal sometimes.
 But not always. But they just blame us always.
 I feel very sad when they blame us. (YB)*

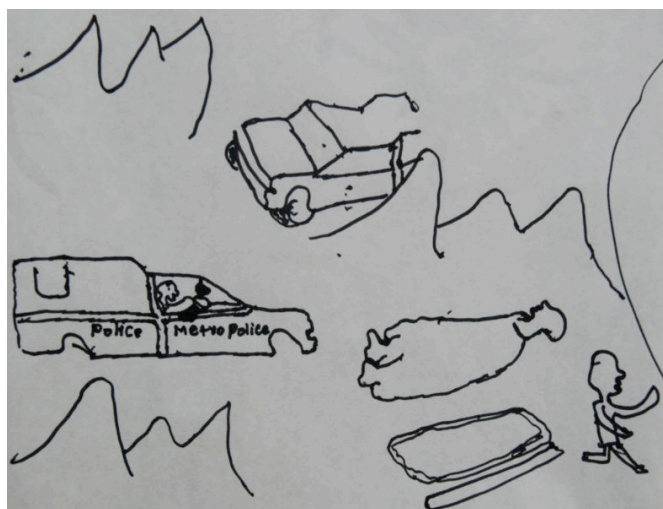
Boys said it was very important not to fight back when police harassed them.

When I was sleeping at the place where I sleep, they came and said, 'you must go home' I said I am street child here; I dress ugly, nobody, no home and I said you must leave me alone. He kicked me while I was under the truck, he tried to get under the truck and I hit him but I did a mistake – then he was very cross. (OB)

The boys said that when there is a fight between the boys or groups the police arrive and don't differentiate between the boys who are fighting and the others, they just assume they are all bad.

The only thing that makes me feel sad is some boys that we don't know are coming from other areas and steal our things while we are sleeping. When we chase them, the police would come and just mix everybody without identifying the wrong ones and then they just spank everybody. (OB)

Girls did not report harassment by the city police as often. They did not include it in their descriptions of their days, nor as a problem in the problem-solving activity or in the activity looking at stress. Their major problems and source of stress were the abuse by the boys and the problems that had driven them from home on to the streets. They did, however, mention in passing that they were chased from the beach by the police and also reported being arrested for fighting and for being drunk.



One issue that both boys and girls reported was being picked up by the city police and taken out of the city and dumped.

They take us and dump us in Pietermaritzburg.

R: Who has that happened to?

Me.

Me too.

Me.

They took me to the farms (rural area).

Sometimes we walk back from Pietermaritzburg. But not for a very long distance, because some people who have cars and have beautiful hearts they give us a lift. (YB)

*They took me and dropped me at the rural area there.
Near Pietermaritzburg.
Me too. (YG)*

Community discrimination

Interestingly when asked to list the things that caused them stress (by naming stones in a heavy 'basket of burdens') boys and girls saw lack of food and being hungry as a much smaller problem than the experience of discrimination from the local community.

The discrimination the girls experienced was related to the assumption that they were prostitutes.

People think we are stupid.

R: Why do they think you are stupid?

Because we sleep outside and then they think that we are selling our bodies.

It's just because some of the girls who live on the street are selling and they think that all the girls living on the street are selling (their bodies), which is not right. (YG)

R: They think, ah because you are on the street, you are selling your body

Yes

R: How does that make you feel?

It doesn't make me feel good

I real don't know what to feel

It doesn't make me feel ok because when someone could just come and ask, 'are you selling?' what does that person think, such a small girl selling her body, no it doesn't make me feel good and I don't like it.

R: Ok.

Others think that you leave your home and sit there intending to sell your body because you want to have your own money

R: So they think that the reason you are here you want to make money?

Yes.

R: But it's not that?

It's not that, there are many problems. (OG)

Boys talked about how people abused them verbally when they were guarding cars.

If you are looking after parked cars some people will just come back and tell you the way to get off, as in swearing and tell you they know who has been guarding cars (and it is not you). (YB)

They also talked about people in the community assuming they were thieves. This made them sad. In one discussion about the kinds of people they would like to have working in shelters and projects for children on the street (see Theme 6) they compared the attitude of the researcher who was accepting and treated them with respect with the way other people treated them. Note the reference to being made to feel like an animal in this quote.

*R: What kind of people would you want to work in the shelters?
It must be people like you, people who do not discriminate us because we sleep under the trees and on the streets and people who would accommodate us as we are. In other areas we have had people who do not want to even get closer to us.
Just a practical example when people are watching music artists and we are also there (at an outdoor concert) when we get closer people hold tight their bags, others will just move away from you. They despise you.
R: How does that make you feel inside?
It makes me feel like an animal when people do it like that. (OB)*

When they were putting the stones in the basket to represent stress in their lives all of the boys' groups put in a stone for the way they are labelled as bad by people who meet them on the street.

*R: Are there any more problems that you would like to put in the basket?
Yes, the community doesn't like you.
Sometimes you are always accused of robbery. (YB)

The other thing is when you are asking money from white people they say, 'go to Mandela'.
It makes me feel sad. Because we came from problems at home. (OB)*

The older boys talked about how the media labelled them and used them.

*The other thing that makes us sad is that, some of the people driving like taking out their cameras when we are sniffing glue and take photos of us and after that we would see our pictures in the newspaper.
R: And what do they say about you?
They associate us with all the bad things that are happening
R: You don't think that they should take those photos?
No, they just take photos. (OB)*

One of the boys painted a house of rainbow colours in one of the activities. For him the house represented the fact that children on the street were not 'rubbish' but also South Africans who deserved respect.

For me here I've put some beautiful colours and all of them mean something.

R: Tell us what they mean.

The first one is the flag, this flag has so many colours and my house too has so many colours and flowers. There's DSTV, here's a satellite dish. On my painting it's those people who use to say, 'ah those rubbish kids'. It's like when you look at somebody and judge them by looking at him and say, 'aha that street kid'. This red colour shows that some people are violent and other people say, 'black people are stupid'. Other people say; if these children can get help from people who have no colour issues maybe there could be something better. So the bottom line is all these colours (on the picture) show that you (even though you are a child on the street) are a South African.



The older boys also talked about how difficult it was to get part-time work as people assumed they were bad because they lived on the street.

You see at work you are expelled without any reason. Because you have done a small mistake. If you are looking for work, when you enter the garden of a white person they just chase you away, some will allow you but others say 'don't come back!' (OB)



Being labelled as bad

The boys and girls talked a lot about how people made assumptions about them because they lived on the street. They felt that people assumed they were bad and *wanted* to live on the streets. They thought the police believed this, as did the community they met in the area where they lived on the street. They also felt that many of the workers in street children organisations as well as people in their families and their home communities also believed this (see Theme 4 below).

This assumption hurt the children, especially as they knew that the reasons were much more complex than this. From their point of view they were there because of problems at home; for many of them (see Theme 4) there really was nowhere else to go.

This idea of being labelled underlies a lot of the discussion about the abuse on the streets. It is an abstract idea and therefore hard for the children to articulate. One boy did, however, go a long way to explaining this dynamic.

When you are living in the street you live a difficult life. There are lots of things happening on the streets and most of us didn't come intentionally. Some of us had lots of problems at homes. Some of us have step-parents who abuse them. The police don't recognise those things that the boy in the street didn't come by his choice so they just think that we are street children with 'street mind' and we don't want to listen to our parents. They think that we wanted to look after us by living on the street and act like adults. Like myself, I had a big problem at home that's why I decided to live in the street. I am struggling and it is very hard to succeed in order to be someone good in life. (OB)

The children talked a lot about how people at home and in their community labelled them as bad because they lived on the street.

Children in the workshops talked about how once they had experienced street life, taken on the identity 'street child' and even some of the survival strategies associated with street life such as sniffing glue it was very difficult for them to go back to another place. This is illustrated well in the story below where T talks about how when he first goes home everyone is very pleased to see him and everything is okay for a short while but then the label 'bad boy' emerges again and now it is strengthened by the stigma attached to having lived on the street and soon the discrimination at home gets too much.

When I am at home I am always thinking of coming back.

R: Why?

Because it is nice here.

To me it is because when I arrive home they are all happy but during the second day they start asking where I am coming from. At that time I should be no longer thinking about that. That hurts me and I come back to the street. When you are going home you think a lot that it has been a

long time (you have been away) so your mother will be asking where you have been all along. Although she is just asking you, you take as if she is fighting you. (YB)

At home they tried to take some of the stones out (referring to the stones in the basket activity). There's a time when you would think that your problems are going to be solved but you get disappointed when you find that they are still thinking negative things (about you) then you can't stay with those people. They would say you are forgiven but that thing still comes up from them. (OB)

Theme 4: Why we are on the street

Children living on the street become adept at presenting a particular identity to outsiders particularly in presenting why they are on the streets. (Swart, 1990). Given this fact, the decision was made not to ask children directly why they were on the street but to use an exercise that focussed on the telling of life histories; it was hoped that some of the factors leading to their move to the street would emerge in discussions about their lives. The narratives were mostly collected individually, though the art activity was done in a group. This was done to protect children's confidentiality and also to avoid the children influencing each other in the details they chose to give.



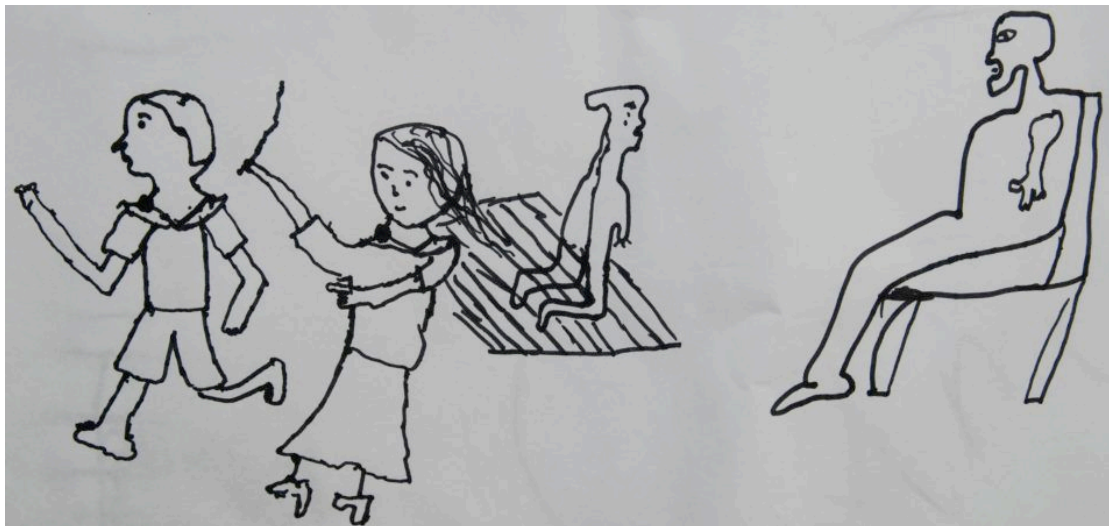
A four-day workshop is not long enough to understand the life histories of the children we worked with, but some understanding of their reasons for being on the street did emerge. Amongst these reasons, we tried to explore how much the impact of HIV/AIDS was a factor behind the children being on the street. Again this was difficult in the time available, but there are some indicators of impact of HIV/AIDS in the information that emerged.

Our life journeys

This is a topic that children who have been through difficult circumstances find very difficult as it raises often long-hidden grief and sadness. Many children have well developed self protection strategies that they need to retain in order to cope with their troubled past so we were very careful not to probe details and let the children choose how much they shared about their past.

Most of the children have complex life histories full of family conflict and issues such as substance abuse and domestic violence. What is also clear is that it is usually a combination of factors that led to children leaving home and coming to the street. Very few children mentioned one factor as a cause; most talked about a number of factors that caused disruption in their families.

I was born and went home with my mother but I became sick so I went to live with my granny. Then my granny died and I went to live with my father. I was staying with my step-mother. She was always hitting me and saying that if I'm telling my father to buy me something my father does that because I am the first and the lastborn. So I moved to U to my mother again. Then there was a big fight at my mother's house. My uncle was fighting, he was drinking. Then my grandfather took a broom and hit my mother and I decided to go. I went to the shelter and then my aunt bought a big house to stay with my mother and so I went back to stay with my mother. But no one supports us so we have to go to the robot and beg for money so we can buy food. There are 8 children at home. My mother has three and others are relatives. (OG)



One of the most common themes in the life histories was that of migration. Most of the children had lived in more than one, sometimes multiple homes, most moving from one extended family member to another. The quote below is typical of the stories they told and the drawing of 'my life journey' also shows how many homes some of the children had lived in.

This is where I was born. I lived with my grandmother, aunt, my sister

and cousin. Then I stayed in Pietermaritzburg. Things were not right there. I was staying with my uncle, aunt, my father's sister. Then I went to Kwa Mashu. This time I was living with my mother and father. Then I moved to Bester. I lived with my grandfather and two siblings. I finished schooling there and then went to Kwa Mashu. I moved from there to the street. (YB)



It seemed that more of the girls had experienced migration than the boys. Their life histories had a lot of evidence of moving from one family to another.

I'm in L here. This is where I started schooling in 1993. I was living with granny, grandfather and my Aunt, uncle and my granny's younger sister. Here it's when my mother got married. Here is my step-father and we lived together, the 3 of us. We left L in 1994 to stay in DP myself, my step-father and my sister. We then left to stay in U. We left because we were living in a one-room. In 1996 we left U and went to rent a flat. Then we moved from R to G as a whole family. The step-father chased me away, accusing me of stealing his money and I went to L although my granny passed away so I was living in the outside room and my uncle lived in the 4-room. Then there was a man who was a problem so I left and went to K and stayed with a relative but she chased me away too. So I went back to L. (OG)



Another theme that emerged was that the dislocation in the children's lives very often began with the death of a father or mother.

I painted my home. I was treated well at home.

R: Who were you living with at home?

My mother and my siblings. My mother passed away, it's only children now. (OB)

The table below reflects how many of the children were either single or double orphans. This may not be accurate as it soon became apparent that children did not often admit that they had lost parents (see Researcher's reflections below), so it is likely that more of the children are orphaned than is shown here. Since thousands of African children may not know – or hardly know – one or both of their parents, having been fostered out to relatives while their parent/s work elsewhere, orphanhood in South Africa extends to inclusion of children's primary carers (*cf.* Richter and Desmond 2008). When primary carers are lost through death children are as vulnerable as if they had been living with their own parents. Experiencing the loss of a parent begins early in life: about 15 percent of South African children under the age of five will lose a parent and this incidence increases to 50 percent by the age of 15 years (Desmond 2004).

Girls – total 12		Boys – total 18	
Double orphan	Single orphan	Double orphan	Single orphan
4	2	5	6

R: Are there many children whose parents have passed away and decided to go to the streets?

Yes, many (all).

There are many.

R: But none of you said earlier that your parents died when you were telling your stories? (said very gently)

When my father died the living conditions changed. I got angry and decided to leave home...

Me too, my mother passed away, my mother and my father.

*My uncle passed away.
My grandmother and my aunt passed away. (OB)*

Children's hesitance to talk about the death of a parent was not explored and could have been due to any of a number of reasons.

What was clear was that the death of parents was a huge stress for children. When talking about the stones in the basket activity all groups chose a very big stone to represent grief at the loss of parents.

*R: So what are some of the 'heavy things you carry in your basket, the things that make you sad?
No parents.
R: Okay do the others agree?
Yes! (many voices)
Parents do protect us in our lives really.
A big stone, (he chooses a big stone to represent the death of parents).
(OB)*

Another interesting theme of the life histories is that the death of parents and the resulting migration had often initiated the family dislocation that led to many of these children being on the street.

*This is my home when my mother was alive. She died in 1999.
R: How did she die?
She had a sickness. My granny took me to the farm when she was sick. And I stayed there with my mother's mother and her sisters. My mother's mother had a stroke so my grandfather came and took me back to my mother's house and there my mother was already passed away and I didn't know that she was buried.
R: So nobody told you?
Yes, they only told me after 2 weeks.
R: How old were you?
I was 6 years old, they told me that my mother passed away and I decided to go to the street.
R: What year was this?
2001 (he was 10 years old). I went to the street because at home I was staying with my step-granny and she was not nice to me, she was treating me badly. I came to T road. I stole money from home to catch a ride in a public taxi, I went to the taxi rank in Durban and I met some friends from my place. I knew them from before and I knew they lived here. But it is not good on the street. I loved my mother so much and I don't know why God took her away because if my mother was alive ...
(OB)*

What is interesting is that at least four of the boys and one of the girls had gone from their homes to a place of safety when their parent died and then on to the streets with other young people from the place of safety.

I went from my home to P and from there to the street. The social worker took me to P. (YB)

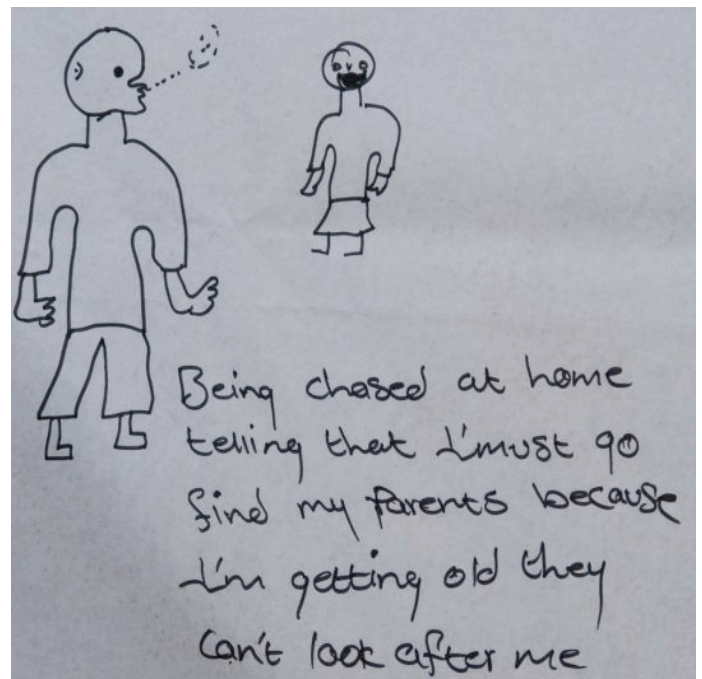
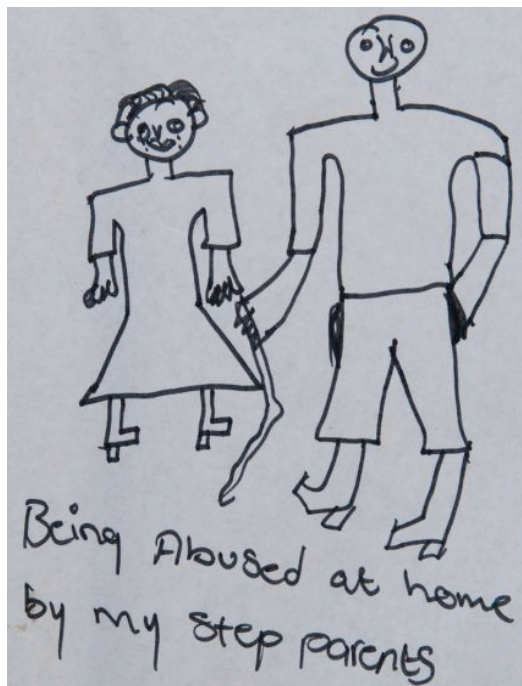
Here is when my mother passed away so I was not happy because our aunt was badly treating us. She was hitting us for minor things. Maybe when we come back from school she would hit us to wash our shirts. (YG)

The death of parents and the resulting migration often resulted in children living with extended family members who treated them badly.

When my mother died we went to the farms (rural area) to my aunt. Our aunt was badly treating us. (OG)

Another thing that characterised many of the stories told by children was that they had experienced multiple deaths.

My mother passed away. I had 4 brothers, one passed away and 3 are left. We are 4 girls, my sister died of AIDS and she left her child. (OG)



Abuse by, and conflict with, step-parents was another factor that led to children leaving home for the street.

The only thing that makes me not to stay at home is my step-mother doesn't like me at all. She said that I'm my father's favourite than her children so my father said I must go to her sister before a dangerous thing occur so that's why I only go home to visit because I know there is no place that I can be treated well. (OG)

Poverty, sometimes alone but often in conjunction with domestic violence or substance abuse, was another factor that emerged from the children's life stories.

The street is the only place and there's nothing I can do because home is not good. At home I don't eat so it's totally better on the street because at home I can stay without food for a month unlike here on the street. Well, it's not good on the street and not good at home. (OB)

I don't go home, there's nobody.

R: No one?

It's only my aunt who is not working.

R: What happened to your parents?

I don't know my mother. They told me that my father is arrested when I was still young. My aunt used to get some little money. (OB)

R: What would help you to go back home?

A cell phone. If I can get a N70 Nokia I can go back home.

R: How will that help?

He would like to go and shine above others and show off. (another boy)

No, maybe in the school he saw another child with a better cell phone. A child from a rich family. All the time he sees children dressed in model shoes and school bags. And he is living a very poor life and can't get anything, not even food. As a child you end up looking down on yourself.

So you would think that by going to town you would get a better life. (YB)

The bag (bag with the heavy stones representing stress) is always heavy because there is no money. (YB)

Domestic violence and alcohol abuse was another reason that emerged from the stories. Boys and girls just got tired of the levels of violence in their homes.

This is my mother and this is my father. They like fighting a lot. When they are fighting a lot I also get the beating. There is nothing to do (about it) so you go. (YB)

It's also hard if the person you are staying with drinks a lot and forgets that children need to eat. (OG)

Conflict with siblings was another reason.

In my case I had a quarrel with my sister, who always told lies that I was carrying big sums of money at school. Then my father was always punishing me, because he has a spaza shop. One day I hit my sister with a brick and ran away. (YB)

Another theme was that the children came from families that were already marginally on the street – two of the girls had grannies or mothers that had

themselves lived on the street. One girl had been raised on the street.

I stayed with my mother, my siblings and my father and my father passed away. He was shot by his friends. Then my mother and I left to stay at the beach. Then my mother got sick with pneumonia and she passed away in 2002. We went to the farms and she died there. We stayed for a whole year at the beach. (OG)

Another theme was that some of the children had moved to the street, often with an older sibling, granny or aunt to beg on weekends and had ended up staying there full time. These children talked about 'up and downing' (going home and coming to the street) as a common feature of their lives.

I was coming to the street with my sister. We were begging at the robots. I was going home and coming back, like up and downing. (YB)

My granny said we must go the street to beg as she had eight of us and we had no money. So I came with my sister. My granny would shout us if we did not bring enough money. So I decided to just stay here. (OG)

My mother is in staying at the house in Inanda. No one is supporting us so we have to go there by the robot and beg for money so that we can buy food.

R: Who is begging?

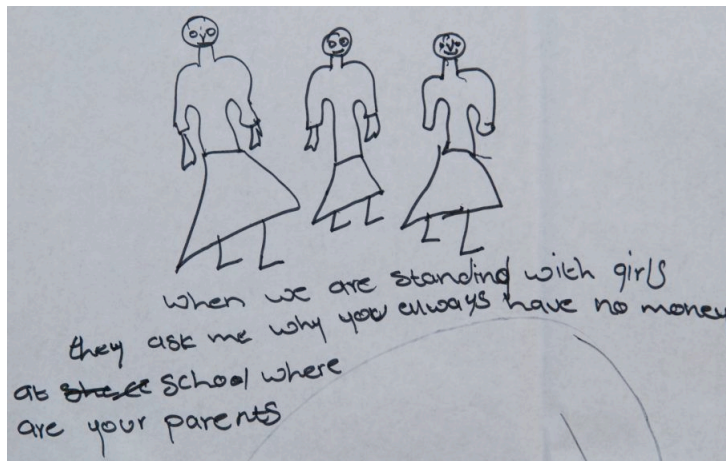
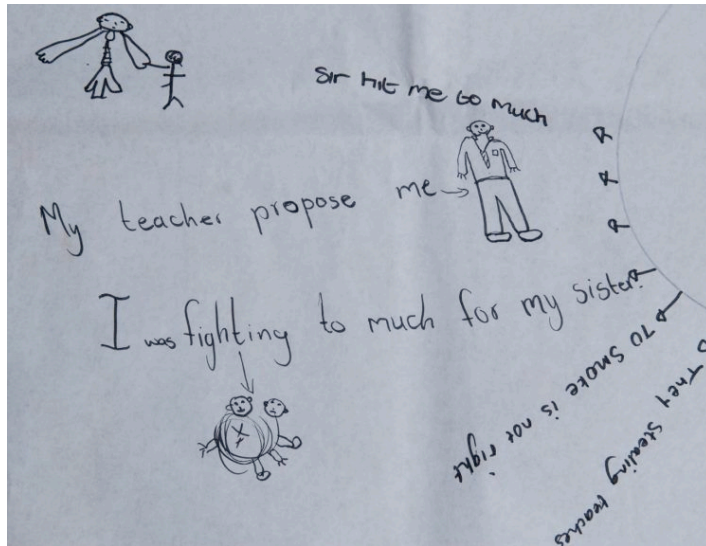
My mother and my younger sisters.

R: Is your mother still doing that?

Yes she is still doing it. there are eight of us at home, my mothers children and some from relatives. (OG)

When we discussed why children did not want to go home some of the groups raised the issue of school. Many of the children had had problems at school. Some girls had been sexually abused by teachers. Others had been teased at school because they were poor.

My teacher proposed to me. The following day I didn't go to school. I never went back there. (OG)



The way the girls were talking during lunch time they were saying I had no money and no parents. It made me feel very bad. I stopped to go (to school). (YG)

The findings in this research are consistent with that of other researchers. Richter and van der Walt (2003) established that North American studies show two 'relatively unanimous' factors among runaway youth: (a) poor and disorganised home environment where children report punitive and unsupportive or non-existent parenting, rejection and hostility and (b) problems in school. These factors are also relevant in the lives of South African children on the streets. Richter and van der Walt (2003:14) noted that peer relationships were generally reported as pleasant but sibling relationships in the home had often been strained for children who were on the streets; half of the children in the sample 'spoke of hurt, pain, anger, rejection and aggression in family relationships'. The findings in the present research appear to reflect similar conditions.

Why we stay on the street

There was much discussion about why children chose to *stay* on the street. This issue arose often when we talked about some of the difficulties of living

on the street. This is a complex issue and again difficult to find a clear answer from a four-day workshop but a few partial answers did emerge. This discussion should be read with the information in Theme 5 on services, which has information on places of safety and children's homes that children have lived in.

It is important to note that during the workshops many children talked about their wish to get off the street, to return home or to go to a place of safety. They often seemed conflicted when talking about this issue; they found it difficult to explain. There was a sense too that they were trying hard to find ways to behave differently and struggling to make sense of it for themselves.

When you are struggling there are things that you cannot explain especially when you are mixed with girls and big boys. You know if someone can come up with a proper plan ... If someone can come up with a plan, the big boys can leave the street and get a better place, get training and maybe their life can change for better and if also the small boys can get someone to take care of them maybe they can have a good life. There must be a person to teach them about life skills. Every one of us here has his talent and dreams to follow but the problem is nobody is lending out their hands to support them but if someone can do that I think everything can change and everyone can succeed and become something in life. And you are trying hard... And it's worse when you are growing up in the street. (OB)

The main idea that emerged when we discussed why they stayed on the street was that they felt they could not go home.

*R: What would you need to go back home?
There is nothing except that if somebody can talk to my mother to treat me as her own child. (OB)*

The street is the only place and there's nothing I can do because home is not good. At home I don't eat so it's totally better on the street because at home I can stay without food for a month unlike here on the street. Well, it's not good on the street and it's not good at home. (OB)

Addiction to glue and, in some cases (particularly with a few of the older girls), addiction to marijuana played a role. Both boys and girls understood the nature of addiction and that no matter how much you wanted to change things the addiction was very difficult to overcome.

My wish is to go back home and leave the street. God didn't create you to be just a creature sniffing glue. You know when you sniff glue it does happen that you get disturbed in mind so much that it becomes difficult for you to stop sniffing it. Sometimes a child can get knocked by a car because he doesn't know what is happening. Glue can make a person be crippled for ever if he/she doesn't stop no one is to be blamed but

the person sniffing because he has put himself on that. Even if you are trying to advise that person or it's someone you know from the same village as yours, it won't make a difference. Some would say glue is the same as tobacco, but the fact remains that glue is not tobacco. Some would say glue is like dagga, it's not easy to stop it. (OB)

They also acknowledged that even when they went home they often had to return to the street because of their addiction to glue.

I can say that there are a few (of us) who want to go back home... but if he goes he will start again missing glue so much that he could even think of stealing money and go back to the street. Sometimes he might steal a TV and sell it and that's when he can be arrested for theft while there was help available for him.

There are some who want to stop it but you find out that it's when they being taken by the social workers and then they stop it simply because they are staying in places of safety but they do miss it. They would say 'I used to smoke when I felt like smoking, there's nothing I can do here to keep myself busy, and so I rather escape'. (OB)

Children recounted how they had gone home and tried to stay there but their addiction got the better of them. They were expected to just stop 'smoking' glue by parents and other family members.

This lack of understanding of addiction and the need for some kind of help to deal with the addiction is understandable in parents. However, it seemed that this lack of awareness of the nature of addiction was also common amongst staff at the places of safety where children had been taken (see Theme 5).

Some of the children talked about how the strict control at home was one reason why they found it difficult to stay at home after being on the street. The girls talked about how they could go to the clubs and dance if they wanted to. The boys talked about being able to play when they wanted to. They also talked about the fun they had with friends on the street. This kind of discussion was always contrasted with the difficulties they faced on the street. So the freedom they experienced was a positive for them but they pointed out frequently that it was not all there was to living on the street.

Children like staying on the street because they can do whatever they want to do any time. If they are in their homes they cannot do what they want.

Yes because parents are strict.

Especially when they want to go to the club.

R: So there is freedom on the street?

No. because when it is raining you feel it and you say if I was at home I should be sleeping on a soft blanket. (OG)

A few children, in trying to explain why they stayed on the street, referred to their minds (or heart) saying it was hard to explain but something inside them

just made them go back to the street.

R: Why did you leave (the place of safety) and come back to the street?

It is like S just said the heart just shakes and you won't know why but you just feel like going. (YG)

There were some there at the shelter but they gave up on me. They tried to help me with my mind but it was just too difficult for them... I wish God to help me because I know God can help me... God will help me to change and be good. (OB)

R: What would have to be changed for you to go home?

I know that all of us have different solutions. On my side I believe if I can get better education and have a change of mindset. (YB)

Theme 5: Services we access

A number of issues related to the services children presently make use of emerged from the discussions. They also talked about the places of safety and children's homes that they had lived in at some point. None of the organisations are named in order to protect the children.

Services children are accessing on the street

Children described two different kinds of service on the street. Some were informal, with outreach workers making occasional visits to talk and give advice and also occasionally to deliver food. Events such as soccer matches were organised by a service organisation but also seemingly on an ad hoc basis.

The other type of service was a consistent one with a physical presence in the form of a drop-in-centre with various other services linked to the centres. Food was available every day, there were showers for washing and regular activities were organised. A mobile health centre was also provided in one of the centres. Community workers were also available to interact with the children. In one organisation most of the staff had lived on the street themselves at some stage.

Many of the children said that they found the consistency of the second type of service important. They valued the fact that the service was consistent.

These guys do help us with food (referring to the more ad hoc service). Sometimes.

Actually when they feel like doing so.

R: So you don't know if they are going to come.

ALL: Yes.

R: And P?

ALL: We know for sure that they will be coming. (YB)

Another part of the service all of the children said they really valued was the help to go home - both money for transport for visits home and also more long-term interventions that would eventually help them to move back home.

P does help us when we want to go home, unlike other places. P does allow us to go home. How would other people call themselves social workers while they can't meet our needs and how are we going to trust them that they are social workers? At P we do ask to go home and they allow us. (YB)

The children had a number of interesting things to say about the services in general. One group talked about how the staff at one organisation cared about them and were patient with them.

If you want to go home they help us with the transport.

R: What is the difference between the people coming with a police car and the people with the car from P (service organisation)? How are they different?

There is a big difference; the police come fighting whereas the P people come talking not fighting.

When the police come to our place, burn our clothes, wake us up and beat us. The man from P took photographs and published them on the Daily News.

Yes they are fighting for us.

They are our brothers and sisters.

They are like our family.

Uncles and sisters.

We love the P people because when we are hungry they even take money from their own pockets to buy food for us.

If something is happening somewhere like a football match, S (another service organisation) tells us once, where P constantly remind us of the upcoming event. P people are very patient to us. (YB)

Some of the children collected food from a local church three times a week. Before eating the food they prayed and sang hymns. Every time the children told us about this service they mentioned the chairs that they sat on, they saw this as a sign of respect and appreciated it.

We get rice, sausages, juice, bread and we sit at the table! (OB)

R: What is that picture S?

We are singing in church after that we pray for food and then they give us food while we are sitting on the chairs. This is the church. (YB)

But not every one respected them or treated them with patience. Some staff at the centres did not listen and take them seriously.

With you (referring to the researcher) we can discuss all that is troubling us yet over there at the centre we haven't told those teachers

all our issues because when you say your problem they make fun of you. When you tell them your problem they ask you 'so what do you want me to do – do you want to go home, because there's nothing we can do for you'. There are the ones that you don't click well with and you end up fighting. She would shout you while other teachers are watching you. (YG)

They often mentioned social workers who shouted at them.

*R: Is there a social worker at N?
Some children are scared of her because she shouts. (YG)*

*R: Do you have someone (a staff member) you can ask for advice?
Yes, but I'm scared because they say Mum P is shouting so I never went to her. I'll try my best and talk to her because I want to finish my studies. (YG)*

The other important issue for all of them but especially for the girls was confidentiality; they did not always trust staff at the service centres because they did not keep things confidential.

I don't trust all the teachers, there's only one I trust. The others there are so troubling but here (in the research workshop) we can open up about all our problems and over there, as soon as you expose your problems to them you'll hear it all over the place. (YG)

The boys appreciated the health service offered by one service organisation but the girls said that they did not always use the health service as it was not confidential, it was too close to the boys and everyone might hear their problems.

*Sometimes they are coming here when I am sick and take me to the hospital.
They have a mobile clinic that comes around when somebody is sick. (YB)*

I am not going there (to the mobile clinic) to tell them everyone will hear. I go to E. It costs R2 in the taxi and there they are good. They do not ask questions - they help you. (OG)

One service provider offers regular activities like surfing, singing and artwork. The children clearly valued these activities. It was clear that these activities gave them a sense of self worth and of agency (see Theme 7 below).

This is me singing and surfing. This is our talent that we have. We are looking forward to become artists and be famous tomorrow. (OB)

The thing that I wish to do in 2013 is working ... and surfing! I am practising now. I am going to be good. (OB)

Another issue raised by a few children was that some service organisations did not always pass food and clothes on to the children.

It's because when cars arrive with people from overseas, bringing us some clothes to wear, they don't give us. They just pick and choose those they like and take them to their homes and don't give to us. They also do that about food. If good food is being brought for us, they don't give us. There's a bakkie that normally brings eggs every month-end that they don't give us. They will only give us hard bread and when we ask for something to eat with, they will refuse and say there is none. (OG)

Girls raised the issue that some of the boys who accessed the services alongside them were dangerous and they thought the staff were even afraid of them.

*The place has changed. There are lots of boys going there now.
The ones who rape.
The ones who are from jail.
Others are very old and there is one who is arrogant and we all hate him. (OG)*

*They (staff) do what the big boys want.
They are scared of the big boys. (OB)*

*Boys are being loved more than girls there.
R: Why?
We don't know maybe it's because they could use their 'thick voices' and the teachers working there at G are scared of them. (YG)*

Places of safety and children's homes

The children also talked about residential services they had accessed. Most of the places they mentioned were places they had been taken to by social workers who had helped them to get off the street. Many of the older children had been to three or four different places. Some were places of safety and others were children's homes.

Many of the children talked positively about these places.

When you want something then they can take care of you and then they write down all the things you want and find out about the things you want and then they take you out for the trips and talk to you nicely. You know, the first time I arrived at O, I didn't know how to read, I didn't know how to do anything so I told them that I don't know how to read. They said to me if I can behave well and listen, everything will be alright and then everything became alright. (OB)

I had shoes for school and I got a lunch box every day! (YG)

But none of the children in the workshops had stayed at these places. There were a number of reasons why they had left. A few of the older children said they had to leave because they were too old, or because they had been there long enough and they had to make space for other children. Often they were not really sure why they had to leave.

I stayed first at the place of safety and then went to the home. At the home, where I was staying in the new place I was even wearing uniform and have stayed for 3 years and they were asking if I want to go back home so I didn't answer them about going back home, I just kept quiet. They told me once that I have over-stayed and I have to go so that I can open the space for others. So I had to leave and I did not want to go home so came back to the street. (OB)

They said I have a mother and father so I must go home and I cannot stay there. They ask why do you need to be here if your mother and father are alive. But what if they do not care for you? (YG)

At the place of safety there at U you cannot stay if you are over 18 and I stayed for one year and after one year I had to go back home even if my problem is not yet solved at home, they just let you go home. (OG)

The most common reason for leaving was that they had been placed back at home by the organisations and the problems that had prompted them to leave in the first place were still unresolved, so they ran back to the street again.

I lived at E for some time and then they took me back home. Immediately after they dropped my belongings home I said I am going to the shop. As they left home, their car drove away, I also left home using a public taxi to T. They had given me money. I was not going to stay to be shouted at home. (YG)

A few of the girls did, however, talk about how the residential services tried to help the situation at home.

After four months they do a home visit. They go and talk to your parents and during December time they take you for shopping for Christmas things and then you go back home. Maybe if it is not so good at home they donate with some food. They also buy some uniform and pay school fees. (YG)

One of the biggest issues raised by children in this regard was that they felt the staff did not believe them when they told them about the problems at home, or the caregivers put on a good face for the social workers and so the children were returned home only to be abused again. See the case study below.

They took me off the street to E. I stayed there for two months and then they took me home, they spoke to my step-granny who was not even listening since she didn't like me. She was just pretending as if she is listening. As she is a drinking and smoking person she would swear at me and when she is preparing to go to work she would wake me up at 4 o'clock and tell me to go out of the house and come back at six at night when she is coming back from work. So I went back. (OB)

Children often told us how they had run away from these residential places. A number of other issues emerged that explained why they ran away. One of the main issues seemed to be a lack of understanding of the fact that many of the children were *addicted* to glue. Staff at these homes and places of safety seemed to just expect the children to stop sniffing glue and if they did not then they treated them as if they were bad.

I made the place of safety a yellow colour because it was beautiful. I felt good there.

R: So why did you leave?

I liked sniffing glue but I was unable to do that there. I feel so bad about the glue because it makes our knees feel weak and our mind becomes full of glue. Even if we go back home all we think about is glue. (OB)

This seems to be one of the most basic shortfalls in the work of the services that seek to help children stay off the street; they do not help the children deal with glue addiction apart from telling them not to do it and if they do calling them 'bad boys'. So children come back to the streets to get access to glue and other substances that they are addicted to and they stay because they know this is the only place to access it. It seems that there is a need for training of staff around this issue and medical programmes to help children deal with the addiction.

The second most commonly mentioned reason why children left the children's homes and places of safety seemed to be the bullying (often violent) from other children at the homes.

Yes I went to stay there at the Home in Z and I was schooling and every month end we would get pocket money so now people wanted to take money from me. One day I got very cross and I took my clothes and packed them in my school bag and I didn't go to school but when the transport dropped me at school I just took a bus and went to Durban. When the social workers asked me why I went there I told them why and they took me to M (another place). I stayed there for a while and I was also very cross there and I told the boys that I'm going to get a cigarette and I ran away.

R: What made you cross at M?

The boys were stealing our clothes and all that and our shoes.

Sometime when you are going to have a shower they push you away saying, 'people' must shower first

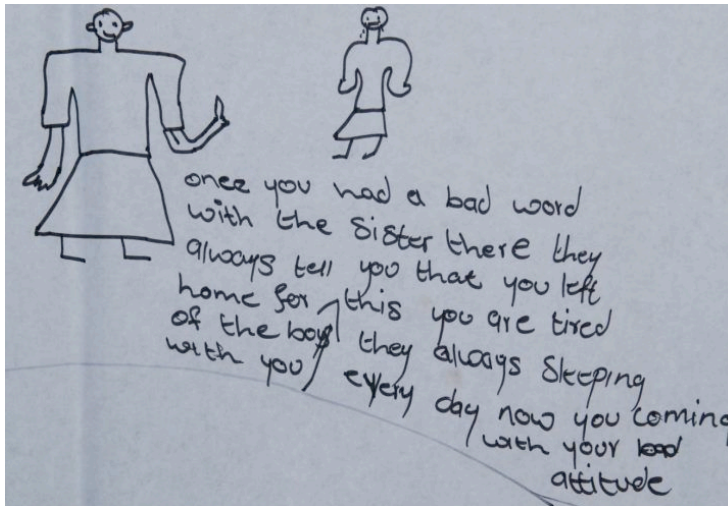
R: So it was the bullying that made you leave?

C: Yes

R: Didn't the people who were looking after you do something about that?

When we told them they would say they will talk to them. When they find out that you did wrong things they would punish you and let you do chores like sweeping, mopping, fetch water and all that but the boys did not stop it (the bullying). (OB)

The other big problem was abuse by staff. This ranged from actual physical beating to shouting and verbal abuse including negative labelling.



Then these new staff came but they got chased away because they were not treating us well. Some came to work at T. Then another new staff came and he started beating us and not taking care of us so me and S, we came back. I think it is a month now we have been back on the street.

R: Do you think it was a good decision to leave?

I think so because I was not going to tolerate beating every day as it is not nice. (OB)

They once took us from the drop-in-centre to S, telling us that we are going to get help from there so that we can be able to study and stay at a place like our home. We went there and at first it was good and we began studying but a new educator (male) came in. One day I was having a tooth-ache and sleeping, the new educator came and pulled off my blanket and said; 'hey you, don't you see that it's the assembly time now'. He said that to me and another boy and I said to him, sir, why are you waking me up rough like this, can't you see that I'm sick? He then said we are arguing with him so he slapped us, pulled us and said we must get out as he said we don't want to go to the prayers. We said to him it was not like we didn't want prayers but I was sick. He threatened us and we kept quiet. We were then given a warning.

Again another guy was just playing with the educator, so the educator slapped the boy and also slapped us. We then realised that they are abusing us then we moved away from them. (OB

One of the most commonly raised issues was the fact that staff labelled them as bad because they had lived on the street.

There's a time when you would think that your problems are going to be solved but you get disappointed when you find that they are still holding negative things about you - then you can't stay with those people. They would say you are forgiven but that thing still comes up from them (that you are bad). (OB)

When you have done a small mistake, everybody would say it is because of the kind of person you are because you lived on the street. Yes just because of a little thing you have done and then they pull you down. (OB)

It is important to fix your problems

R: How?

In many ways

To find someone who will help you

To listen to you and get an idea of how exactly is he going to help you liken a supporter

R: Like one who is a supporter

Yes, a person who that you can trust

You know when you are talking about all those things to the people who help us; some of them won't believe us or trust us. They would say, 'no, you see, he is lying now, he ran away from home and now he is talking lies'. You can't really make that person understand because they don't trust us. (OB)

The children talked a lot about how they wished the people at the places of safety and homes to be.

People who should work at places of safety must be the nice people...

Smiling people

Truthful people, people who have good hearts and we need people who care, who understand we can't stay with a person who don't understand... (OB)

Another problem area was school. Many of the children had been helped to go back to school while staying at these places but they faced problems there too. Bullying from other children and labelling from teachers and beatings were the most common issues mentioned. One big problem was that they had often missed school and were behind and they were then teased by other children or beaten by teachers

Yes at school the children are teasing you and the teacher too because you do not know things. (OB)

You know sometimes when you go to the Place of Safety, they meet you and then they ask you which grade you are in – asking you in front of many people so you don't say the truth. When you are too old for that class you can't say that you are in that grade so you say a higher class and when you go there then you can't write, you can't do your homework. (OB)

Another reason given for children going in and out of service organisations and back on to the street seemed to be because the organisations were not stable. Children often talked about a centre closing down, forcing them to leave. This obviously had an impact on their already dislocated lives.

I stayed with the boys at T on the street but before that I was at A but they closed there so I went to the street again. (OB)

Yes I stayed there and I also stayed in I. Then I went to stay in U for a while and they closed it up again then I went back to the street again. Now people were stealing and the community started to complain so I went to M but I couldn't stay there because they said the place is already full. (OB)

Simon's story below highlights many of the shortfalls of the services available for children living on the street. His story is typical in that he has been in and out of different service organisations throughout his life like many of the other children.

Simon's³ story

Simon is 18 years old. He is a good looking boy with a strong body. He regularly works out at the beach to keep his body strong. He also says the exercise helps him to overcome the effects of the glue addiction he has now broken.

I used to 'smoke' glue but with the help of my friends I stopped it. I did not want to do it any more. They beat me when I wanted it, I gave them permission and I just did not go to sit with them when they smoked and I do not want it any more now.

The other boys agreed that he no longer used glue.

He had a sharp intelligence, understanding instructions immediately and often explaining to the other boys what I was asking them to do. He could think analytically and talked about issues with an understanding of what had caused them. During one of the discussions I couldn't help thinking that in any other situation he would be the boy who was elected prefect or head boy.

On the third day he told us a story, which for me epitomised how the system had failed so many of the children who we were working with.

³ Name changed

I was living in a children's home from when I was a baby. I don't know where my real home is. I was at that home until 7 or 9 years. I was living with a child-care worker and there were other children who were staying there. When I was staying there I was going to school. I was doing everything well and my mind was fine and when I was asking for things they were able to give me immediately.

The social worker came and told me that I have to go back home. I asked them if that is my mother and they said yes.

R: So they took you to a lady and said she is your mother?

Yes. I stayed there and she treated me badly and she had other children so I didn't stay well there.

R: Was she part of your family?

No, it was just people who were taking care of me and get money because of that, they were just making money...

R: Like a foster mother?

Yes, and then they didn't buy clothes for me, they hit me everyday when I've made a mistake, they wouldn't even explain to me about where I went wrong and then I started to run away from that home. I went to the street at Z Township whereby I started sniffing glue, smoking cigarettes and did all the wrong things. All the people from that area would see me everyday in the streets and then I ran away to Durban. I think I was 10 years old. Then they took me off the street and took me to X (a place of safety).

I started staying there and they said I am a good person, I behave well and I do everything that they are telling me and I do it nicely. They asked me one day why I went there to the street because I am a good person I can't just do something wrong at home and then I told them the whole story but I knew they didn't believe me, they didn't trust me so they asked me to give them my home telephone number and I gave them. They spoke with my mother – my foster mother, and then she told them that I just ran away from home on my own for nothing. My foster mother and my father were drinking alcohol so they spoke lies. So the social workers thought I'm the one spoke lies so they took me back home and then I decided to run away again. I then realised that that was not my real mother from the beginning.

Then when I was 13 they took me to C (place of safety). They wanted to take me to school there so that was where they asked me who Grade I was in. They asked with all the other children in the room and I was ashamed to say that I had only Grade 2. I could not even read. So I said Grade 6 and then when I go there to the school... so I ran away from there.

Then we, S and I, last year I think we went off the street to A to stay but it closed down and now we have no where to go so we are staying at the street again. I am alone. I can't phone anyone. I am a single person, no one.

R: I can see you are a strong boy though, what makes you so strong because you had bad luck in your life?

I just forget all the things that happened and I look forward. I have got my ID now.

Theme 6: Health issues

Health problems

The body mapping activity focussed on physical problems that children experienced while living on the street. Children drew their health problems on the body drawing and then each child was given a set of stickers and asked to indicate if they had had this problem while living on the street. The table below summarises the results.

Boys (total 18)			
Illnesses/physical problems	No of children	Injuries	No of children

Lice	10	Eyes hurt from spray gun sprayed by police	18
Bladder problems	5	Slapped by police	7
Sore teeth	9	Beaten by police with a sjambok	18
Armpit sores	8	Stab wounds	5
Fits	1	Broken arm from fall	1
Sore eyes	2		
Bad dreams	9		
Earache	1		
Rash	6		
Boils	3		
Pain in chest	4		
Drowsiness	2		
Flu	9		
Headache	5		
Diarrhoea	7		
Discharge from penis 'idrop'	3		
Sore feet	1		
Swollen glands	2		
'Thobela' unable to walk because of sniffing glue	4		

Girls (total 12)			
Illnesses/physical problems	No of children	Injuries	No of children
Flu	10	Sore eyes from spray gun Sprayed by police	8
Sore feet	4	Slapped by police	7
Headache	12	Hit by police with a sjambok	6
Earache	2	Bruises from beatings from boyfriends on body	4
Stomach ache	3	Head injury from beating from boyfriends	7
Bad dreams	9	Stab wounds	6
Sore eyes	4		
Tooth ache	5		
Dizziness	2		
Itchy arms	3		
Pain in chest	11		
Discharge from vagina	7		
Bladder problems	3		
Diarrhoea	5		

Some of the health issues the children describe, such as lice, rashes and armpit sores, are related to the lack of washing facilities. A sore chest and coughing were also commonly described. The girls attributed this to smoking

cigarettes and dagga. The children said diarrhoea was caused by eating bad food. Tooth ache was commonly mentioned. A lot of girls and some of the boys talked about what appear to be sexually transmitted infections.

Most of the children sought help from the mobile clinic at the local drop-in centre for these health problems, although the girls did go to a nearby clinic by taxi.

The injuries children recounted are linked mostly to the abuse by police, fights and the abuse the girls experience from their boyfriends. The number of stab wounds received is an issue for boys and girls. The number of girls who said they had received head injuries and bruises from boys while on the street shows that the issue of violence (usually perpetrated by a 'boyfriend') is a huge one for the girls (see Theme 2 above).

We explored what the children ate. Apart from the bread from the drop-in centre, biriyani twice a week from a project that fed the homeless and three meals a week at a local church, they seemed mostly to buy bread and polony and 'sweet-aid'. If they had the money they bought hot meals from a hawker on the side of the road.

*R: If you have money what food do you buy?
Bread, polony, sweet-aid. (YG)*

Substance abuse

The biggest health issue for the children was addiction to glue and to a lesser extent dagga (marijuana).

Many of the boys and some of the girls sniffed or as they put it 'smoked' glue. This glue was bought at a number of different places from small shops, informal traders and even some larger shops. The glue was bought in bottles and then decanted into small plastic bottles that the children could easily hide under their shirts or jerseys.

*These are buying from stores.
These supermarkets are selling it.
It's even sold on the streets by the street vendors just like they are selling vegetables. (YB)*

You get it at the different tuck shops (informal shops) around.

There is a shop that sells glue. We know him.

R: So it is easy to get glue.

You work for it!

You must get money to buy glue, like there is one for R11, one for R5 but sometimes we would collect money and add it together to buy glue and share but others become greedy when they got money and managed to buy big bottle out of their pockets, they run away and sniff alone.

R: How long does it last?

It depends how big the bottle is, sometimes I can sniff today and finish it tomorrow. It would get dry on top so I would dilute it with other new glue

Only one day in the body but the glue in the bottle we can use it many times even if it gets dry we add a drop of glue and we carry on sniffing. If you have a bottle of glue, you keep on sniffing for the whole day into the night. (OB)

The glue the boys bought was used for mending shoes and sticking wood together. They could differentiate between the different strengths of glue.

Are the glues different?

Yes

R: What is the difference?

There is the white one, red one, which is very strong and the black one.

R: What is the glue used for?

For shoes and wood.

If you pour super glue on your mouth by mistake, your mouth won't open again. If you can pour it down and let someone sit, he won't stand up, he'll get stuck there. (All laughing). (OB)

There are different kinds.

The brown one.

Shoe glue.

Small one.

Big one. (YB)

They could also describe the effects of the glue. The first effect was related to its hallucinogenic properties.

When it's the first time you see snakes.

You hear some machines making noises.

It makes you dizzy. (OB)

Sometimes when I have smoked (glue) I hear some scooters while they are not around. (OG)

You see the world going upside down.

You hear music.

You see baboons.

Sometimes you feel you are in a dark place.

They see anacondas.

Sometimes they run away not knowing why they are running.

Sometimes you see ghosts.

R: How long does it last seeing things?

Too many minutes.

R: How long does it make you warm if you feel cold?

It can take 5 hours.

It can take 24 hours. (YB)

The second effect they describe and in fact the main reason they give for using it is that it dulls the senses making it easier to cope with life on the street.

R: Why do some boys smoke glue?

It's stress.

R: How does glue help stress?

Not to think too much. If it is cold outside it makes you not to feel the cold. It makes you not to think right.

It makes you see things. (OB)

It makes it easy to eat from the rubbish bin. (OB)

It makes me very happy. (OB)

Glue makes you feel things differently so even if there is a storm outside you don't even care about that you can't even feel the rain falling on you, you just watch people. (OB)

Many of them also mentioned that they 'smoke' glue because it helps them forget their problems.

R: Why is this boy smoking glue? (referring to a photo).

Because it is cold and he wants to get warm.

I think he has family related stress and he wants to avoid problems and stay drunk always. (YB)

I was sniffing it before. I can say it from my understanding; most of the people say it makes you forget things that are happening like if you have some problems at home and you want to forget about that so I started sniffing glue and it worked. I stopped thinking about home. When I started sniffing glue I stayed here for two months without thinking about home. (YG)

They also acknowledged though that it has some dangerous effects.

It makes you steal.

R: Why does it make you steal?

It's because you want to buy more glue because you want to keep on sniffing. (OB)

It makes you dizzy.

It you are a bigger boy and now you are suffering since you need money to get glue, you feel like making a younger boy suffer.

Yes, glue is disturbing your mind.

It kills the brain.

*Even if a person is hitting you, you can't see or feel your mind might come back later when the person is away.
The cars would hoot us because we cannot see and get in the way.
(YB)*

They could also describe what happened to children who used it over a long time, some from experience.

Sometimes it makes you start getting weak for instance if you used to be strong and carry things, you are unable to carry things, your joints get weak.

It kills your legs.

You can't speak properly. I can't even jump now because of glue but I used to do everything. When I try jumping I just fall down and they laugh at me.

R: Don't boys worry about this happening to them?

They do worry but their problem is when they feel cold that's why they keep on going back. (OB)

They walk funny.

Thobela! (They demonstrate. This is the term the boys used to describe the peculiar walk of those children whose nervous system has been affected by the glue. The term is sePedi for a popular dance where the knees knock together). (YB)

The glue physically challenged me. I ended up unable to walk. They had to send me to a place to get better. I could not even walk to the toilet. (OG)

They knew from experience that it was addictive. Though they were not able to articulate any understanding of the process of addiction – especially that it was a physical process. An understanding of this process may have made them feel less guilty about their failure to give up glue even when they were in a safe place like a children's home (see Theme 6).

R: I want to know, if you are sniffing glue are you able to stop?

No, you don't stop.

It's not easy but it's possible as a result I was sniffing it but I tried to stop but it's not easy.

It depends if you are strong or weak.

You can tell yourself that you don't want to do it anymore but that can't even last 2 weeks. This thing differs with people, you can say, no I don't want glue but as the time goes on you start feeling the cold again and then by that time you don't have something warm to wear like a jersey. Now you know that glue makes you don't feel the cold and it makes you have more energy of stealing and sometimes you succeed to get money from stealing. (OB)

When people say what can I do for you to help you stop glue, and some boy would say, you want to help me ok, if you can take me to school, give me clothes and give me money every month, I can stop glue. They are lying and only want to steal from you and get more glue. (OB)

When you want it your body gets itchy all over and you have to get it. (YB)

We also discussed why boys hide the glue when they have it. It was largely a pragmatic issue (they could not beg with glue) but also because they were ashamed of it.

*R: Why do boys hide it when they are sniffing?
People won't give you the money when you are begging if they see that you have glue
But bottles are in many types; sometimes people would think that we are drinking juice and then they can give you money. (YB)*

The children had a number of strategies for breaking the addiction. Not all of them worked.

*R: So how did 'you' stop?
If you want to stop the glue you must break the bottle in front of other people so that they can see that you have quit.
You can just tell a person that you are no longer sniffing and they must help you. For instance when they are busy sharing the glue and then they pass to each other you ask him to tell them not to pass to you. Sometimes you can tell a person when he comes to you to collect money for glue in order to smoke as a group that you are not buying.
When I happen to do a terrible thing I remember that it's because of the glue I've sniffed and then I would tell myself to stop and stop. When the cold comes I would feel like going back to the glue. (YB)*

What was interesting is that many of the children talked about how they wanted to give up glue and in fact how they had tried to do so. It made them sad to be addicted.

*I used to play soccer. In some of the days I used to sleep without food and I feel bad since I smoke glue and cigarettes.
R: Don't you feel better when you smoke glue?
No because I can't think for myself. I can't think good things I only think about bad things.
R: So why are you smoking it then?
I want to stop smoking but I can't stop so I need someone to help me
R: So what help do you need?
I started smoking when I was still young so I've been smoking all my life so if someone can help me I can be ok. (OB)*

The children did, however, assure us that a few very strong-willed children had broken the addiction with the help of friends.

You can stop if there is someone to assist you. You must slap them every time they want the glue. They tell you to do that. (YB)

I told myself that I must stay away from people who are sniffing glue. (she is speaking very softly) I used to stay alone. I didn't want any person next to me, Remember (she asks the other girls).

In the morning she would wake up, take a bath and isolate herself. And I never did it again.

Now when I am with people sniffing. It doesn't come (the craving). (YG)

I stopped. I told them to not give me glue and slap me when I wanted it. I did exercise whenever I wanted it.

Yes he did he is not smoking any more. (OB)

Girls and boys smoked dagga but the girls talked about it more.

We buy it on the street. In these little packets.

There are many different types. There's a strong one that lasts for long.

R: Why do you smoke it?

People want to make themselves happy.

When you want to quickly forget something. When I smoke dagga it is when I am disturbed and know that I can laugh and forget about something.

It takes stress away. I don't buy it. I smoke only when I see my friends and I like it because I become fine and dagga makes me laugh and go crazy. (OG)

Knowledge and experience related to HIV/AIDS

We explored the children's knowledge of HIV/AIDS. We were looking particularly for evidence of protective knowledge and their ability to apply this knowledge in their context.

There was quite good knowledge of the basic facts of transmission and prevention.

You get it from girls who are HIV-positive.

You also get it from a boy who is HIV-positive.

You mustn't sleep without a condom.

And mixing of blood with HIV. (YB)

You can get it from the razor blade. If I don't clean the blade I can get HIV. (YB)

He (the boy on the street) knows that when he sleeps with his girlfriend he must use a condom.

R: So does he?

*He gets from the clinic.
From the shop.
He must use a condom. (He pulls a condom from his pocket to much laughter).
Because you can't trust anyone. (OB)*

She (referring to a drawing of a girl on the street) knows she must use a condom.

She also knows she mustn't hide if she is HIV-positive.

She needs support she must tell someone she trusts.

R: Where did she learn all this stuff about HIV?

From the old people who care like if she is staying at the centre she will find one teacher there to tell her. Then she will ask her 'do you use a condom?' they do ask us. If you know that you do you say yes. They say if you don't use a condom this and that can happen to you. (YG)

They knew about the need for testing but they said few of them went because they were scared.

R: What else does this boy (referring to a drawing of a boy living on the street) know about HIV/AIDS?

*He knows that when you have HIV and AIDS you must eat good food.
And when you have HIV you don't need to tell yourself that your life has come to an end.*

R: But how does he know that he has HIV?

Some go but some don't for a blood test because they are scared but it can be seen from his movements that he has HIV. He starts getting tired. But with some you can't tell that they have HIV yet. (OB)

But this knowledge is of little use to them as they cannot apply it in their situation. The quote below says it all.

I did learn about it.

Oh yes ABC – Abstain, Be faithful and Condomise.

R: Do you think that applies to the girl living in the street?

I don't think so.

(laughing) Eish it doesn't.

Maybe they don't know about it.

I know about ABC even though I'm not ... (laughing) ABC.

R: So this girl knows about ABC, she's not doing it, why?

She's got no choice.

R: She's got no choice, why?

Because she doesn't love the partner.

R: What else makes her not to have a choice?

She needs money and place to stay. (OG)

The boys identified men who wanted sex in exchange for food as a risk in terms of HIV/AIDS. They had some strategies for protecting themselves.

This is how we catch them, when a big man comes and gives us bread and polony we start suspecting why is this man become so kind to us. We do not accept help from anyone. That is why we are always in a group.

There is this man.

He wanted to have sex with us in the thighs.

Yes, it happens a lot.

More especially to the children who love money. You must always ask something. As a street child you must not accept everything from anybody. More especially those who bring full chicken and two litre coke and give to us, we get suspicious. (YB)

But they said that men did not use condoms so they worried about getting infected.

Men have sex with boys.

R: Does that happen?

Oh Yes!

R: Does it happen here?

Yes, everywhere. Without condoms.

Sometimes he would say the boy must keep quiet and gives him money. There is the one called X who gets money from the bigger boys and they take him to the corner and have sex with him on his bum.

R: So that happens too and they get money. Can he get HIV from that?

Yes.

R: Ok, but he doesn't worry because he wants some money?

Yes but he will think about it inside him for a long time and then need some help.

People who have money just come around and say, here's the money. (OB)

The boys also talked about sex with older women and again the inability to use condoms.

The other thing is some (girls) are selling their bodies and the boys too.

R: Are there boys who are selling their bodies?

Yes.

R: To women or to men?

To men and women.

There are lots of married white women who are looking for small boys Lots of women drinking traditional beer over there next to scrap yard, they would say; 'look at how handsome you are little boy' they would buy you for R10. I remember one old woman, I think she was around 60 years; she wanted P who is about 20 years old.

R: When those old women buy from you, do they use condom or does a boy use condom?

(All talking)

They don't want to use condom and there's an issue of rape.

R: Do you think that's a problem?

Yes, you can't force an old woman to use condom or someone raping you. (OB)

They also talked about how condoms were seldom used in sex with girlfriends.

R: So in the group the girlfriend is for everybody?

Yes, because they change from this one to that one and the other one.

R: So she belongs to the group?

Yes.

R: How many girls for a group?

Many, she goes from this group to another.

She leaves the ones from the group that have no money.

R: She goes to the group that has money, so what about HIV, is she not worried?

We don't know.

R: Does she use condoms when she sleeps with everyone in the group?

Sometimes you don't use condoms and sometimes you use condoms (other boys laughing).

R: Does she get pregnant?

Yes, some are pregnant right now.

Even the boys, some of them don't want to use condoms because they want to do it nicely (other boys laughing).

R: So they don't like it with condoms because they say it's not so nice. Yes.

R: Is it only with the boys or also girls don't want to use condoms?

You know this thing is the same; some of the boys don't like condoms and some girls don't as well and when a girl loves you she still goes to another boy and you go to another girl so it is the same. (OB)

The girls talked about how using a condom was almost impossible with their boyfriends.

R: So is she using a condom?

No! (All)

R: No, why not?

Because if she tries to use it sometimes, that person she's going to sleep with maybe he has HIV, he would say, 'you know what, if you really love me don't use it (condom) but if you don't love me, you'll use it'. You must leave me if you want to use it, I don't want to use it'.

R: So she has a problem with the boys because they don't want to use it?

And sometimes if you say you want to use a condom the boy would say 'you are making me stupid, you slept with another man now you are scared you want to use a condom'.

R: So are there any boys using a condom?

I don't know any.

They do carry some 'Trust'.

They carry them for nothing, have you seen how many are there in W and T's wallet, but they never use them.

R: Ok, where did they get them from?

I don't know, maybe they buy but I saw some carrying a packet of Trust.

I can tell you how, you know when they rob, the older boys usually rob so they would get a wallet from someone that they rob and there would be some condoms in the wallet. Even if they found those condoms, they don't use them. (YG)

In the discussion about condoms and the girls in the younger and older group insisted that they could not carry condoms because if they did the city police would arrest them as they would assume they were prostitutes.

R: Ok, do the girls have condoms, like this girl here (points to drawing) does she carry condoms with her?

I would say no to that one because if you are a girl carrying condoms, they say you are a prostitute...

Exactly! (All)

R: Ok, so who's 'they', the other boys?

The police, if the police is searching you and you have a condom as a girl, they say you are a prostitute and after that they would arrest you for prostitution.

R: Really?

Really, they would arrest you for prostitution, I know, my friend T has been arrested for that; she had a condom in her pocket and they asked her what she is doing with it and she said, 'I use it when I sleep with my boyfriend'. They said, 'you are a street kid and you are using condoms on the street' and she said, 'yes I'm doing it for my own life' and then they said, 'you are a prostitute, why are you wearing such a small top' and she said, 'I'm going to swim' and they said, 'you have a condom and you are going to swim, you are arrested, you are a prostitute'.

That's what they said to her.

R: And she got arrested?

She was arrested ... for a month, a full month. (OG)

Boys and girls asked a number of questions about HIV/AIDS that are important as they give an indication of what they do not understand. There were many questions about testing.

How many times should I go for testing?

You don't test for only once? (OB)

The girls wanted to know how someone can test for HIV and be positive in one test and then negative. They also had lots of questions about how HIV is transmitted to babies and about the risk of breast-feeding.

Pregnancy was a huge issue for the girls. Four of the twelve girls had given birth to babies, all of these babies were being looked after at their homes. One

girl had had two children (and one miscarriage). One girl was pregnant for the second time. The girls in one group talked about abortions.

They do go for abortion.

R: Do they go to the clinic or ...?

Some use something that they know that it works

Someone would say 'if I can fall pregnant, I can hit here and here to get rid of it'. Some just hit her stomach and ran to the toilet there were some big balls of blood coming out.

And then you know what she did; she knew that she was pregnant and her boyfriend didn't love her too much so she took Vim, do you know Vim? She put it in water and added some salt and stayed for a while.

R: Is it more often that the girls do that kind of thing than go to the clinic?

They make their own abortion because they get shouted when they go to the clinic. The nurses will start swearing at them and say, 'you wanted to be pregnant so what do you want now'.

There are private doctors but it's R75.00. We normally see the papers posted on poles and walls advertising doctors who do abortions. And they put the numbers there as well.

But where are they going get R75.00?

They do they own abortions. Drink cokes and Grandpas...Panados and all these things. (YG)

Only one group talked about treatment (older girls) they also talked about the need for a person who was HIV-positive to eat healthy food and exercise. They talked about the difficulties of being HIV-positive and living on the street. They understood the importance of support and had some ideas about this.

If I have HIV I can't rely on those who are on the streets like me, I also need mother. If I was I would take pills but I also need cooked healthy food you know and to stay with a parent. When I have HIV my friends on the streets would say, 'hey my friend just forget, here's dagga, let's smoke'. I can smoke and forget it for a while but I would decrease the strength of my immune system by tobacco that's why a parent is needed so it's bad if you know you can't go back home.

Even if you didn't go back home but you have a support group, you can make a support group while living on the streets, create your own to get help and you will get help. Maybe one from the support group will have the same views like yours then she will listen and help you and maybe come up with some creative things to make you stop thinking about it. You can't rely on your parents because if they die you will still be left with people of your age to talk to as you still have a problem. That's why you need people to support you even though they won't be from your family or relatives. (OG)

What was clear is that all of the children worried about HIV/AIDS.

She is thinking about AIDS.

*R: Is that what she thinks? Where and when does she think so?
When she sees about it on adverts, she starts thinking about it
You know when you are walking on the road and meet with an adult
person, he/she will just ask you if don't you think you have HIV? Just
like that, out of nowhere.*

R: An ordinary person?

*Yes or an old woman asks you that or say, 'You see as you live on the
streets you will get AIDS' then you begin to think lots of things about
AIDS. (OG)*

R: Do you think he is worried about getting HIV and AIDS?

Yes he is worried.

He's going to get worried as soon as he gets sick.

R: So do you sometimes worry when you get sick?

(All) Yes! Yes too much.

Yes even if we get cuts now. (OB)

There has been very little research done with children from the streets around knowledge of HIV/AIDS. One study that is relevant is a study done in 1992 with 141 children in seven major cities around South Africa ((Kruger and Richter 2003). The one difference between the children in the present study and the 1992 study is that the children we worked with seem to have higher knowledge levels and a clear idea of how to protect themselves. Yet, fear of getting AIDS is a similar concern as is their inability to apply the knowledge they have because of the context of violence and transactional sex in which they find themselves.

Theme 7: Psychosocial well-being

One of the main ways in which theorists have sought to understand how to reduce vulnerability in children and youth is by looking at the concepts of risk and resilience. Most of this thinking is drawn from research on resilience in children (Rutter 1979, Werner 1982, Grotberg 1995, Benard 2004).

Grotberg (1995) describes resilience as a

*... universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to
prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity. (p7)*

Donald and Swart-Kruger (1994) and Richter and van der Walt (2003) have looked at the complexities of resilience as encapsulated in vulnerability and coping mechanisms showing it to be a relevant theory in the context of South African children on the street.

Resilience is determined mainly by the balance between the stresses and risks children are exposed to on one hand, and the protective factors that may be operating for them on the other. It is possible to measure how resilient a child is, therefore, by looking at the protective factors that are present in their lives.

Bala's (1996) outline of protective factors is a particularly useful way of looking at resilience. Bala identifies four levels at which resilience can be built in children:

i) Reducing stressors

- reducing the impact of present stressors
- unloading accumulated problems
- assisting in making peace with the past
- minimizing anticipated stress that could interfere with daily life

ii) Strengthening and supporting the use of existing protective factors

- within the child
- within the family
- within the wider social environment (friends, neighbours etc.)

iii) Broadening coping alternatives

- facilitation of the use of existing coping strategies
- assistance in seeking new coping skills (including training, life skills, beliefs etc)

iv) Strengthening and opening future perspectives

- supporting the search for future possibilities and visions

Research shows that these protective factors are lodged in normative human resources and appear able to generate positive outcomes to a considerable degree for high-risk populations of children, regardless of geographical, historical, ethnic and class boundaries (Benard 2004).

One quantitative measure and a series of simple qualitative measures were used in this research to assess which protective factors were present in the lives of the children who were living on the street. In other words how many of the factors that would promote psychosocial well-being were present in their lives. The protective factors are explained below and then the findings for each are presented.

Emotional stress

The question we asked here was, did these children have high levels of stress, had anything been done to reduce the impact of present, past and future, anticipated stress?

Two measures were used to look at emotional stress:

- The Reynolds Children's Depression Scale (RCDS) (Reynolds & Graves 1989), adapted for South African conditions, was used as a measure of emotional stress.
- A qualitative activity that has been used in numerous impact evaluations (Clacherty and Donald 2005, Hofman, Heslop, Clacherty

and Kesey 2007) that asks children to outline the burden of stress that they carry with them in their lives and then to say if any of the stressors have been removed.

Emotional stress scale

The emotional stress scale is administered individually (see Appendix) and consists of 29 questions about feelings in relation to everyday life events. Respondents choose an answer based on a four-point scale. The scale is simplified through a visual representation of, 'almost never, sometimes, a lot of the time, all the time'.

In order to make valid comparisons with normative data, instead of using the RCDS scores and norms, which were developed in the USA, a normative score (developed with the same scale) from a sample of 304 children in South Africa was used. These children were selected randomly from schools in four provinces across South Africa and from three socio-economic categories, namely informal settlements in urban areas, formal housing in urban areas, and rural areas. The children were not part of any project or other intervention. This group of children was used as a normative group for the purposes of comparison in this research.

Results of depression scale

It is important to note that the scale is a simple measure of emotional stress. Individual tests in the context of a detailed case history would need to be gathered to assess psychological ill-health in specific children. Direct comparison of the scores of the two groups suggests clearly that the 25 children included in this part of the study experience a higher burden of emotional stress than the normative group. The mean scores are 58.3⁴ (study group) and 37.9 (the normative group), respectively. Statistical analysis using a 2-sample independent t-test shows that there is a highly significant difference between the groups ($df=27$, $p<0.001$, $t=4.45$), favouring the normative group.

These results compare with the study of Richter and van der Walt (2003) in Johannesburg who found about two thirds of their sample of children from the streets to reveal depressive symptomatology.

Results of qualitative activity

Children were asked to list the things that cause stress in their lives in this activity. This was done through naming a number of stones and placing these in a basket or bag that represented 'the heavy burden we carry when something bad happens to us'. Once this had been done they were asked if any of these stressors had been reduced and if so which of them and how.

⁴ Note that these scores were derived using a modified scoring system and cannot be compared with scores derived from the RCDS scoring system.



The younger girls' group named the first and biggest stone, 'boys wanting to rape you'.

A boy will appear and say let's have sex and to you its difficult to do that. He always beats me, he said he'll rape me and infect me with HIV. (YG)

The second biggest stone for this group was 'parents dying'. This was the first stone named in the three other groups.

My mother passed away that's why I'm living on the streets it's because I have no one to care for me. (YG)

I think God did make my mother die on purpose. Even if he did it by mistake he is the only one who knows but I felt the pain and I tried to forget about it because it was confusing my mind. I had no on loving me so I was just an orphan. (OB)

Poverty at home was the next stone mentioned in the young girls and older girls group.

Not having clothes to wear at home. It's also a problem if you don't have money to carry to school. (YG)

'Not knowing what I'm going to eat at home'. That's the problem. (OG)

For both boys' groups it was 'being assaulted by the police'. In the one group there was a discussion about how the police are harassing them now about being on the street in 2010. Boys were clearly worried about the future.

They then mentioned 'problems in the family.'

*Being abused a lot after my parents died by uncles, aunts, grannies.
(YB)*

The boys also mentioned education.

*'I grew up without education' that is what this stone must be called.
(OB)*

They also mentioned being sick and even dying on the street.

*This stone must be called 'Being sick and no one to take care of you'.
YB)*

What if you pass away and no one knows? (OB)

The other big issue for children was 'the community doesn't like us'. Then came 'no food', 'no soap' and 'no clothes' – but interestingly these stones were smaller than the others.

We explored with the children if they felt more stressed at some times rather than others. The beginning of the week was more stressful than later in the week, because people give money more willingly closer to the weekend.

R: I want you to think about times when your bag with all the stones feels heaviest.

Monday.

R: Why?

Monday there are no people and if S (service organisation) has not come and the dustbins are empty there is no food. (YB)

R: Is there any difference between weekdays and weekends.

All: Yes!

R: What?

Mondays and Tuesdays are the worst days of our lives.

R: Why?

Even Wednesdays.

R: What makes these days bad?

There is few people visiting the beach.

People don't have money and there is no food in the dustbins.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday people have got some money. (YB)

They also mentioned that the bag was heavy early in the morning.

Maybe in the morning we always think about food, we don't have the money to buy soap, so we don't wash. The police will chase us and say we are not supposed to be there we are supposed to be in school. (YB)

When you wake up sometimes you are thinking about your home. Thinking about the past. (YB)



A sign of emotional stress mentioned by all the children was sleep problems. Many children mentioned bad dreams (see table in Theme 6). They also talked about how they often struggled to sleep at night.

It is worse at night when I am not sleeping. I think about why I left home because there was no specific thing pushed me away from home. I always think about my mother and then I fall asleep. When I can't sleep I start thinking about something happening around. (YG)

Researcher's reflections

One thing that characterised the work with the children was that at any one time at least one child would be asleep, either curled up in a corner apart from the group, or sleeping in the circle where we sat on the floor talking. At one point in a discussion I asked a question and realised that everyone was asleep! Siboniso and I sat quietly waiting until someone woke up.

I mentioned to one of the groups that I noticed that they slept often while we worked, I reassured them that this was ok but I wanted to understand why this was so. They had lots of explanations.

R: I've noticed that you are sleeping a lot and you said just now you don't have energy, tell me why you don't have energy.

Because we are not eating something healthy.

And it's cold.

When you're feeling hungry you can't do anything and then you sleep.

You sleep when you feel sad, anyway other people.

Sometimes we don't sleep in the night.

R: What are you doing in the night when you are not sleeping?

You can't sleep when you don't feel like sleeping.

We are talking. (YB)

When we are tired of the police we sleep during the day and don't sleep during the night.

R: So what are you doing during the night when you are not sleeping?

We are just waiting for the police so that we can recognise when they arrive. (OB)

At the end of the workshop one of the things they mentioned that they had liked was that we had allowed them to sleep when they needed to.

We like it here that you let us just sleep. You are not shouting at us to listen to you.

You are just free. (YB)

Another time when stress was at its worse was when it rained.

Right now I am crossing my fingers for the rain not to fall because my blankets are outside there. When the weather is like so (raining) I am not relaxed I am worried. (YB)

Children also talked about feeling stress when people discriminated against them.

You see sometimes when people don't give me money I get cross. It is because these people would sear at me. And I feel like I am not a person. (YB)

The police also give me a hard time. They say I'm stealing. Some people call the police and tell the police that I'm stealing but I don't steal.

R: How does that make you feel?

I feel unhappy.

Yes, you look unhappy here (points to picture)

I am cross. Sometimes when I am cross I just go to sleep and I know that when I get up I'll get some money. (OB)

All of the stressors mentioned by the children are still with them. When we asked if anything had helped them to get the stones out of the bag all groups said no. In the young girls' group the girls then went on to tell about more problems they had.

R: Is there anyone who has helped you to take these stones out? Have any stones gone out?

None.

I had a problem the time I lost my grandmother. (YG)

R: I want to know are these stones still in the basket? Are you still carrying all of them or have any been taken out?

They are still in.

No one is helping take them.

I never had that luck.

They tried to take some stones out but failed. (OB)

This exercise has been used widely in the evaluation of psychosocial well-being in other projects (Clacherty, 2007, Clacherty and Donald, 2005). In such work, children who had been part of a successful intervention very readily removed stones. They were very specific about removing those stones that related to the intervention and leaving others behind. In this research none of the children removed stones.

This bag is always heavy.

It is always the same. (YB)

The activity gives an insight into the high stress levels of these children. Coupled with the results of the emotional stress scale, which shows a likelihood of depression, it seems fair to say that these children carry a high burden of emotional stress. There are few protective factors around emotional stress present in their lives.

Social networks

The second protective factor we explored with the children was the social networks of support that they had. Bala (1996) talks about how support from family, friends and the community is a protective factor, something that will promote resilience. Children who are emotionally vulnerable will often isolate themselves from peers, family and the community.

We explored the nature of their social networks with the children through an activity that asked them to identify the people who are important to them. The information about groups in Theme 2 also applies here.

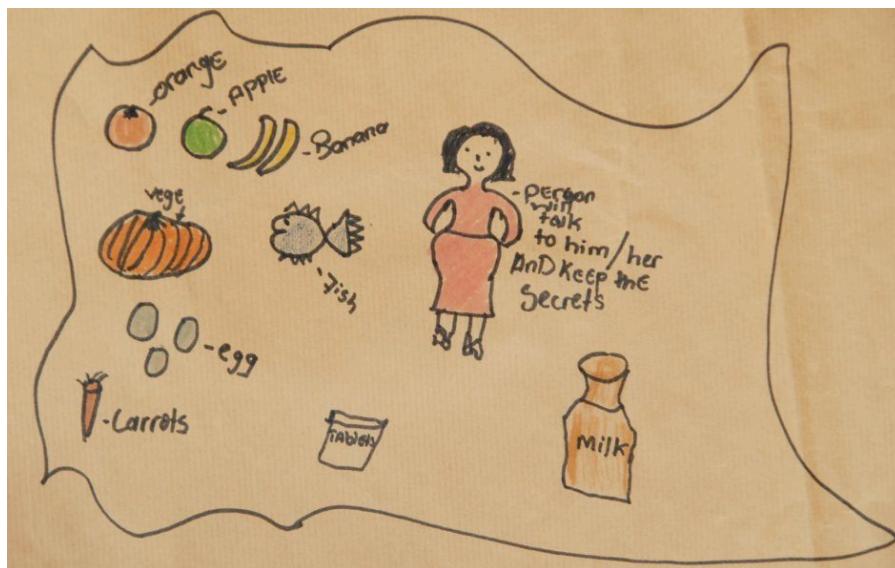
In their social network drawing the girls identified only people at their homes. They drew aunts, grannies, their babies and sisters. They talked about those people at home who supported them.

With my sister I get any kind of help that I need. (OG)

I get help from my mother. She stands by me. (YG)

There was some possibly contradictory thinking when the girls described the people at home who gave them support because in other discussions these same people had been described as critical and accusing. Nevertheless, there were some people at home that the girls obviously enjoyed a supportive relationship with. What is important in this context is that they did not spend a lot of time at home so could not easily access this support.

The girls did have some friends on the street but they felt they could not trust them (see Theme 2 above). None of them drew these friends in their social network drawing. The girls did not mention any adults who were part of their social network on the street.



I need a person to talk to who can keep secrets

The boys also mentioned people at home but far fewer than the girls. Some of the people they mentioned had died.

This is my father and my sister.

R: Why is your father on your drawing?

I used to love him. He is passed away. (YB)

The boys seemed to have weaker links and attachments to people at home than the girls. They did, however, mention friends in their group that supported them.

This is my brother I trust so much (points to a boy in the group). He is a playing boy.

R: Why is he important to you?

When I wake up there is somebody wanting to fight for me. (YB)



They also mentioned staff from service programmes as important people in their lives. They could articulate how these people gave them emotional support as well as practical support. This is one of the protective characteristics of a social network.

All the people of G (service organisation) are important to me.

R: Why?

Because they are helping me. If I say I want to go home they are going to help me. (OB)

This is F (Staff member of service organisation). He is advising me about the dangers of street life and it is better because he knows street life since he was also living on the street and ended up changing for good. He is advising us about the things we can do to succeed in life and we can also learn how life can be changed from what he did. (OB)

The use of a social network drawing has proved to be a very useful tool for looking at children's vulnerability in other contexts. For example in an evaluation of an orphan support programme in Tanzania (Clacherty and Donald, 2005) the children who were part of the programme had a much wider social network than children in the control group – they had more friends and had adult support in contrast to the children in the control group who often had only one friend or even none, and had no adult support.

The situation with children on the street is more complex. They have to live in a group to survive and they depend on adult service providers to survive. They also have complex relationships with family at home, often characterised by abuse but also by a deep wish for closer contact and acceptance by their

family. The results of the activity are, therefore, less clear when used in this context.

What is clear though is that in this exercise the girls present their support as entirely outside of the street (even if it is a 'wished for' support). They do not feel as if they have support from peers on the street because they cannot trust them.

The boys, however, do have some supportive relationships with service staff and peers, which is clearly a protective factor for them.

Problem solving

An activity that looked at children's ideas for solving problems was included in order to gain an understanding of their use of coping strategies and social skills. In addition, it gives a good idea of their sense of agency – how much control they feel they have over their lives (a sense of locus of control) which is an important emotional protective factor.

Children were asked to identify problems in different areas of their lives and then say how they had solved these problems. The same pattern emerged in all of the groups. In areas where the children had some control they revealed quite sophisticated problem-solving strategies, but in areas that they had no control over they felt completely powerless.

They could solve problems that arose in the group.

I had a conflict with a friend (in the group) so I apologised to him, because I knew I was wrong so I apologised. (YB)

If there is fighting you must be talking not fighting.

R: Are you doing that?

Yes we are talking until we all agree and reach an agreement. (YB)

They had many strategies for getting money (see Theme 1 above) and when describing these they showed a strong sense of agency. They also had strategies for avoiding police action such as cleaning up their place and staying clean and not smoking glue so they could stay in the area they liked.

But problems at home were more difficult to solve. Many of them described strategies they had tried but overall there was a sense of failure about these problems. Children talked about trying and not succeeding.

This one (picture) is called 'abuse at home'. I tried to fix it at home but I think I fixed it in a wrong way.

R: OK, you tried to fix but it was a wrong way?

Yes, I ran away from home and did all that but at the end of the day I saw that I was not right. (OB)

R: Have you been able to solve some of the problems?

I have tried.

R: Which one have you tried to solve?

To go home, I told the social worker to talk with my grandfather so that I can stay home. But ... my grandfather doesn't want me there, he said I'm a trouble because I steal his money. So the social workers said they will find me a place somewhere else. But they didn't. (OB)

R: Ok, anybody else tried to solve problems?

Yes, it's me

R: Which one?

The one about home.

I went to the shelter and they took me back home and they spoke to my parents. At home my step-granny didn't like me but I stayed there by force although she didn't like me. I then realised that I can't sort this problem so I ended up going back to the street. (OB)

The above quotes are interesting as they show some sense of agency; they had tried to solve the problem but it was too big for them. What is clear from this discussion is that some of the children had gone to an adult for help to solve their home problems but they were often let down and not given the support they needed.

I did go to the social worker to help but she did not believe about my granny and she sent me back. (YG)

There was, therefore a sense of powerlessness about problems at home.

It's not easy to solve those problems because no one is supporting you at the time. (OG)

The one area of complete powerlessness was the girls' inability to do anything about abuse by boys in the group (see Theme 2 above).

... I don't have a choice. (YG)

R: have you ever talked to him?

Never! I would get beaten. (YG)

R: So why don't you leave him?

He will beat me. (OG)

Another aspect of agency is the idea of identity. Most of the groups at some point discussed how they did not feel they were real people because they lived on the street.

I wish to get education so I can become a real person.

R: But you are a real person now.

Not when you live on the streets you are not a real person. (OG)

This is linked to the discrimination they experience in the community, which makes them feel 'like an animal'. (See Theme 3 above).

Overall, therefore the picture is a mixed one of vulnerability on one hand and of resilience on the other. In some situations the children showed high levels of problem solving and a sense of agency but in other situations they show powerlessness.

This finding is congruent with previous work with South African children on the street. Donald and Swart-Kruger 1994 highlighted a real paradox between the children's developmental risk and vulnerability (because they are living on the street) and their resourcefulness, adaptability and capacities for coping.

Richter and van der Walt (2003) used a battery of formal tests to explore (amongst other things) cognitive abilities and problem-solving capacities of children from the streets. They found a similar paradox with significant vulnerabilities but also in one third of the sample signs of resilience particularly in terms of problem-solving abilities.

Researcher's reflections

On my way to the final day of the girls' workshop I drew up at a traffic light and a small boy came to the window. At first he put on his sad face for me and put out his hands, then suddenly his face burst into a grin as he recognised me from the younger boys' workshop the week before. I wound down the window and asked how he was and he grinned an even bigger grin and waved me off as the robot turned green.

Later that day as I was on my way from our workshop space to our lunch venue across the road, he came up to me and asked if he could talk to me. I said yes and we sat on the grass in the sun. He seemed very, very sad and so different from the boy who had grinned at me that morning. I asked what was making him sad and big tears rolled down his cheeks. He said that he had been thinking about our workshop and all the things we had talked about since he saw me this morning. He said he did not want to live on the street any more. He had been at a place of safety for some time last year after being on the street for a few years and he wanted to go back there. He had been naughty and that is why they had asked him to leave but now he wanted to try again as he was very tired of being on the street. I said I couldn't make any promises as I did not live in Durban and I was just here for the research but that we would find someone who was working there to see if they could help him.

I took him with me to lunch and spoke to the social worker who was supporting us. She spoke to him and followed up with the local centre that he had contact with and there are now plans to help him get off the street.

This interaction showed me how research can raise issues for children and also raise deep emotions and how important it is to have some way of following up.

Future orientation

A future orientation is evidence of emotional health, of resilience. We assessed whether this factor was present in the children through an activity called 'where will I be in five years?' In previous work (Donald and Clacherty, 2005, Clacherty and Donald, 2005, Donald 2003) this activity produced three main types of responses. The first is complete hopelessness for the future in children that were very vulnerable emotionally (child heads of households).

The second is wishful thinking (I will be the president, a music star), which is also a sign of a lack of hope. The third is very clear, achievable goals (in children who were part of a very successful orphan organisation) such as 'I will be a successful farmer', or 'I will be a tailor in the village'. The last response shows an achievable goal and a sense of hope for the future. These children could also articulate how they would achieve this goal.

In this research the response was mixed. Some children in all of the groups did not have hope for their future.

I can't explain (where I will be in five years time) because I don't know what could happen.

Maybe I would still be like this (on the street). (YB)

Others had great dreams similar to the wishful thinking described above.

I want to be famous.

I want to be an actor. I want to put some songs together so I can be a star. (OB)

The girls described themselves in healed family relationships, earning money and looking after their children.

In 2013 I will be working, raising my boy child and be able to build my own home. (OG)

But what characterised their responses was that they placed the onus on others who would make this future a reality.

There is this man who said he will take me to this place for victims of drugs. He will put me there and I will be able to study well.

R: So do you have contact with him, have you asked him?

I need to go and look for his number, he is a policeman. I know his name so I will look for him until I get him. (OG)

When the people at P (service organisation) have assisted me to sort out things with my family then it will be easy for me to go back to school. (OG)

Many of the boys wanted to be back at school. But they too qualified their hope with the idea that they would need help.

I will be at school that time if I am fortunate. (OB)

We try to discuss with those people (service organisation) that they return us to school. (OB)

Generally, therefore, the children have little future orientation, a sign of emotional vulnerability.

Psychosocial well-being - Conclusion

In many areas essential to psychosocial health these children show vulnerability. They show clear signs of emotional stress with little hope of help in reducing this stress. They do have social networks but these are lacking especially in the area of adult support. They do have problem-solving strategies in areas of their lives that they have control over but there are large and very important areas such as family and sexuality that they have no control over. This gives them a sense of powerlessness and generally a lack of agency and even identity. They have dreams and talents but perhaps quite pragmatically many of them know that they will need help in fulfilling these dreams.

A more detailed analysis with the use of further tools to measure emotional well-being would need to be used to make a more conclusive assessment of the children's psychosocial health. The few simple tools we were able to use do show, however, that these children are vulnerable emotionally. They have few of the factors present in their lives that are needed to promote resilience.

The following quote from a study that looked at the psychological health of children on the streets in Ethiopia casts light on many of the issues described by the children in this research. It also points to an intervention approach that would build resilience.

... our research and field work corroborate that relationships are indeed indispensable to the psychosocial well-being of the individual. A child's identity is formulated by his or her environment, but more importantly, identity is understood to be co-constructed by the individual's internal perceptions of self and the perception of others towards that self.

Furthermore, we assert that the primary source of psychosocial distress in children on the street originates from the child's perception – whether real or imagined – of exclusion, rejection and isolation, in some degree, from the community at large. Consequently, promotion of psychosocial well-being of street youth is best achieved through the facilitation of relationships with peers, the family and the various social domains of the community (Shah, Graidage and Valencia 2005:5, p5).

Epilogue

Reporting back on the research

About a hundred children came into the Life Space room at Umthombo's inner city centre, milling around, talking to each other and collapsing on the floor once they were in the room. Many settled themselves down to sleep on the carpet while others leaned against the walls talking.

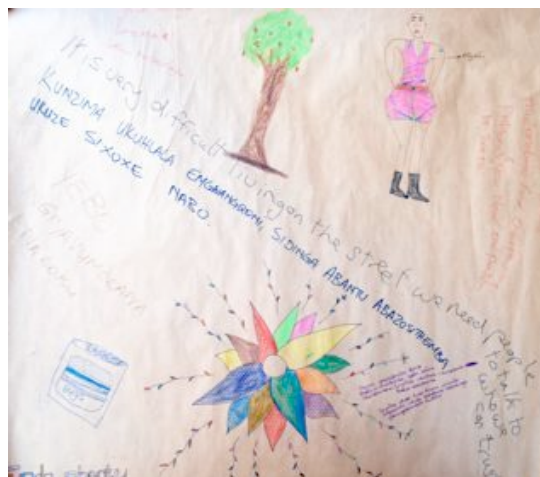
Tom, the director of Umthombo managed to get a little bit of silence and explained that we were all here to hear about the research that had been done. Siboniso and I got up and I began explaining that not everyone had participated in the research so it was important for us to check our findings with all of them. Siboniso began translating, making jokes as he did. The children laughed at him and slowly became more attentive.

We had summarised the research findings into twelve points and had written each one on a large piece of brown paper. As we read each one out we could hear discussion about that point and some of the children who were lying down sat up and began to listen. As we got to each point there was spontaneous discussion and interaction and many called out "Yes, we agree..." As each point was read we could hear comments about the police, "What about the police?" "The police are a problem." When we finally got to this point there was loud agreement that harassment by police was an issue they faced.

When Siboniso translated the point, "People at home say we are bad when we go back" there was spontaneous loud applause. This shows how important the issue of returning home is for the children and young people and how difficult it is for them to go home once they have been on the street.

We then placed the big sheets of paper around the room and invited the group to write, or draw a comment on the sheets to show their agreement or disagreement. We also placed some blank sheets around the room so they could add any points they felt we had left out.

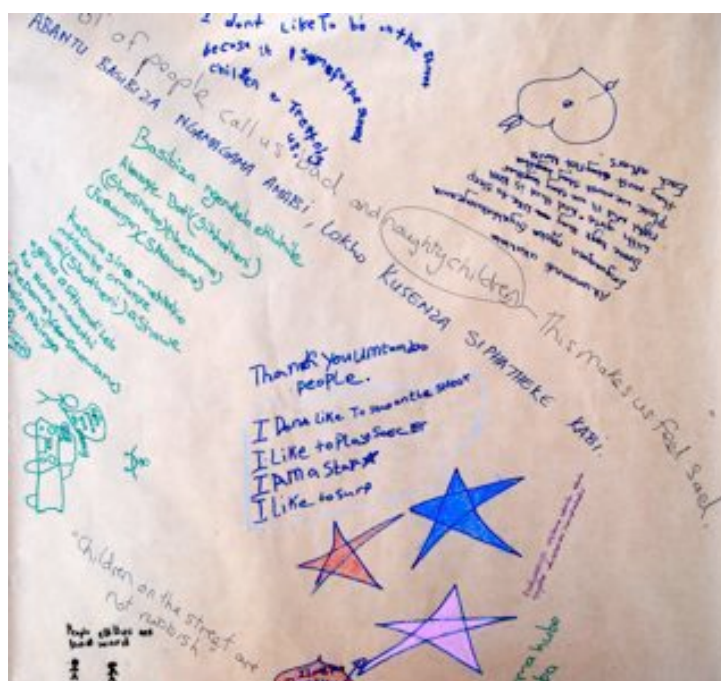
A few of the children left at this point, while others continued talking to friends or sleeping, but many of them went from sheet to sheet drawing or writing their comments. A group of girls sat around the sheet with "It is very difficult living on the street, we need people we can talk to who we can trust." on it and drew a huge flower. When I asked why they had drawn a flower they said they agreed with this point very much and wanted to show that this was important.



Umthombo had invited adults from other service organisations and from government departments that work with children on the street to the meeting. Some of them sat alongside the children and asked what they had drawn or written. Some also wrote comments for the children who could not write well. There was a lot of discussion amongst them. Many of them commented afterwards that it was the first time they had interacted directly with children who lived on the street.

Once everyone had had a chance to write something we closed the meeting by explaining what would happen with the research and how it would be used for advocacy around the needs of children on the street. Tom then announced (to loud applause) that there was Kentucky Chicken downstairs for everyone.

Siboniso and I reflected afterwards how seriously the children and young people had engaged with the process. They were keen to make their voices heard in the research. We were also humbled by how they trusted us and Umthombo to take the research forward on their behalf.



The list of issues with some of the comments children made
It's very difficult living on the street. We need people to talk to who we can trust
I agree because you sometimes find overpowering problems and you need old person to talk to.

We come to the street because of problems at home
Yes our problem at home it's difficult but other they come to look for money at Durban.
Yes, Parents are both deceased grandmother sends me to sleep with men for money (so I ran away).

You need to stay in a group if you are on the street
I agree because it hard especially when you are a girl you need to stay in a group because when the strangers comes to attack they find it hard when you are all in a

group.

The boys sometimes can rape the girls within the group however it is still safer in a group.

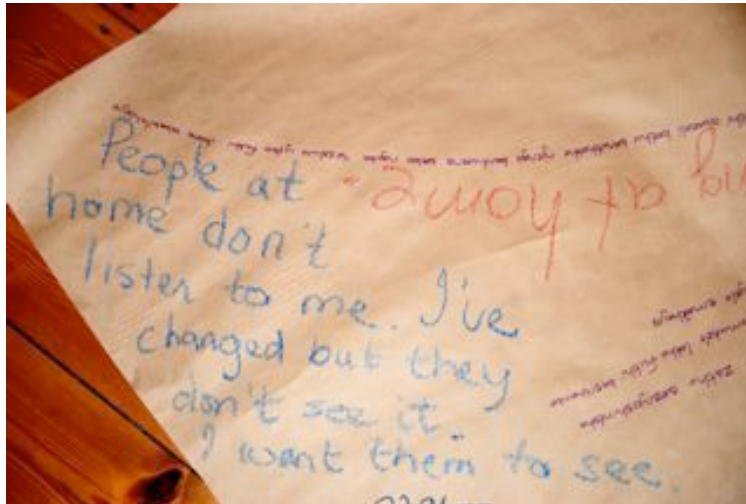
Older boys take our money and beat us up.

Older boys abuse us, assault us they want our money when don't give them they stab us. Call for an ambulance.

People at home also say we are bad when we go back

People at home don't listen to me. I have changed but they don't see it. I want them to see.

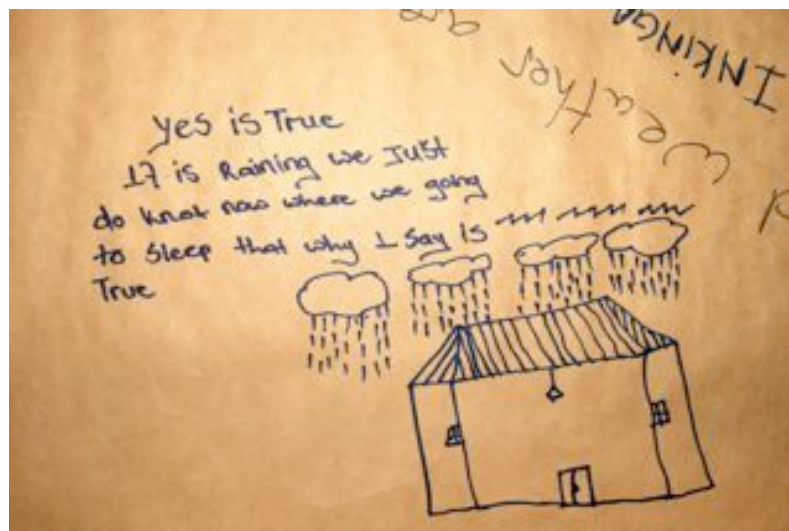
I disagree because I belong at home.



Rain and cold weather are very bad when you live on the street

We get sick when it rains if we stay in the street. We have no clothes, no shoes even jacket that is such a big problem.

This is true if it is raining we just do not know where we going to sleep that why I say is true.



Life on the street can be very hard and so sometimes we smoke glue to help us feel better

Some of the boys they smoking glue

And some of the girls the smoking glue and drugs

I disagree because when children smoke glue they act like crazy people and they sleep anywhere.

Girls some of us are selling with their bodies because they want money.

Police abuse us a lot

Yes is true about this police.

Police is hitting us.

Agree police they take our clothes.

Policemen promise to arrest us if we sleep in the street.

Yes! Police they abuse us about beat us. We run away from them, they say we must go back home.



It is difficult to find places to keep clean on the street

I agree because even when you go to the beach the cleaners catch you and tell the police.

Umthombo help us a lot we thank you staff of Umthombo

It is difficult because we clean our body or we bath on the street whereby people they walk they see me naked.

We do some fun activities while live on the street

I like to play ladies soccer

We are number one so far surf!



We do lots of different things to get food

*We can get food by selling shoes and then we can get the food to save.
Disagree.*

A lot of people call us bad and naughty children. This makes us feel sad.

I don't like to stay on the street. I like to play soccer.

I am a star. I like to surf.

Children on the street are not rubbish.

People call us bad word I don't like people call me bad word.

Some boys they like to sleep with girls and that is not right. And if we stay together please we must stay together they must not abuse each others.

I don't like to be on the street because it is some of the street children are threatening us.

Man sodomise boys, younger ones.

We get help from different organisations on the street

Umthombo help us a lot and we love them so much because they help us a lot and they give us food.

We love Umthmbo people because they help us a lot.

Umthmobo street children south Africa.

Surfing.

What you wish for street kids wish for too.

We love surfing for ever.

Getting HIV/AIDS is a very big worry for us

Love life save the kids from the street.

About HIV and AIDS we must test our blood so early so we can know our status.

Because AIDS kills.

Because when we stay on the street some of us get abused by sexual you can't even say no because you get held by the person you don't know.

The group added two points

We (don't) refuse to go to school.

We need to go back to school but it's hard.

Some of us we didn't run away (from) at home.

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5. Appendix: Research instruments

Activities

Lived experience

My life journey

Materials: Large piece of paper and wax crayons and food colouring and paint brushes.

Focus: Spatial movement and significant relationships over life time – this will give an idea of push and pull factors including HIV/AIDS

Step 1:

Say: 'Who has been in a taxi? Does the taxi just go straight to one place or does it stop along the way? Our lives are like a taxi ride. We start in one place and stop along the way.'

Show me in a drawing the place where you started from and show me who was living there with you. Show me who was important to you at that time in your life. '

Let them draw this.

'Now show me the other places you have been to in your journey and who was living there.'

Step 2:

'Colours can tell how we are feeling – each of the colours in these bottles (point to food colouring bottles) is a feeling. Think about each of the places you have stopped on your journey and show me with a colour how you were feeling in that place.' (colouring washes over the wax crayon without deleting it).

Step 3:

Talk about what they have drawn.

i) **First homes**

Find out about deaths and illness of significant people in their lives – are these people still all there? (Don't ask specifically but we are looking for HIV related reasons for being on street)

ii) **Places before they came to live on the street** – look for migration caused by family breakdown from death or illness.

iii) **Spaces of arrival** - try and find out how they came to be on the street – the process

iv) **Moving between street and home** – try and find out if they move between street and home and why

Step 4:

Now show me where you would like your journey to go. What would have to change if you were to stop living on the street? What help would you need? Draw and talk about this.

v) **Resettlement and alternative strategies for leaving the street** – what options do they feel they have – what do they ‘wish’ for – see if there are any HIV related reasons for not going back home.

My day (daily activities and services they access)

Step 1:

Make a drawing of what happens in your day from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep.

Step 2

Talk about the drawing. Ask specifically about services.

Step 3

Using stones and flowers show me the good and bad things in your day. Talk about these.

Step 4

Explore if they think about HIV in any way in their daily lives. Use a silhouette figure.

Bring out a silhouette figure and say ‘this is xx. He lives with a group of boys on the street in Durban. Does he know about HIV or AIDS? What does he think it is? How does he know? Does she ever think about it in his day? When? Why?’

The streets

A large painting titled – ‘The Streets’

Children feel a sense of freedom when painting and this open-ended activity could yield a wide range of experiences.

Photos: If we decide to go with photos I would link them to this activity. Take photos that tell a story about ‘The Streets’. We would then stick them on to the painting as a collage and talk about them.

Glue

Step 1:

Look at picture of child sniffing glue (photo or drawing)

What is happening?

Why is s/he doing this?

Where do children get the glue from and how much pay do they pay?

What do they see when they smoke glue?

How long does it last?

What do they do to make it last longer?

Do they hide it?
Why?

Step 2:

Act out what you know about glue in groups of 3.

Body Maps: physical and emotional well-being

Materials: Large paper and crayons and markers and stickers

Step 1

One child lies down and we draw around them making a body map. This is a child just like you.

Step 2

Sometimes this boy/girl gets sick. What kind of sicknesses did you have when you were little? How shall we show that? Let them decide where they want to show it on the map and how. Let them do this.

Step 3

Put a yellow sticker if you have had that illness.

Step 4

Now think about other illnesses you get now and other injuries that can happen to your body? Where and how should we show that? Now show if you have had that next to it with a sticker.

Let them add coloured dots or stickers to the side of the chart to show how many of them have had that. How many have had treatment in hospital, for what? Broken arm? Gunshot? Where? How many? etc.

Each child should have a turn to portray something on the body map.

Step 4

Now sometimes when we feel very afraid we feel it in our body right? What does our body do? How should we show that?

Move on to ask about the physical feelings that accompany emotion. Where and how should they be shown on the body map? How many have experienced this – red stickers? Also ask what were the reasons – record the reasons on a separate sheet and attach with masking tape.

We need to think carefully how we will record this information – it is both qualitative and quantitative.

Step 5

What does this child need if they are to be healthy and happy?
Each draw a few things and we add this to the map and talk about it.

Psychosocial well-being analyses

Quantitative

Adapted form of Reynolds Depression scale

Qualitative

Emotional stress – stones in the bag

Material: a bag, a pile of stones of different sizes, labels for the stones and a pen.

Step 1:

Stones are in the bag.

Ask one child to try and pick up the bag. It is very heavy. Say:

‘When bad things happen it is like a lot of stones come into our bag making it very heavy for us to carry.’

‘What are the stones in your bag called?’

Step 2:

Take all the stones out and then as children name them write the name of the stone on a label and put it back in the bag.

Step 3

Now ask, ‘Are those stones still there?’

‘Is there anyone here who has been able to take some of the stones out?’

(Make it okay not to have stones taken out – but ask the question – we want to see if they still feel as if they carry a heavy burden)

‘Which stones were taken out.’

‘Who or what helped you to take them out?’

Step 4

Take the My Day drawings and place them around the room. Think about your day – are there some times when your bag is very, very heavy? What times? Are there some times when it is lighter? Or is it just always heavy?

Step 5

Put the life journey drawings around and ask at which time was your basket MOST heavy? And which time was it lighter? Was there any time when there were no stones?

Social networks

Material: Paper, crayons and stones

Step 1

I want you to draw a picture for me of all the people in your life who are important to you.

Step 2

Put a stone next to those ones who are VERY important to you. Why are they important for you? What do they do for you? What do you do for them?

Step 3

Now talk about the other people in your network.

Step 4

Now take leaves and place them next to the people you really trust. What makes you to trust them?

Problem solving

Ability to have ideas for solving problems is an aspect of resilience – it suggests a measure of locus of control. This will also show coping strategies and how services help them to solve problems.

Note: It is important to focus on the fact that most problems have some kind of solution though they may not be the ones that first come to mind for a child, for example, my problem is my mother is dead. The way to solve the problem would be that she is alive again; rather focus on whether other people could do some of what your mother did for you. Those problems that have no solutions are not a problem but a handicap.

Materials: Large piece of brown paper, crayons, small paper and glue.

Step 1

'OK, we are going to talk about problem parts of your life. Where do you have problems? As they name them draw circles on the paper and write the name in each circle - don't worry about making this too specific – just help them think of areas of life. Make sure that the area of relationships comes up.

Step 2

'Now think of some of problems you have in these different parts of your life. Draw them on this large paper.' Talk about what they have drawn.

Step 3

'Is there anything you have been able to do about these problems? Talk about what you have done about them. Have you been able to solve these

problems?' Draw pictures of these solutions on the small papers and stick them on the problems. Talk about the solutions they draw.

Future orientation

This is an indicator of resilience.

Material: a large piece of paper and a pen to draw a picture of a child and steps.

Step 1

Draw a set of steps moving up the paper.

Draw a child at the bottom of the steps.

'Imagine yourself here, now as a young boy or girl and then here you are at the top of the steps in 5 years time.'

Step 2

Think about what you would like to be doing in 5 years time? Talk about what you think you will be doing.

Step 3

'What are you doing now to help you to get up those steps?'

Step 4

'what more would you need to help you get up these steps?'

Children's Depression Scale

Directions: Here are some sentences about how you might have been feeling over the past two weeks or so. Read each sentence and decide how often you feel this way. Decide if you feel this way: Almost never, sometimes, a lot of the time or almost all the time. Tick the answer that describes how you really feel. There is no wrong or right answer.

	Almost never	Some- times	A lot of the time	All the time
1. I feel happy				
2. I worry about school				
3. I feel lonely				
4. I feel my parents don't like me				
5. I feel important				
6. I feel like hiding from other people				
7. I feel sad				
8. I feel like crying				
9. I feel that no one cares about me				
10. I feel like playing with other children				
11. I feel sick				
12. I feel loved				
13. I feel like running away				
14. I feel like hurting myself				
15. I feel that other kids don't like me				
16. I feel upset about things				
17. I feel life is not fair				
18. I feel tired				
19. I feel I am bad				
20. I feel I am no good				
21. I have trouble paying attention in class				
22. I feel sorry for myself				
23. I feel like talking to other children				
24. I have trouble sleeping				
25. I feel like having fun				
26. I feel worried				
27. I get stomach aches				
28. I feel bored				
29. I feel nothing I do helps anyone				