What Works in Street Children Programming: The JUCONI Model

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by Sarah Thomas de Benítez

Foreword by Rick Little

International Youth Foundation®

Sarah Thomas de Benítez

Born and educated in the United Kingdom, Sarah Thomas de Benítez has spent over a decade working with and for street children. Arriving in Mexico in 1985 as a young diplomatic officer in the British Embassy, Sarah later joined the UK's International Children's Trust as its first field officer in Latin America. In 1988, with husband Gabriel Benítez, Sarah co-founded the first "JUCONI" Foundation (Junto Con Los Niños) for street children in Puebla, Mexico, serving as executive director for five years. JUCONI Mexico was quickly recognized by UNESCO as an "Innovator in Education", gaining widespread public and private support. In 1994, Gabriel and Sarah co-founded a JUCONI Foundation in Ecuador, serving as directors until 1996. Sarah then led the pioneering inter-institutional META Project, aimed at improving services for excluded children in Mexico and Ecuador. Mother of two and now a dual Mexican-British citizen, Sarah received her master's degree in public policy at Princeton University, USA. She is consultant to the JUCONI foundations, the Consortium for Street Children, UK, and the International Children's Trust.

International Youth Foundation®

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) was established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources and attention to the many effective local efforts that are transforming young lives across the globe. Currently operating in more than 60 countries, IYF is one of the world's largest public foundations supporting programs that improve the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. IYF's "What Works" series examines cutting edge issues in youth development and aims to provide practitioners, policymakers, donors, and others supporting youth initiatives with insights into effective practices and innovative approaches impacting young people around the world.

Dedicated to all street children everywhere

and in memory of Gabriel Benítez de Thomas

(1962-1996)

Table of Contents

It has been estimated that more than 100 million street and working children around the world are struggling to survive under harsh and often exploitative conditions. While accurate figures are elusive — there is clear evidence that the problem is on the rise, particularly in regions of the world undergoing economic or political transitions. Unfortunately, even the label "street children" is demeaning in itself. It depersonalizes each child — making him or her a "problem to be solved." And this global tragedy is only going to get worse. By the year 2025, more than 60 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas. Already, the rapid pace of urbanization deprives up to a billion people of adequate shelter and basic services, forcing them to live in crowded and unhealthy conditions.

Every year, millions of children are pulled into life on the street by economic need, problems at home, commercial exploitation, or poor access to schools. The majority of these street-based children are neither homeless nor delinquent, but are unprotected working children who are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Their lives on the streets leave them with few opportunities to form emotional connections to caring adults, or to develop the social abilities, education, or job skills necessary to rejoin society and lead productive and meaningful lives.

In *What Works in Street Children Programming: The JUCONI Model,* author Sarah Thomas de Benítez examines her own organization's work with street children over the past decade, and provides practical knowledge and insight on the most effective ways to improve the lives of this socially excluded segment of the population.

Through refreshingly candid observations of the successes and failures of the two JUCONI organizations she founded in Mexico and later in Ecuador, the author examines "what works" in a context that practitioners in the field will immediately find valuable to their work. We are grateful for her clarity and honesty as she tackles one of the most complex social and economic challenges facing urban communities today, and for the practical "lessons" she has unearthed in the process. She admits that in such an unchartered field of work, there is a good deal of trial and error.

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) has launched its "What Works" series of publications to address some of the most pressing challenges facing young people around the world, and to broadly disseminate the lessons IYF and its partners are learning about effective programs serving today's young people. The goal is to create learning for impact — knowledge that produces tangible improvements in the lives of children and youth. This report, the second to be published in the "What Works"

series, takes on some of the many difficult issues that surround any work with street and working children, and places them in a local context.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for how governments and NGOs can and must work together more effectively to give street children the services and attention they need to reconnect with their families and their communities and lead productive lives. Among her suggestions, Sarah Thomas de Benítez calls for the development and use of minimum program standards, assessment tools, and cost measurements in the field, and the wide dissemination of working models that will build on the progress already being made in improving the lives of street children.

IYF's "What Works" publication series is a vehicle to collect the kinds of valuable lessons and "best practices" detailed in this report, and share them broadly. Through these publications and related electronic learning activities, our goal is to stimulate a conversation among practitioners and others directly engaged in these issues that will advance our collective understanding of "what works" in positive youth development. This publication on street children is another step to improving our understanding of how best to contribute to tangible improvements in young people's lives. We hope it prompts all of us to more learning — and more action.

Rick R. Little
Founder and President
International Youth Foundation

Through these publications and related electronic learning activities, our goal is to stimulate a conversation among practitioners and others directly involved in these issues that will advance our understanding about "what works" in positive youth development.

A ndrea began selling roses alongside her older sisters on the streets of Guayaquil City, Ecuador when she was just five years old. At the age of seven, Nicolás found himself destitute and imprisoned in Puebla City's juvenile detention center on charges of aggravated assault. This paper traces the efforts of two organizations to find "what works" for street children like Andrea and Nicolás that would enable them to build solutions and become full members of society. I have been deeply involved with the founding and growth of both organizations, and this paper represents my own view of their work and progress.

The first Junto Con Los Niños (JUCONI)[1] Foundation was established in 1989, in the central Mexican city of Puebla, as a joint venture between one British and two Pueblan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)[2].

It was founded in response to a convergence of international, national, and local events. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) had just been adopted, highlighting the appalling living conditions of disadvantaged children. It was strongly supported by Latin American governments. UNICEF had also campaigned throughout the 1980s to draw global attention to the growing populations of children living and working on the streets of Latin America's cities. In addition, the Mexican authorities had finally recognized, in the aftermath of two devastating earthquakes in 1985, that street children were a large and growing sector of the country's most disadvantaged youth. As a result, the Mexican government launched a national initiative "Menores en Situaciones Extraordinarias," or "MESE,"[3] with UNICEF support.

Meanwhile, nearly one hundred nongovernmental groups had sprung up in Mexico City to address street children's problems, but by the late 1980s most were floundering and increasingly isolated. They lacked sufficient resources and were finding it hard to survive in the complex environment of one of the world's largest cities. Nobody knew how many children were living or working on the streets. At the time, estimates of the number of street children in the country fluctuated wildly — from several thousand to well over a million. The situation was chaotic.

The national MESE initiative was adopted by 30 of the country's 32 states, including Puebla, but by 1991 had almost petered out. The Pueblan MESE initiative, launched in 1986, was able to galvanize civil society into action. But it was poorly designed and under-financed. JUCONI was thus born as the local government's MESE initiative slowly fizzled out and NGOs began to assert leadership in the work with street children.

From the beginning, JUCONI Mexico was an independent association, with

> **Nearly one hundred non-governmental groups had sprung up in Mexico City to address street children's problems, but by the late 1980s most were floundering and increasingly isolated.**

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[1] Junto Con los Niños (JUCONI) means *Together with the Children.*

[2] The two Pueblan NGOs were the Fundación Fuad Abed Halabi and the Instituto Poblano de Readaptación, Asociación Civil (IPODERAC). The foreign NGO was Britain's International Children's Trust (ICT)

[3] The Mexican government's Menores en Situaciones Extraordinarias (MESE) program was designed to help all particularly vulnerable children, including street children.

no political or religious affiliations. (I served as JUCONI Mexico's first Director General and President). Our mandate was clear: to improve the lives of street children. Our first management committee determined that JUCONI's highest priority should be to meet street children's needs, with the requirements of donors, government bodies, and other stakeholders taking second place.[4] Local expertise, international financial support, independent decision-making capacity, and a clear mandate to help street children combined to give JUCONI room to experiment, to learn from its own and others' mistakes, and to find more effective ways to help street children.

In 1991, we were approached by the co-founders of CANICA,[5] a new NGO in Oaxaca, who asked for JUCONI's help to develop their program for street children. Our collaboration over the next couple of years helped CANICA put basic management structures and program systems into place.

By 1993, JUCONI's leaders were keen to discover whether our experiences could be useful to helping street children in other countries. I was particularly interested in exploring the option of setting up a second JUCONI in Ecuador, a country with many similarities to Mexico. We wanted to start in a city, possibly the capital city of Quito, where there was a significant population of street children. We also wanted to come at the invitation of local organizations. We hired a research team who concluded that Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city, was by far the most promising candidate. A city largely ignored by international NGOs, Guayaquil had a community of local NGOs that, together with the local government, invited JUCONI to join them in responding to the needs of growing numbers of street children.[6] Again, estimates of numbers of street children were rather wild and unsubstantiated.[7] But hundreds of children were observed by our researchers working daily on the city's streets, and the city's youth detention center held many street-living children.[8]

As a result, the second JUCONI Foundation was launched in 1994, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Ecuador's JUCONI was also strongly focused on collaboration between local and foreign civil society associations,[9] and had the same independent policy-making capacity as the Mexican JUCONI. JUCONI Ecuador, however, started with two advantages over its Mexican sister. It incorporated lessons learned in JUCONI Mexico's first five years,[10] and 95% of its first four

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[4] I served as JUCONI Mexico's first Director General (1989-1994) and President (1989-1999).

[5] El Centro de Apoyo para el Niño de la Calle A.C. of Oaxaca

[6] Robin Milton and Lisa Smith, 1992, *Research Report on Ecuador for JUCONI,* unpublished JUCONI document.

[7] INNFA, the semi-governmental organization responsible for children in Guayaquil in 1992 claimed there were 25,000 child street-workers in a city of 2 million inhabitants.

[8] Ministerio de Bienestar Social in Guayaquil

[9] JUCONI-Ecuador's first collaborative ventures, for three years, were with local NGO Fundación Principe de Paz and grassroots community movement Mi Cometa. The foreign NGO was, again, Britain's International Children's Trust (ICT)

[10] I served as JUCONI Ecuador's first executive director (1994-1996), alongside operational director, Gabriel Benítez (1994-1996) who had served as JUCONI Mexico's operational director (1991-1994).

[11] JUCONI Ecuador won the largest joint grant ever awarded to a program for street children by the European Commission and Britain's Overseas Development Agency (now DfID), with additional support from Britain's private and philanthropic sectors

Javier, an early resident of JUCONI House, washes his clothes as part of his personal hygiene routine, Puebla, Mexico.

years' funding had already been secured.[11] Yet it also faced the complex challenges of working in a politically unstable and low-income country environment.

The two JUCONIs continue to pool experiences, learning from each other as well as from their various local partners. They have a similar mission: "To help street children and children at high risk of social exclusion build solutions that respond to their needs, in a way that ensures healthy personal development, within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." They both have forged strong links with international agencies. UNESCO's Basic Education Program, the European Commission, and the British Government's Department for International Development are among the largest supporters, providing important resources and stimulating opportunities for technical collaboration.[12] Both JUCONIs attract significant national and local funding. JUCONI Mexico has a greater range of national and local supporters, from business, schools, clubs and individuals to federal and municipal agencies. JUCONI Ecuador, younger and working in a smaller, less developed economy, has not yet received funding from the Ecuadorian authorities, but has gained support from national and local groups and individuals. I am convinced that one of the keys to NGO autonomy is diversity of funding sources. For the JUCONIs to be able to focus on meeting children's needs, instead of responding to donor priorities, they need to continue to diversify their sources of support.

This report describes my view of some of the lessons we have learned over the past decade, and seeks to explain some of the thinking behind the decisions we have made.

I have chosen to tackle ten main themes that seem to me to be definitive in explaining the approach taken by the two JUCONIs to helping street children, and to chart how key decisions were made.

[12] Other major international supporters include Spain's Solidaridad Internacional, Holland's SKN, USA's International Youth Foundation and Britain's Baring Foundation.

■ Sections 1 and 2 deal with the issues of service delivery versus advocacy, and places the work of the JUCONI in the broader context of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child

■ Section 3 describes the centralized educational process that has become the foundation for the JUCONI efforts

■ Section 4 looks at the different groups of children who participate in the process, their specific needs, and how the JUCONIs work to meet them

■ Sections 5 and 6 explore the complexities of measuring children's progress in programs designed to help them

■ Section 7 addresses the different degrees of participation by children in JUCONI services

■ Section 8 looks beyond helping street children to targeting children at high risk through prevention services

■ Section 9 examines the contentious issue of children at work

■ Section 10 looks at the "numbers game" and explores broad issues of measurement, program quality, and costs.

The conclusion draws these ten strands together and offers recommendations for action.

Jorge Villar

JUCONI educator Arnulfo explains the rules of a "future aspirations" game to street-working girl Claudia, in Claudia's family home, Puebla, Mexico.

From the beginning, JUCONI leaders chose a service-delivery approach rather than advocacy as their primary tool to help improve the lives of street children. This decision reflected the experience in service delivery of JUCONI's founding members and their passionate concern to "do something practical" by offering opportunities to some of the most obviously disadvantaged children in society. Although at the time the decision was led more by the heart than the head, this choice still seems to have been a good one that has held up over the years.

To give the reader an initial frame of reference, I have pulled together some of the more unusual features of JUCONI interventions, which will be explored in greater detail later in the paper:

■ Both JUCONI Mexico and JUCONI Ecuador provide direct services to 400 to 500 girls and boys every year. Approximately half of these are street children and 50% are their younger siblings. Street children participating in JUCONI Mexico's services are: street-living children, street-working children, and market-working children. A separate program exists for each of these groups. JUCONI Ecuador's Program focuses primarily on street-working children.

■ The JUCONIs focus their prevention work on vulnerable siblings of street children who share community and family situations and are therefore at genuinely high risk of taking to street life.

■ The JUCONI approach is to identify and build on strengths, helping street children create solutions that will enable them to integrate into mainstream society, and helping their younger siblings to develop solutions that will prevent their exclusion from society.

■ The JUCONIs provide personalized, family-based, integral educational and psychotherapeutic services, in a sequence of steps. The first step is preparation, which includes intensive and regular contact with children, recreational activities, and preparing street children for life away from the street. The second step is intensive change, which could include living in a residential home and attending some formal schooling, or working with a child's family. The final stage is follow-on, or tracking, which helps graduates integrate back into society through home visits, work visits, and continued counseling. A child and his or her family progress from stage to stage, finishing the process in three to five years.

■ The JUCONIs emphasize balanced institutional growth, and have worked hard to develop their social management, staff training and evaluation systems evenly, so that they complement and support program developments. The JUCONIs assess their cost-effectiveness in terms of the numbers of children who successfully graduate from their programs.

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By the late 1980s, Latin American street children were in the spotlight, triggered by murders of street children in Brazil. But the attention they received from the media, governments, and philanthropic bodies was highly sensationalist. Not much was known about street children: how many there were, who they were, where they came from, and what happened to them. All of this was a mystery.

Advocacy on behalf of street children in this period, and well into the 1990s, was based on flimsy evidence, much of which has since been found to have been misguided.[13] Estimates of the numbers of street children were exaggerated; street-workers were being confused with street-living children; and many street children thought to be orphans turned out to have families. That said, advocacy in the 1980s and early 1990s was successful in attracting crucial human and financial resources to help street children. But the big challenge, as we saw it in those early days of JUCONI'S existence, was to find ways to make sure that these resources truly benefited extremely disadvantaged children.

JUCONI Mexico has spent the last ten years working to build services that respond to street children's needs. The effort has been complex, painful (as work with children who have been exposed to very painful circumstances must always be), and rewarding. With no religious or political agenda to guide us, we have had more freedom than some to respond to what educators and participating children identify as their most important needs. Also, without a religious or political mandate, we have had a wider framework within which to search for solutions.

Marcus Lyon

Rubén, a street-working child, catches up with school work in his family home on the outskirts of Guayaquil city, Ecuador.

But freedom of action brings with it greater responsibility. We are under more pressure to "get it right" and to make a difference in children's lives, because we have no broader agenda within which to assess our successes and failures. Our lack of a cohesive natural constituency and our decision not to focus on advocacy has meant that the JUCONIs have relatively little impact on public policies toward street children.

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[13] See *Hidden Lives,* Duncan Green, 1998, Radda Barnen and Save the Children UK, London, particularly "the numbers game" section of Chapter 3, and Judith Ennew's *Street and Working Children – A Guide to Planning, Development Manual No. 4* 1994, Save the Children UK. Both books give good illustrations of the disparity between reality and the discourse on street children.

JUCONI leaders are now recognizing that for our "lessons learned" to make a sensible contribution to the field, we need to strengthen our role as advocates for better programs for street children. A new challenge for this decade will be to continue to develop the quality of our services for street children, while learning to participate wisely and effectively in the public policy arena.

Marcus Lyon

On the fringes of Pueba's Hidalgo Street Market, Pedro, a market-worker, sells fruit and vegetables left over after the day's trading from his family's small market stall.

During our first six years of work in Mexico, we did not explicitly adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as a primary reference in developing services for street children, and the JUCONIs still do not take a fully "rights-based" approach. This despite the fact that Mexico became party to the CRC in September 1990 (six months after Ecuador ratified it). In the same year, JUCONI's program director, Gabriel Benitez, developed UNICEF's materials on the CRC for Mexican schools.

JUCONI Mexico was slow to adopt the CRC as central to its mission, in large measure because the CRC's high standards[14] seemed so far removed from the reality of Mexican street children's lives. These youngsters are among the most severely and chronically disadvantaged young people, surviving in desperate physical, emotional, and social conditions on the margins of societies. They have deep and multi-faceted needs.

The CRC requires that governments guarantee the protection and care necessary for each child's well being, and ensure that programs serve the "best interest" of the child (Art. 3). Governments are required to do everything possible to protect a child from abuse or negligence (Art. 19), and to recognize each child's right to a standard of living adequate for his or her development (Art. 27). Parents are primarily responsible for raising their children and ensuring their healthy development (Art. 18). And all children have the right to full and free access to schooling (Art. 28). None of these conditions, however, were being met for street children in Mexico. Public funding and educational support for street children were virtually non-existent, while parental support for these youngsters was severely limited. In the absence of meaningful governmental support, it seemed unlikely that a small NGO like JUCONI could provide the services a street child needed to develop into a full participant in society.

So in JUCONI Mexico's first years, the CRC's holistic approach, guaranteeing all rights for all children, seemed an unattainable dream.[15] At the same time, JUCONI Mexico needed some objective standards to guide its service development and against which to evaluate its impact on street children's lives. But no such "standards" existed — or exist today — for work with street children, whether at the international or national level. In the absence of objective standards, JUCONI Mexico adopted the CRC as an abstract set of overarching goals.

By 1994, JUCONI Mexico's new program leadership felt that the organization's accumulated experience, initial results for individual children, and financial stability were strong enough to imagine that JUCONI could at some point cover the array of provisions set out in the CRC. JUCONI Ecuador began later that

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[14] CRC standards remain "…in many respects, considerably in advance of anything currently formulated in rights terms at the national level" Philip Alston (ed.) 1992, *Children, Rights and The Law.* Clarendon Press, London.

[15] The CRC has "changed the lens through which governments must regard children, a change from protecting vulnerable children against a range of specified ills, to a holistic approach guaranteeing all rights for all children." A.C. Gomes da Costa, 1997, *Niños y niñas de la calle: vida, pasión y muerte.* UNICEF Argentina

year with a sufficiently solid funding base and a strong enough partnership with its Mexican sister to also view the CRC as a set of potentially achievable standards.

Since that time, the CRC has been pulled steadily closer to the center of programming in both JUCONIs, and their mission of "helping street children to build solutions" is now interpreted in terms of helping street children to gain and maintain access to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Even so, JUCONI educators find it difficult to use the CRC systematically for service planning. First, the Convention's broad generalities do not lend themselves to measurement.[18] Second, there are so many rights to which street children do not have access (such as protection from abuse; provision of shelter, basic economic conditions, and supportive family environment; and participation in school, family, and community). Although these rights are related, they cannot all be addressed simultaneously. Third, many children have a range of urgent needs to tackle, such as problems of sexual abuse, physical illness, or dangerous work. In addition, street children face significant developmental needs such as gaining access to key rights that facilitate active learning in formal education, improving family relationships, fostering employment in the formal sector, and enabling them to participate in their communities as responsible adults.

In the absence of objective standards for street child programs, JUCONI services have evolved somewhat organically. They build on a range of educational theories[19] and some practical experiences,[20] and blend these with an ongoing, practice-based analysis (practice-analysis-adjustment-practice) of participating children's "needs" as perceived by teams of JUCONI educators working together with street children. JUCONI's management decisions on how to target institutional resources so that they can best help street children gain and maintain access to their established rights are guided more by the needs identified by their teams of educators working together with street children and their families, than by a systematic use of the CRC. JUCONI managers are convinced that our needs-based approach, combined with the tracking of individual outcomes, is key to enabling children to participate in mainstream society.

> **Street children face significant developmental needs such as gaining access to key rights that facilitate active learning in formal education, improving family relationships, fostering employment in the formal sector, and enabling them to participate in their communities as responsible adults.**

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[16] Sarah Thomas de Benítez, 2000, *Street Children's Rights and the CRC: A Study of Acceptance and Observance in Mexico and Ecuador,* working paper 2000-01 of the Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University

[17] In 1993-4 JUCONI Mexico changed directors. I handed over the position of Director General to Alison Lane in 1993, and Gabriel Benítez handed over the position of Operational Director to Jorge Villar in 1994. Gabriel and I then moved to Ecuador to lead the establishment of JUCONI Ecuador as Program Director and Executive Director respectively.

[18] At this point, it is almost impossible to think of measuring such concepts as the "in the best interest of the child"

[19] JUCONI's educational focus has its roots in theories of integral human development, attachment and psychodynamics (borrowing from S. Freud, M. Klein, J. Bowlby, J. Piaget, M. Montessori, E. Erikson etc), mediated learning (from L.S. Vigotsky, M. Lipman and P. Freire) and structural cognitive change (R. Feuerstein) among others. More information on this is available in the Introduction and Annex A of *Creando soluciones para niñ@s en situación de calle* 1999, Sarah Thomas de Benítez (ed), @ META 2000, JUCONI, CANICA, CIDES, JUCONI Ecuador and Tanesque, Mexico.

[20] Documented experiences with street children like: *Musarañas: Programa Bosconia-La Florida,* 1981, Javier de Nicolo, Servicio Juvenil Bogotá, Colombia; and *Coatzacolacas: nuevas alternativas de atención para los niños de y en la calle de México,* 1987, UNICEF Bogotá, Colombia

The JUCONIs have shown strong evidence of making a consistently positive impact on children's lives by using this approach. An overwhelming majority of participants, well over 80%, graduate successfully from JUCONI programs, after completing at least their primary schooling and having achieved a more harmonious and supportive living environment. Some have steady jobs and most have developed other stable, positive links to their communities.

We believe that there is no "one true way" to achieve the CRC's goals for street children, but rather several paths that can lead to success. The JUCONIs are confident that the best strategy is to keep the CRC firmly in our sights and constantly reassess our performance in moving towards its goals. But the JUCONIs still have a long way to go before we can ensure that street children secure their rights in the holistic way envisioned in the CRC. To get to that point, I think, will require a major change in official, donor, and public perceptions of street children programs. This would include a shift from viewing these programs as "charitable causes" to seeing them as critical "investments" in children and society.

Jorge Villar

In JUCONI's day center, Luis Andrés, the younger brother of market workers, classifies Montessori materials by size, shape and color, in a game that helps JUCONI assess his cognitive development, Puebla, Mexico

At first sight, an "educational process" can seem a rigid or even inappropriate tool for helping street children. But it is a good way of ordering information and developing an explicit structure. The JUCONI educational process is designed to help educators and children understand and agree on "rules of the game" from the beginning, to work through tried and tested ideas, to experiment, to assess progress, and to feed back into and improve a steadily accumulating base of knowledge. We see "education" as the most useful approach because it provides a framework in which several disciplines, such as psychology and anthropology, can be harnessed together to help children equip themselves "not only with the capacity to solve their current problems, but also with the skills and abilities to confront the challenges they will face in the future."[21]

JUCONI's educational process is based on 3 major principles:

■ First, street children everywhere face numerous obstacles to participation in mainstream society. Most street children have not finished primary schooling, do not have supportive home environments, have difficulty getting and keeping jobs, have very low self-esteem, and find it hard to develop positive relationships with peers or adults. Many of their street experiences create new emotional problems and exacerbate existing ones. Children can also acquire new skills in the street, but we think that any attempt to view the street as a potentially positive experience is unhelpful. Such a view seems to be the equivalent of identifying the positive aspects (such as gaining strength of character) for a child in an abusive relationship with an adult. Instead, JUCONI educators identify abilities as belonging to the child, irrespective of how and where he or she acquired them. Our main concern is to help each child build on his or her range of strengths.

■ Second, informal education aimed at helping children gain and maintain access to their rights is a process. This implies that there is a "beginning", a measurable point at which a child enters the service, and an "end", a point at which measurable benefit to the child can be established. But this process is not necessarily a linear one. The JUCONIs believe that street children can acquire some key abilities most easily by using a sequenced format, in the same way that formal schooling involves some basic building blocks for learning academic subjects. But each child has his or her distinct set of starting points, preferred ways of learning, and pace.

■ Third, this assimilation of key abilities is complex and can take a long time, perhaps years. One individual is highly unlikely to be able to accompany a particular street child all the way through the process from "exclusion" to "inclusion" in society. So the JUCONIs need to prepare project workers to work in teams with each child.

> **JUCONI educators identify abilities as belonging to the child, irrespective of how and where he or she acquired them. Our main concern is to help each child build on his or her range of strengths.**

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[21] Anita Schrader and Sarah Thomas de Benítez (eds), 1999 *Making Operation Friendship Work: The Emotional Development of Street Living Children – Selected materials for Educators of Street Children,* unpublished handbook by the Consortium for Street Children UK with the META 2000 Collective

JUCONI House educators Ernesto and Victorica help Julio learn to read and write. An illiterate street-living child when he entered JUCONI House, Julio needed intensive, personalized education before he could enter formal schooling, Puebla, Mexico.

Marcus Lyon

We decided on this approach in the early days of JUCONI Mexico, once we began to realize how highly fragmented, unstable, and unprofessional the field of work with street children had become. The few models of such work available to us through UNICEF, UNESCO, ChildHope, and others were theoretical or situation-specific, which made adapting educational strategies from other organizations in the field very difficult.[22] So we knew that we would have to learn a great deal from the children who we hoped would be the prime beneficiaries of our services. We also wanted to make sure that we had a way to bring together our experiences so that we could build on them, as an institution, to the advantage of incoming children and educators.

Thus our educational process started as a sort of mapping exercise of little known terrain, in which JUCONI educators hesitantly developed activities for children and then put them into practice with the active participation of street children. This produced some wrong turns and dead-ends, but it also led to the creation of useful activities, shortcuts, and some very successful strategies.

There are numerous ways this approach can be seen in practice. For example, some years ago, JUCONI Mexico educators became concerned about the high number of street-living children leaving JUCONI House (its residential home for street children) within their first month of residency. Another concern was that children were not allowed into school without copies of their birth certificates. In addition, educators found children were extremely reluctant to give accurate information about their families (fearing they might be sent "home"). Educators wondered if the high desertion rate might be caused by a combination of frustration at not being able to go to school with their

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[22] For a fuller argument see the Introduction to *Creando soluciones para niñ@s en situación de calle* 1999, Sarah Thomas de Benítez (ed), @ META 2000, JUCONI, CANICA, CIDES, JUCONI Ecuador and Tanesque, Mexico.

JUCONI House "compañeros" (friends), and having "empty" time in the day to brood on their problems.

The JUCONI House educational team decided to try three tactics: persuading schools to accept children before they had their birth certificates; filling the empty time with stimulating activities in the House; and persuading children to allow visits to their families as early as possible as a way to track down birth certificates, find out more about the family, and explore possible sources of each child's problems with the family.

Educators did not have much success in persuading local schools to change. Stimulating activities in the House produced mixed results. They seemed helpful for the child, but involved a great deal of the educator's time and energy. The third tactic, however, promoting family visits, was an unqualified success. Educators found that taking a large group of JUCONI House children to visit one family had several positive results. First, the child felt well supported (reducing the fear of punishment by family members) and special (the trip had been organized especially for him or her). Second, other children saw the youngster return with them to JUCONI House (diminishing the fear of being "left"). Third, they witnessed a happy family reunion (prompting them to want their own family visit).

In the process, educators got a chance to promote friendship and family and community values within the group, as well as to track down the child's birth certificate and make contact with the family. The visit usually ended with other children asking for their own family visits and the educational team happily planning another trip. This tactic was incorporated into the House curriculum, and has been tried, analyzed, and improved over the years. These days, JUCONI's outreach team of street educators lets children know, well before they enter JUCONI House, that family visits can take place early on. They show photos of successful trips and work to motivate each child to request a visit home as soon as possible. Results have been extremely positive. The JUCONI House enjoys dramatically lower desertion rates, children get their birth certificates so they can enter school more quickly, and educators have more information earlier, to help children and families more effectively.

There are many other examples of this mapping process at work, and a few are touched on below in sections 8 on prevention and 9 on child labor. Because the mapping process is explicit, it allows for peer and group review as well analysis and enrichment by outside specialists. We instituted systematic, centralized reviews of the educational process every six months, bringing together

Thus our educational process started as a sort of mapping exercise of little known terrain, in which JUCONI educators hesitantly developed activities for children and then put them into practice with the active participation of street children.

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[23] At the time of this paper's publication, JUCONI Mexico is gearing up for its twentieth six-month review

JUCONI director Sylvia visits the Sulca Chango family home to explore the family's complex needs and possible solutions with single mother Emilia, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

teams of educators from different services to analyze each child's developmental progress.[23]

When we started, we felt a centralized educational approach would enable us to learn more about the needs of street children and how we could help them to resolve those needs. A decade later, we are still convinced that a centralized educational approach is the best strategy available to the JUCONIs. The advantages include: creation of a common language, common working tools and common goals; an explicit and objective basis for monitoring and evaluation of service impact on participating children, a firm base for internal collaboration and institutional learning, and a platform for meaningful sharing with partners and policy makers.

However, a centralized educational process has disadvantages as well. It can be very restrictive for children if applied rigidly, and it can deaden educators' initiative and slow down the process of change. It can also absorb enormous amounts of staff time and energy to create and maintain the mechanisms of the educational process. Each of the JUCONIs has suffered from these problems at one time or another, particularly from an emphasis on conformity across programs to ensure an acceptable standard of service.

During the last few years, the JUCONIs' intensive collaboration with external partners, particularly in the META project,[24] has drawn attention and resources away from these internal difficulties, so they remain threats to the effectiveness of JUCONI interventions with street children. Both JUCONIs are now making up for lost time by focusing explicitly on encouraging educators' initiatives and fostering their leadership.

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[24] META, an acronym for "Modelo Educativo – Tomando Acción," was a six year project by four independent NGOs, including the two JUCONIs, which lasted from 1994 to 2000. Its objective was to develop an integrated model of educational and management practices for street children.

Marcus Lyon

José, a street-living boy, watches the world go by from Puebla's busy CAPU bus depot, Mexico

JUCONI Mexico and JUCONI Ecuador each provide direct services to 400 to 500 children every year. These children manifest distinct characteristics, to which specific JUCONI programs are designed to respond. Participants in each city are different: JUCONI Mexico has services attuned to what we believe to be the most critical needs of Puebla's street-living children, street-working children, and market-working children, as well as the particular needs of the siblings of each of these groups of youngsters. (See Figure 1 for a description of the range of approaches that JUCONI uses to meet the needs of street children.)

JUCONI Ecuador, on the other hand, concentrates directly on street-working children and their siblings. It also runs an innovative practice-based training center that provides support services to local organizations working with excluded children. The differences in organizational emphasis between the JUCONIs reflect local service gaps and priorities identified by the JUCONIs together with their local collaborators.

At any given time, the following categories of children participate regularly in JUCONI services:

- JUCONI Mexico: 460 children

    100 street-living children and 20 siblings
    100 street-working children and 50 siblings
    120 market-working children and 70 siblings

- JUCONI Ecuador: 460 children

    220 street-working children and 240 siblings

Early on, the JUCONIs began to "categorize" and "select" children to participate in their services. While this paper is too short to permit a detailed classification and explanation, (it is available elsewhere[25]), the following is a brief look at how JUCONIs categorize street children, and then select them for participation in the program.

> **The differences in organizational emphasis between the JUCONIs reflect local service gaps and priorities identified by the JUCONIs together with their local collaborators.**

Categories of Street Children

Our decision to categorize youngsters — as street-living children, street-working children, and market-working children — came about because it was clear from early JUCONI experiences that children living in different street situations had quite distinct welfare and developmental needs, and were therefore likely to require different services. One generalized set of services would probably not be useful to any of them. For example, drawing on JUCONI Mexico's experience:

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[25] *Creando soluciones para niñ@s en situación de calle* 1999, Sarah Thomas de Benítez (ed), @ META 2000, JUCONI, CANICA, CIDES, JUCONI-Guayaquil and Tanesque, Mexico. And *Making Operation Friendship Work: The Emotional Development of Street Living Children – Selected materials for Educators of Street Children,* 1999, Anita Schrader and Sarah Thomas de Benítez (eds), unpublished handbook by the Consortium for Street Children UK with the META 2000 Collective.

FIGURE 1: JUCONI (MEXICO) SERVICES FOR STREET CHILDREN[26]

Street-Living Children and their younger brothers and sisters *5 year maximum*	Street Working Children and their younger brothers and sisters *4 year maximum)*	Open-Air Market Children and their younger brothers and sisters *3 year maximum*
1) OPERATION FRIENDSHIP TYPE: preparation LOCATION: in the street and juvenile prison DURATION: from 1 to 6 months *Intensive contact with children; recreational activities; emergency medical services; child counseling; preparing for life away from the street.*	**1) OPERATION FRIENDSHIP** TYPE: preparation LOCATION: in the street and in the family home DURATION: from 1 to 6 months *Regular contact with children; recreational activities; complementary schooling in the street; family visits in the home; child counseling; preparing for life away from the street; provide new options away from street-life.*	**1) OPERATION FRIENDSHIP** TYPE: preparation LOCATION: in open air markets and in the family home DURATION: from 1 to 6 months *Intensive contact with children and parents; visits in the family home.*
2) HALFWAY HOUSE TYPE: intensive change LOCATION: Residential House DURATION: from 12 to 18 months *Round the clock attention; holistic education (self expression, recreation, life skills); formal schooling; regular home visits and activities within the family; individual counseling; work training and placements.*	**2) FAMILIES** TYPE: intensive change LOCATION: in the family home DURATION: from 12 to 18 months *Complementary schooling; school and work visits; family counseling; complementary schooling for younger siblings; small contributions to the family economy; introduction to community services.*	**2) DAY CENTRE** TYPE: intensive change DURATION: daily services from 12 to 18 months *Formal schooling (registered primary school); holistic education (including corporal expression, recreational activities, life skills); pre-school activities (Montessori) for younger siblings; counseling for parents; parental participation in running of Centre.*
3) FOLLOW-ON TYPE: continuity LOCATION: in their own home or in the Youth House DURATION: 3 years *Help graduates from the halfway house to integrate into society by: home visits (with the family, substitute homes or in a Youth House); school and work visits; small contributions to the family economy; education for younger siblings; family counseling.*	**3) FOLLOW-ON** TYPE: continuity LOCATION: in the family home DURATION: 2 years *Help ex-street-working children to adapt into society by: home, school, and work visits; schooling for younger siblings; family counseling.*	**3) FOLLOW-ON** TYPE: continuity LOCATION: in the Day Centre and in the family home DURATION: 1 year *Help Day Centre graduates adapt into society, through: home visits; encouraging younger siblings to attend school and parents to use local services; continue counseling for parents and their participation in the Centre.*

[26] Adapted from *Making Operation Friendship Work: The Emotional Development of Street Living Children – Selected materials for Educators of Street Children,* Anita Schrader and Sarah Thomas de Benítez (eds), 1999, unpublished handbook by the Consortium for Street Children UK with the META 2000 Collective.

■ Most of the city's street-living children can, at some point in the day, be found in the "CAPU," Puebla's busy central bus station. These youngsters have lost daily contact with their families, are not in school, are often hiding from the authorities, are depressed, and have low self-esteem along with many other severe emotional problems. Some use drugs or alcohol. Many have diseases or untreated infections. Contact with them can be erratic and fraught with difficulties.

■ Puebla's street-working children work alone or in small groups, sometimes with their families, and are highly visible at the city's main traffic junctions. They work on the street during the day — selling flowers or newspapers or shining shoes — and then return home in the evening. They often have unsupportive family environments, drop out of school early, and assume roles at home usually associated with a parent.

■ The city's market-working children usually work in close proximity to their families, within the community environment of a market, making small contributions to the family income by filling in for parents at their stalls. They often have reasonably supportive family environments but tend to drop out of school early to assume larger working responsibilities.

Thus the term "street children" encompasses a wide range of children, and within this range there are various identifiable groups of children, each group with its own conditions, characteristics, and developmental needs. This is similar to the way "children with special needs" refers to a whole range of individuals and within this range there are identifiable groups of children, such as youngsters who have Down's Syndrome or autism. Some groups will respond well to a certain set of strategies, while others require another kind of help to reach the same goal of full participation in society.

There are street children who straddle two categories and others who hardly fit into any of the three categories we have defined. JUCONI identified basic differences between the needs of street-living and street-working children very early on, alerted by UNICEF literature to children "of" and "in" the streets. It took us longer to differentiate sensibly between street-working and market-working children.

The process that led us to identify the different needs of these two categories of children was the same educational process the JUCONIs have used for all their major programmatic decisions. Educators accompanied children, mapped out activities, and carried them out with small groups of participants. They then analyzed feedback in weekly team meetings and regular evaluation workshops, detected diverging patterns in children's responses, and formed hypotheses about the causes. In consultation with other educators and external specialists, they gradually identified two distinct groups.

They then formulated and tried new activities to respond more closely to each group's personal situations and developmental needs.

At this stage, we have restricted JUCONI programs so far to three categories of street children because:

■ they are currently the dominant categories of street children in the cities where we operate (established in early surveys and monitored periodically), and

■ we believe that working in a targeted way enables us to be more effective with participating children, whereas a wider spread would dilute our impact.

If we had set up a JUCONI in another city, country, or time period, we might have focused instead on child sex workers, or indigenous street-living families. The category of street children targeted would have depended on local conditions and the most visible needs.

The JUCONIs have separate programs for each category of street child, each with its own services and its own teams of educators. Service goals and strategies are explored in the next section. But first, we need to look at the "selection" process.

The Selection Process

Clearly, by introducing categories, a selection process is already implicit. A child who "fits" the characteristics of a certain category of street child has already been filtered or "selected" in some way. But there are other factors at work. JUCONI selection reflects organizational capacity, timing, and a child's motivation to participate. The following examples are illustrative.

JUCONI Mexico

JUCONI Mexico's halfway house for street-living children has a maximum of 25 places available at any one time, and a child would expect to spend from 12 to 18 months living there. If JUCONI House is full, selection from the preparatory outreach service will depend on one of the current 25 residents progressing to the follow-on service. As an added complication, the blend of residents in JUCONI House is key for educators to be able to provide quality service (developed by teams through the years). So we try to achieve a workable balance between hard-core street-dwellers and youngsters new to the street. At any one time, educators aim for:

■ A maximum of two hard-core street-living youth (who have spent more than a year of their adolescence living in the streets of two or more cities, have a distant

relationship with family, and may be habitual drug users, often over 15 years of age)

- A maximum of 8 youngsters who have lived on the streets for up to a year (usually staying in just one city, have a closer but turbulent relationship with family, and are occasional drug users, usually over 12 years of age)

- A minimum of 15 children new to the street (who have lived on the street for less than three months, have a turbulent relationship with their family, and tend to be under 12 years of age).

Each of these sub-categories is defined by the team, and has been fine-tuned over the years and adjusted as circumstances change. The limit on numbers of hard-core street-dwellers reflects both the large investment of time, energy, and skills needed to help these adolescents effectively and also the negative impact these youth can have on younger children if they do not receive very personalized attention.

A child candidate for JUCONI House might not be motivated to participate at the time a space becomes available, so does not self select. JUCONI educators would aim to get that child ready for the next available slot, or perhaps the one after, depending on the child's feeling of readiness.

JUCONI Ecuador

JUCONI Ecuador's educators work in teams of three, with each team responsible for a maximum number of street-working children and families at any one time. Once a child has been contacted, much of JUCONI's work is in the family home, including educational support and family therapy. Until service goals have been achieved, the JUCONI team of three is unlikely to leave a family to start work with a new one. Selection of new children can therefore depend on the team's current number of participating families, and also where they live. Teams of educators aim to work in a limited number of communities at any one time, to reduce travel and thus increase time with the families.

The JUCONIs have another reason for "selecting" participants. There is strong empirical evidence, particularly in Puebla, that by focusing services consistently on younger children who are newer to the streets and by offering them intensive, quality services that are successful in ensuring they access their basic rights, JUCONI has reduced the numbers of older, seasoned street children in Puebla City. A "prevention" approach is a strong element of JUCONI's work and is addressed later in this paper.

The limit on numbers of hard-core street-dwellers reflects both the large investment of time, energy, and skills needed to help these adolescents effectively and also the negative impact these youth can have on younger children if they do not receive very personalized attention.

T he JUCONIs put great emphasis on assessing the progress of participants and the impact of their programs on each child. This focus emerged from our early realization that the field of working with street children was unregulated, with no generally accepted standards of quality, and no impact measurement systems. First, we wanted to make sure our working methods had a positive and meaningful impact on street children's lives. Second, in such a desperately under-resourced field, we wanted to be effective and efficient, and to stretch our resources as far as possible. We needed to be able to gauge the impact of our services on participating children, and with no assessment systems available for street children programs, we would have to develop our own.

Individual Assessment

Developing an impact assessment system to capture changes in individual street children's lives, within a reasonably short period of time and without eating up our limited resources, presented a huge challenge. A chapter in the book *Creando soluciones para niñ@s en situación de calle* is devoted to explaining our slow and tortuous route in developing some reasonable assessment tools.[27] In this report I will concentrate on how and why we assess the way we do, and how our search for more rigorous assessment has triggered some of our better programmatic advances.

Leaving impact assessment to the next section, I will tackle the two biggest challenges in the area of individual assessments that we have struggled to overcome:

■ The first challenge is the different meanings attributed to terms and definitions for words as basic but as potent as "street child," "educator," "participation," "family," "friendship," and "community." For a meaningful assessment, including data collection and analysis, a common language had to be developed within each JUCONI — a language shared by child, parent, volunteer, educator, and director. Our educational staff took a couple of years to hammer out agreements on basic definitions and terms, and the process of building language continues today.

A good example of the importance of meaning is "contact," as in "to make contact with a street child." If a street educator reports making "contact" with a street child, there could be a range of interpretations about the occurrence. Some obvious questions might be: Did the educator meet the child for the first time, or was it the first time they spoke together, or was it the occasion at which the educator felt she and the child had really reached some kind of agreement? Was the

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contact intentional or accidental? Was it "meaningful" for the child or educator — and if so, how? In terms of assessment, an educator who has made 30 "new contacts" with street children might simply have spent a few minutes with each of them, talking about the weather. A second educator, who has made just five "new contacts," might, however, have spent a substantial amount of time with each child, exploring interests, sharing information and views, and starting a friendship.

The JUCONIs are considerably more rigorous about what the word "contact" means, because we believe that a simple chat with a street child cannot be construed as much more than just a chat. By itself, a first meeting cannot be seen as part of an educational process that might have an impact on the child's life. For a street-living child to be considered "contacted" by the educator, JUCONI's common language requires that the child must have participated in "six consecutive street sessions."[28] These six sessions should be planned (with clear goals, strategies, and based on recommended activities), chosen from Outreach activity sheets developed by previous street educators, with the results shared with the Outreach team. Until a child has been "contacted" in this way, he or she will not enter into the JUCONI register of participants. And contact is only the first step in an initial stage of "friendship" — the full meaning of which needs to be made explicit and shared by educator, child, family, and organization[29].

■ The second big challenge we have faced has been establishing causality in changes to street children's lives. On occasion, when a successful, enthusiastic graduate of one of the JUCONI programs comes to visit us, we are not sure whether our services contributed to some of his or her achievements, or whether such progress would have been reached without our help. In other words, did we really make a positive contribution to this young person's development? Or would she or he have developed just as well without some, or perhaps all, of our services? These are key questions that most programs for street children are not able to answer. When we point to our "successes," were they in fact program successes? And the children who we "failed," what was it about the program that failed them? What could we have done differently to help them more effectively?

Most of us would find it unacceptable to have a school in which each teacher made up his or her own classes, with no syllabus or curriculum, no formal linkage between topics or years, and no regard to what his or her colleagues were doing in other classrooms. Similarly, in JUCONI, we believe that educational programs that articulate some kind of syllabus and curricula, and some kind of ordering and linkage between services for street children, are critically needed. Otherwise, we

[27] C*reando soluciones para niñ@s en situación de calle* 1999, Sarah Thomas de Benítez (ed), @ META 2000, JUCONI, CANICA, CIDES, JUCONI Ecuador and Tanesque, Mexico.

cannot easily claim to be undertaking an "educational process." Nor can we assess a child's progress through the program or even try to assess the impact the program has had on that child.

The JUCONIs have not yet fully surmounted this challenge, but we have come a long way toward demonstrating at least some causality. First, we establish program goals with measurable indicators — from broad institutional goals to be accomplished in 3 years to session goals to be reached in 60 minutes. An institutional goal might be that JUCONI directors raise the funds for and establish a training center serving local NGOs by 2001. The objective for a one-hour session between a child and educator might be that the child gives examples to show that she can recognize that not everyone around her is a true friend. Second, we analyze our work in terms of these indicators, so that planning and evaluation are inextricably linked in feedback loops. In our six monthly workshops, we analyze sequences of outputs together to see how far each child has traveled towards explicit service goals (e.g., the child cleans his teeth daily with no supervision and gives examples of the effects of not keeping his teeth clean) since he entered the JUCONI program, when he was assessed using the same indicators.

For this process to be manageable, we have divided developmental goals into four areas of human development (physical, emotional, intellectual, and social), which in turn are subdivided into modules. Each service offers a number of modules in each of the four developmental areas.

Services are linked so that the final "output" of one service is explicitly the "input" of the subsequent service (e.g., outreach to the halfway house). When put together, meeting the service goals should enable a child to "graduate" from a JUCONI program with a number of measurably new or improved abilities and skills. By assessing a child on entering a JUCONI program, monitoring progress periodically, and evaluating outcomes on graduation, the JUCONIs can show to some extent that their programs have "caused" the changes.

There is one fundamental issue yet to be resolved — how should we estimate what the same child might have achieved on his or her own, without the program?
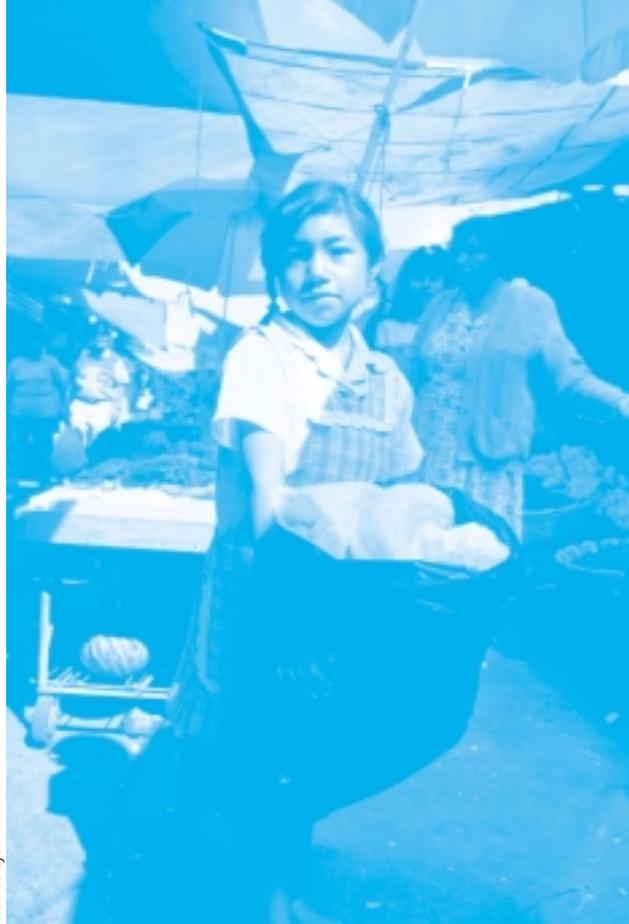
Marcus Lyon

Lupita sells loofahs each morning in the Union market to help her hard-pressed family pay for her schooling. Nominally free, primary education in Mexico and Ecuador has "hidden" costs in the form of schooling materials, uniforms, and a variety of financial contributions.

[28] JUCONI Mexico's Operational Framework, Outreach service for the street-living child, cited in *Making Operation Friendship Work: The Emotional Development of Street Living Children* – Selected materials for Educators of Street Children, 1999, Anita Schrader and Sarah Thomas de Benítez (eds), unpublished handbook by the Consortium for Street Children UK with the META 2000 Collective

We have no obvious "control group" with whom to compare program results. Children who enter the program are self-selecting and therefore difficult to compare with children who remain on the street, and there are as yet no guidelines in the field to facilitate meaningful comparison between different programs.

Impact Assessment

The level of assessment just described is only helpful if we can discover how useful these newly acquired or improved abilities and skills are to street children. How much do they enable children to become full participants in their societies? Finding the answers would require costly impact assessment over a long period of time. With their limited financial and human resources, the JUCONIs have come up with a partial "tracking" solution, which allows some limited impact assessment while (fortunately) benefiting program planning.

Our approach has been to introduce a fairly long "tracking" period as a part of each program, within the "follow-on" service. Follow-on is the third and final stage of program participation for each child.

Follow-on lasts between 1 and 3 years, and is aimed principally at helping children sustain the changes they have made during their twelve- to eighteen-month-long participation in the preceding "intensive change" service (e.g., developing abilities and acquiring skills). Follow-on enables educators to visit children regularly after their graduation from the halfway house (street-living children), day center (market-working children) or family service (street-working children). Post-graduation contact includes visits to the child's home (whether his or her original family home, a substitute home, semi-independent or independent living), as well as visits to school, work, and any other area of life where the child might experience difficulties in integrating into his or her environment. Some goals are established for each individual, depending on his or her particular starting point, while others are aimed at achieving the same minimum outcome for all participants. A street-working child or a market-working child might graduate from JUCONI still working, but away from the street in a job involving development of skills, rather than menial labor. Other goals are universal: any street-living child graduating from JUCONI will no longer be living on the street and will have at least successfully completed elementary school.

The tracking aim in follow-on is to discover which skills youngsters are using in their new social context, and what other abilities might be helpful to resolve tough problems they have encountered. This information is fed back into the

[29] The British Consortium for Street Children produced a 50- page pack of materials in 1999 for educators of street children. It provides a step-by-step analysis of one part of a street educator's activities with participating children in one of JUCONI-Puebla's three outreach services. Its length is daunting, but we have not yet found a more succinct way to capture the complexity of educational work with street children.

intensive or out-reach services, to try to equip the next generation with more useful abilities and skills. Such information can also be used to help children within follow-on, either by accompanying them in solving problems for which they do not feel sufficiently prepared, or as a last resort, by inviting a temporary return to

Birgit Rostad

JUCONI director Jorge motivates street-worker Ricardo and sister Margarita to invite their parents to join JUCONI's Families service.

the intensive change service to reinforce specific skills. JUCONI's halfway house regularly accepts re-admissions — with clear goals and timetables — recognizing the wide range of difficulties that street-living children face.

As a tracking mechanism, follow-on is limited by the relatively short time we have been able to allot to this service (one year for market-working children, two years for street-working children, and three years for street-living children). The JUCONIs would very much like to secure resources to formally track children for a much longer period — to look systematically, for example, at how graduates approach parenting and the running of their own households as adults, to analyze how their informal and formal education have contributed to their lifestyles as adults, and to study the extent of their participation in family and community matters. Our tracking is also constrained by continual developments in the JUCONI programs. Although individual assessment is steadily improving, year by year, we have only sketchy information about the first children leaving our programs back in the early 1990s, and certainly no credible entry data for them within the four areas of development we now track. So tracking children from the first three or four years of their participation in our services would probably not be a useful exercise. We do, of course, keep in touch with our early graduates as friends, and we use these contacts to gather qualitative data, and to try to learn lessons that would improve our work. Our current tracking involves participants in JUCONI programs in the late 1990s.

Follow-on has been successful in identifying weak areas of JUCONI services. Some have now been strengthened, while others still challenge educators. One early lesson learned was that attempts to address children's developmental problems during the outreach services period were not showing lasting effects, while those tackled in the intensive change services were producing good long term results in follow-on. We thought these results might reflect an unfavorable learning environment in the street. So we pushed almost all the educational and psychotherapeutic work into the middle, intensive change services at the halfway house, the family home or day center. We also refocused outreach into an intense "preparatory" phase aimed at motivating positive participation in subsequent services. Outreach has since evolved into a lean set of strategies and activities with two main objectives. First, to help each child to understand the JUCONI program — what the program and child together can and cannot expect to achieve — and to help motivate the child to participate. Second, to roughly assess the child's emotional, cognitive, physical and social needs that must be addressed by the intensive change educational team for that youngster to be able to integrate fully into mainstream society.

When we started ten years ago, our largest teams of educators were those working in the street, offering outreach services. This reflected our eagerness to get to know street children. A decade later, our outreach teams have few members — sometimes an outreach team will consist of just one, well-trained person. Most of our resources are now focused on the two subsequent stages of service in which children are developing abilities and acquiring skills, then sustaining and using them to improve their daily lives. One disadvantage of JUCONI's emphasis on outcome or impact on the child is that outreach services can become insensitive to the needs of children who do not seem to immediately "fit" what the intensive services offer — such as youngsters with special physical or cognitive needs, or heavy drug or alcohol users. The JUCONIs try to remedy this by encouraging educational teams to refer children with other needs to suitably qualified institutions or groups in the community. This is workable in some cases. For example, blind children have been successfully channeled to local schools for the blind, and some heavy drug users have left drugs and the street behind after immersing themselves in specialized residential programs. However, sometimes we have transferred children into programs that we suspect may be more poorly equipped than the JUCONIs to help youngsters improve their lives. This has happened to a small number of street-living youngsters with Down's Syndrome. While we channeled some youth to specialized institutions because JUCONI Mexico lacked the skills to help them gain access to their rights, we were

nevertheless conscious that they might have found greater stimulation and won more independence by participation in JUCONI services.

The decision to transfer a child to another organization or institutions is usually taken by the relevant outreach and intensive service teams together, in consultation with their program coordinator. This joint decision is made after analysis of initial assessments of the child's personal development, the level of family support available, and the existence of other suitable organizations. Although we would often prefer not to transfer children, we recognize that we have limitations. The JUCONIs are small NGOs, and are not equipped to tackle many of the problems they find. It would be unreasonable to expect the JUCONIs to address the full range of needs that exist. Rather, we struggle to offer a limited number of street children the most effective and efficient services we can to help them lead fulfilling lives within mainstream society.

Although we would often prefer not to transfer children, we recognize that we have limitations. The JUCONIs are small NGOs, and are not equipped to tackle many of the problems they find.

While one of our main goals is to enable street children to participate in society, and to achieve the CRC's participation rights, the JUCONIs' services fall far short of being "truly participatory".[30] Several writers on child participation quote the "Ladder of Participation" adapted by Roger Hart (1992) from Sherry Arnstein's 1969 ladder of adult participation. I use Roger Hart's ladder in this section because it offers a useful framework to discuss an issue that is interpreted in different ways. The framework is also a well known approach which has been applied to the field of programs for street children[31].

The level of a child's engagement in the JUCONI programs varies considerably. There are many examples of the lowest degree of participation (rung four on the ladder), in which a particular task is assigned to a child who understands the purpose of the task and the task is meaningful to him or her. An example might be the administration of JUCONI's halfway house in which resident children participate in the day-to-day running of the house, under a rotation system. The system is established by an adult educator, who also participates in it, and who supervises the cleaning and food preparation activities. All purchases for the house are initiated and supervised by the adult educator. This is very much an adult-led administration, with individual tasks assigned among informed children. The educational team considers it very important to provide this type of "holding environment," a relatively predictable, stable context within which resident children can be given the chance to be dependent and to leave responsibility for important decisions to others. Within such a holding environment, street-living children can start to address the feelings of worthlessness, hurt, and vulnerability that lie behind their apparently tough "independent" exteriors. They have a chance to relax, reflect on their lives, start to take steps to resolve their emotional needs, build on their competencies, and learn to get on with other children and adults. It may be possible to create a more democratic and participatory administrative experience, woven into the wider educational process, but our priority has been to create an atmosphere in JUCONI's half-way house in which street-living children can begin to prepare themselves emotionally for a more genuine sort of independence that does not depend on drugs or violence.

There are fewer examples of true participation, in which decisions are initiated by children, and shared with adults. For street-living children, examples of true participation tend to be stacked in the follow-on service, where children are definitely taking the lead — making their own decisions about schooling, jobs, hobbies, relationships, and living conditions. Here, educators aim to listen and provide guidance as needed, to help children follow through on their own ideas.

Within the JUCONI half-way house… resident children have a chance to relax, reflect on their lives, start to take steps to resolve their emotional needs, build on their competencies, and learn to get on with other children and adults.

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[30] See *Degrees of Youth Participation,* Jack K. Boyson, 1999, International Youth Foundation's unpublished Youth Participation Resources

[31] Judith Ennew's 1994 *Street and working children – a guide to planning,* published by the UK's Save the Children as its Development Manual No. 4 is an excellent example

Many of their decisions are short-sighted and short-term, but by this advanced stage in JUCONI participation, youngsters are better equipped to learn from their mistakes and gradually improve their own decision-making.

There are, however, more examples of true participation of street-working children earlier on their program. In JUCONI-Ecuador's family program, children and parents set their own goals, with help from the educators, and create their individual education plans together. There is an even greater degree of genuine participation in the program for market-working children, who often need less help to gain access to their rights of protection and provision, and are therefore more able to take on and enjoy their rights to participate. Coming from fairly restrictive family structures, these children nevertheless have real potential to change their own lives and to play an active role in their market communities.

It has been very hard for JUCONI to facilitate true participation at the outreach level, in the way that several experiences are recounted in Brazil, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and Kenya. In the cities in which we work, street-living children very rarely form any kind of stable group at the street level. It seems likely that the participatory outreach option might be more appropriate where there are large numbers of street-living children in identifiable groups, and where viable alternatives for them off the street are still remote. Small groups of this kind can be seen more often in Mexico City and a few other Latin American capitals, where seasoned street-youngsters form groups and live or sometimes work together. The JUCONIs have chosen to work in cities where street-living child populations are smaller and more transient. In Puebla, by working with the children as individuals or in pairs as they arrive from surrounding towns and rural states, the JUCONI program actually limits the development of street-based groups. There is also evidence that we are contributing to stemming the flow of street-living children from the eastern provinces to Mexico City, through working with youngsters as soon as they arrive in Puebla city.

With street-working children, again our experience tends to be with children working in family groups or alone. Their problems seem best resolved by working with them and the rest of their family, in the family home. Perhaps here too, the participatory outreach option may be more appropriate in towns or cities where there are large numbers of children working or living in a relatively small area, who do not have any obvious alternatives to street work. In Mexico this might be true of indigenous families in the rural southern states. It might also be increasingly true in Ecuador, where the economy is in decline and families are increasingly unable to survive without contributions from their children. However, in

In JUCONI-Guayaquil's family program, children and parents set their own goals, with help from the educators, and create their individual education plans together. There is an even greater degree of genuine participation in the program for market-working children, who often need less help to gain access to their rights of protection and provision. . .

Puebla and Guayaquil, we have not found it useful or appropriate to encourage child development by strengthening their working competences within the street environment itself.

Within the JUCONIs, many of our activities with street-living children are on the lower rungs of the participation ladder. Activities with street-working and market-working children are on the higher rungs of that ladder. And as children progress through a program, their activities should become increasingly participatory, reflecting an increasing emotional readiness to take on responsibilities. Ultimately, of course, the quality of the participation depends on the child and educator. As Roger Hart says, "There is no single best strategy or technique for any project; diversity is the key. Projects should be designed to enable different degrees and different types of involvement by different persons and at different stages in the process."[32]

Although over 10% of any educator's time in the JUCONIs is spent in training, most of our educators are not highly skilled in the range of educational strategies that would stimulate true participation, and some have little natural feeling for nurturing children's participation. This reflects national development levels, public perceptions of children, and NGO salaries. Staff selection and training are among the most problematic issues when it comes to the quality of programs for street children today, and the JUCONIs work hard to improve their educational professionalism by investing heavily and constantly to prepare and train educational staff inside the organizations.

The JUCONIs recognize that street children's participation in our services is necessarily of a complex nature. Almost by definition, these youngsters are among the most alienated of all youth — with many feeling extremely inadequate, under-valued, and excluded. This low self-esteem can throw up serious obstacles to true participation. Our experiences to date suggest that street children need to have resolved at least some basic welfare concerns and have developed some emotional and cognitive abilities before they are able to truly participate in designing and leading their own activities. JUCONI programs are increasingly aimed at helping street children reach this stage of empowerment during the middle, intensive change service. They draw on a range of educational theories and methods to do this, aimed at giving street children opportunities to reflect on their lives, to more fully appreciate themselves, to build on their strengths, and to find ways to move forward.

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[32] *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship,* Roger Hart, 1992, UNICEF Innocenti Center, Florence, Italy

I t seems desirable in every way to help youngsters avoid becoming street children in the first place, by offering them better alternative opportunities before they are forced into street life or become involved in street work. In theory, prevention should be much "cheaper" for the children involved, because they avoid paying the severe emotional, physical, intellectual, and social costs associated with experiences on the street. Prevention should also be "cheaper" for society, because it diminishes the high financial and human resource costs of intensive developmental services for street children.

But prevention is only cheaper if preventive services (whatever their nature), actually serve children at risk of becoming street children. And here we have a major problem: how do you identify who is actually at risk of becoming a street-worker, a market-worker, or a street-living child, and who is not? The JUCONIs have faced this dilemma, and have come to believe that the children most at risk of taking to the streets are the younger siblings of street children, who share community and family situations.

JUCONI Mexico's first attempt at systematic preventive work roughly followed the general trend of "community-development" models adapted for poor urban areas, in widespread use in the late 1980s and through the 1990s in Latin America. Through its outreach service for street-working children, JUCONI identified three localities on the fringes of Puebla where considerable numbers of participating children lived with their families. We decided to invite parents of these children to form support groups, with technical and financial support from JUCONI. The support groups would be aimed both at helping families to find better opportunities off the streets for their working children, and at preventing other siblings from taking to the streets by helping parents to improve the family's economic situation.

In one locality, La Popular, JUCONI helped mothers set up a cooperative child-care unit and organize themselves to run a soup kitchen for the community. In San Petro, mothers and JUCONI together organized workshops on a range of themes and eventually were granted a meeting place in the local government's offices. And in San Felipe, JUCONI and the mothers focused on pre-school childcare with workshops for parents. In each case, the projects had a high degree of participation by families, and decisions were made together as a group, with JUCONI educators playing a supportive role. Participating mothers and JUCONI could point to some important achievements for their communities — adequate childcare options for working mothers, an improved role for women in local decision-making, new mechanisms for collaboration between families, better nutrition and improved health care for children.

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By the end of the first year of each project however, the elected leaders of these groups of mothers (we had relatively little success in stimulating participation by fathers), were not mothers of working children, nor did their children seem to be at particularly high risk of becoming street-workers. In fact, the mothers driving JUCONI's community work were natural community leaders, whose children were doing well in local schools, receiving considerable family support, and enjoying a good standard of living by comparison with the majority of the community. The mothers of street-working children, who were among the poorest in the community, had usually dropped out of the group altogether, having neither the time nor the motivation to participate in such community activities. Our conclusion when we assessed the value of JUCONI's "community-extension" services was that we may well have had a significantly positive impact on women's formal participation in local communities, but we had not had an impact on preventing children from taking to street-work. So, in terms of impact on the street-working child population, our prevention strategy had turned out to be a cost with no identifiable benefit—making our prevention work not cheaper, but in fact "expensive"[33].

Community development literature has recently begun to address the difficult issue of how to include the poorest and least integrated members in community projects. The JUCONIs do not yet have a good enough skill base for this work, nor is community development in itself a priority for the JUCONIs, as NGOs concerned primarily with street children. So while the JUCONIs still collaborated with local community groups, they needed other strategies to help children avoid slipping into street work or street life.

Some help came from looking through internal records. First we looked at street-living children. By roughly mapping the locations of the homes of street-living children who had participated in the early years of JUCONI Mexico's program, we could see that they came from a wide range of communities — rural, urban, local, and distant. There was no identifiable pattern, except that they came from very low-income areas, and within those areas, from particularly poor families whose parents had received very little formal education. Another important factor in JUCONI's analysis was that not all children from the poorest families in the poorest communities were leaving their homes for the streets. In fact, relatively few youngsters left their homes. But children who had taken to the streets sometimes had older siblings who had left home before them. We began to see a pattern: low-income community plus low-income family of very limited education within the community, suffering some kind of serious internal problem or

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[33] For a fuller argument see the chapter on JUCONI – Preventing Children taking to Street Life, by Alison Lane, in
Prevention of Street Migration, 1998 Consortium for Street Children UK.

disruption (such as neglect, violence, alcohol, psychological illness, or parental death) plus some characteristics of the child making him or her either particularly vulnerable to ill-treatment or particularly willing to leave the home.

This research led us to decide that the best place to start preventive work was with children who showed characteristics of vulnerability within the families of street-living children. The 20 children at high risk that JUCONI helps each year in its street-living child program are selected younger siblings of participating children in the program.

We use a similar strategy for street-working and market-working children. But almost all the younger siblings of these children are at high risk of carrying out street work in the future. This is because street-workers and market-workers contribute to the family economy, and so respond to decisions taken by the adults responsible for them. It is likely that if a parent has allowed or forced one child to work on the streets, then others in the family are at high risk. However, this is not always true. Sometimes one or two children bear the brunt of the workload, paying for the remaining children to go through school. But in most cases, all children will be expected to contribute to the family income. The 120 children at high risk who participate in JUCONI Mexico's prevention services are almost all siblings of street-working or market-working children, while the 240 youngsters at high risk who participate in JUCONI Ecuador's prevention services are all siblings of street-working children.

We cannot conclusively demonstrate that these younger siblings would have become street children without our intervention, but we do know that they share family environments that put them at higher risk than other children who are members of more stable and integrated families within the same communities. We are reluctant to support claims by community-focused programs that they prevent children taking to the streets simply by virtue of working in poor communities. They might be preventing a range of other problems, but unless they target the poorest and most alienated families of those communities, and particularly those in which children work or have left to live in the streets, it seems unlikely that they will prevent children from taking to the streets.

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In 1990, JUCONI Mexico opened its "productive workshop", designed to respond to street-working children's needs to produce an income for their families. The workshop was instigated by youngsters between 11 and 15 years of age, facilitated by JUCONI educators, and involved other family members as participants. JUCONI directors and educators envisioned the workshop as a space where families could work together in a protected environment, learn to set up and administer their own home-based workshops, and build on sales techniques already acquired by street-working children. At the same time, children would receive help with their homework and parents would acquire skills to create a more supportive environment for their children. Market and production analysis by a group of children and a JUCONI educator resulted in a joint decision to make and market mops and cleaning cloths. This seemed to satisfy various concerns — it built on children's existing competences and involved some parts of production suitable for children, others for youths, and others for parents. There was also an existing market with many potential buyers, from individuals to chains of shops, in which the workshop and potential family-based enterprises seemed able to compete. Participating children and families would carry "credentials," explaining the purpose of the workshop, to encourage individuals to buy the products.

JUCONI provided the installations and made the initial investments in equipment and raw materials. A first group of children and their families was helped by JUCONI educators to calculate costs, margins and prices, and a local craftsman was brought in to show the first group of 18 participants how to make the products.

We closed the workshop 18 months later, concluding that not only was it not meeting the goals of children, or of their families, or of JUCONI, but that it probably never would. So what went wrong? And what did we learn?

Our main error, I think, was to expect so much of one service. We wanted it to meet economic objectives and training objectives; we hoped it would meet practical, immediate needs and longer-term, developmental needs; and we wanted it to belong to children and families and JUCONI. Some of these ambitions were contradictory: how could a workshop be both productive, in the sense of producing for the market, and offer training, in the sense of training youngsters to be able to produce for a market, at the same time? To be genuinely productive, the workshop would need to compete with other local producers geared to producing as much as possible, as efficiently as possible. Large scale producers were using economies of scale and paying very low wages, while small producers were working long hours and producing at high speed. This was not compatible with the sort of workshop street-working children and their families could run, or

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JUCONI wanted to manage. Plus, there were too many stakeholders. We should either have let the children run the show, or their families, or JUCONI. But one single workshop couldn't meet the needs of all these constituents.

There was another problem: the street-working children we had brought together were not a "natural" group. They worked different street corners and had been brought together by JUCONI. Similarly, their families came from different communities and had no real common cause. Neither of these groups showed any desire to work together outside the protected workshop environment provided by JUCONI. We concluded that for children or families to work together, they would need a common working or living environment, or perhaps a common "job-type" in which children could benefit from "unionization," as several African, Asian, and Latin American projects advocated. But street-working children in Mexico tend to work in an isolated fashion, not sharing a common location, and their families did not come from the same communities. Also, there were no job-types that had seen successful "unionization" experiences in Mexico.

Reluctantly, we decided that we had neither the experience nor the interest in business to become successful innovators in this field. But we did need to help children acquire skills for finding and keeping better jobs than those they had in the street. We learned we could do a pretty good job of helping youngsters gain these skills by accompanying them in their search for jobs (reading the newspapers, using our network of local contacts), training them in life skills, developing carpentry and other internal mini-workshops, and helping youth overcome problems as they occurred in the working environment. Our record is far from perfect, but we keep learning. In 1997, JUCONI Mexico opened another small workshop, with space for six youth. It is a training workshop, designed to give street-living youngsters a combination of working skills in a semi-industrial environment. The workshop makes jams, and is moderately but not highly successful in selling them to JUCONI supporters.

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Andrea, Katty and Diana, all street-working girls, wait outside their house in Isla Trinitaria for a family visit by JUCONI educators, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

The number of street children is often exaggerated by international develop-
ment agencies, NGOs, and the media. This is partly because they are
difficult to count. Who do you include in the term street children? And where
and how do you count them? NGOs also have different ways of counting the
numbers of street children who participate in their services. Some include young-
sters who have dropped in for one session or night, while JUCONI requires
participation in several consecutive sessions before including a child in service
numbers. Some NGOs count "services" instead of children. For example, a child
who participates in an outreach service and a day center service can be counted as
"two" beneficiaries, rather than one person. Often too, the term "street children"
is used as a blanket term to include children who hang around street corners in
poor neighborhoods, orphaned youngsters and other children seeking institution-
al help. In addition there is the problem of measuring children's outcomes. Most
programs have their own range of services and set their own standards of "suc-
cess," but few are clear to an outsider, and even fewer can be validated. These
different interpretations make meaningful comparisons between NGO programs
difficult, if not impossible.

Nevertheless, it is important for service delivery, program management, and
public policy-making, to be able to show accurately the costs per child served,
and to assess the "cost-effectiveness" of any program in terms of children's out-
comes. The JUCONIs analyze their costs in two ways:

■ First, we look at the average cost of each service per participating child. By
adding the cost of the relevant outreach plus intensive change plus follow-on ser-
vices, we find the average cost for a child in each program for any specified time
period, usually a year. We can also average the management and administrative
costs over the programs, to find out the average cost of any one child in terms of
the entire organization's costs. In JUCONI Mexico's case, this averaged out in the
year 2000 at just under US $800 per child per year, and in JUCONI Ecuador's
case under US $400 per child per year. A comparison across programs shows the
difference between the costs of running services for street-living children, street-
working children and market-working children, per child. As expected, the
JUCONI Mexico program for street-living children is the most expensive per
participant and its program for market-working children is the least expensive.
This reflects the magnitude of problems faced by a street-living child trying to
access his or her rights, compared to a market-working child who, in JUCONI
programs, is generally, although not always, less disadvantaged.

Developing a cost analysis per child is particularly useful to help supporters

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and governments recognize program limits and understand our need for more resources. For example: an educational process for particularly vulnerable children that includes personalized and family-based psychological, educational and welfare provision, as well as all program overheads, at a cost of US $800 per year per child, is clearly very cheap in any country environment. Unit costs can be compared roughly with programs for extremely vulnerable populations in other countries by comparing per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of each country and making adjustments accordingly to the program cost per child. For internal use, unit cost analysis is very helpful as an input to analyze service quality, specific program investments, and programmatic results for each child.

■ Second, the JUCONIs assess their cost-effectiveness in terms of the numbers of children who successfully graduate from their programs (outreach plus intensive change). This is not a standardized measurement, because children enter the JUCONI programs from a wide range of starting points, but it does give an idea of the percentage of children who manage to reach the goals that they and their educators set out together to achieve (with progress towards those goals monitored during participation). There are program-wide standard criteria for graduation (e.g., all street-living children must have resumed regular contact with their families) and some organization-wide minimum criteria (e.g., all children should have obtained their primary school certificates). The purpose of this measurement of "cost-effectiveness" is to discuss the organization's costs in terms of outcomes per child. This seems a far better indicator of a program's usefulness than costs per child served, which demonstrates nothing about how the child was served or what he or she achieved as a result of participation in a program.

The JUCONIs are among those pressing for commonly accepted standards, assessment tools, and cost measurements in the field of work with street children. We are particularly keen to see cost measurements include the savings and gains accruing to society from helping children move from exclusion to productive participation. Until we have commonly accepted measurement tools, it will be extremely difficult to analyze the effectiveness or efficiency of an organization's programs for street children without in-depth knowledge of the organization itself. And even with in-depth knowledge, if a program has limited outcome or impact assessment, then trying to measure cost-effectiveness might still be a meaningless exercise.

JUCONI educator Veronica uses a drawing game to help street-working boys Edison, Isaac and Jacobo build their self-esteem, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

I n this document I have tried to highlight the principal strategies behind the
JUCONIs' approach to helping street children, and to show some of the
lessons we have learned during a decade's work in the field. While the picture is
far from complete I hope it stimulates discussion among practitioners, donors,
government officials, academics, and others interested in securing a better life for
street children.

   To my mind, the most significant obstacles to street children gaining access
to their rights today are: a chronic under-funding of programs for this population
and a public policy focus on street children as "charitable causes" rather than
potential investments. As a consequence, the field of work with street children is
developing very slowly and erratically. The search continues for effective ways to
help children find solutions to their most pressing needs, and there are many pit-
falls. The JUCONI's efforts in the area of "productivity" workshops and commu-
nity-based prevention work are good examples of misguided projects. They did,
however, provide useful lessons.

   The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a much-needed
framework within which to develop services for street children. And a needs-
based approach, combined with individual assessment and tracking of program
graduates, seems key to enabling children to participate in mainstream society.
For NGOs, a centralized educational approach appears to be the best strategy
currently available for helping street children to move from exclusion to inclusion
in society. The degree of children's participation in each program will vary
according to children's needs, program possibilities and objectives. We have not
found it useful to focus on building on competences acquired in the street, but
rather to help each child build on his or her range of strengths — irrespective of
the context in which they were developed — and as a member of his or her fami-
ly. We aim to help children to achieve a balanced, integrated development that
will foster real participation within society. By grouping and selecting children,
programs can address participants' needs more effectively and efficiently.
Similarly, tracking of graduates greatly improves program planning if feedback
mechanisms are adequate, and allows for some impact assessment. Measurement
of results is finally one of the keys to creating long-term solutions for street children.

Recommendations:

■ To urge governments and the international community to move street children
to the center of their social priorities, in line with national and international com-
mitments assumed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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■ To encourage appropriate levels of investment in street children from all sectors of society. Tri-sectoral collaboration is particularly appealing, since public policy-making and public finance can be substantially enhanced by private funding and business management, to support professional civil society organizations working with street children.

■ To press NGOs, NGO networks, and donors to develop and use minimum program standards, assessment tools, and cost measurements in the field of work with street children, to allow us to better assess our impact and accelerate our program development.

■ To disseminate working models systematically through publications, practice-based consultancy services, and training modules. With adequate resources, more models of good practice will emerge to be tested and applied, more innovations will be made, and more effective and efficient solutions will be found.

■ To encourage programs to recognize both their limits and their potential for specialization. I recommend a focus on creating solutions for individual children, through teamwork, through developing a coherent educational process within the CRC, through individual assessment, and through the tracking of graduates.

■ To make sure our mistakes are not hidden, but are shared as lessons learned that can be used to build better programs.