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BUILDING BRIDGES TO MAINSTREAM OPPORTUNITIES:
*Displaced Children and Orphans Fund Guidance on Funding Priorities
and Parameters for Street Children Programming*



Cover photo

A group of children participating in the Quédate con Nosotros project work on craft projects to design and build beautiful houses. These houses are sold during an annual fair. Proceeds are used to benefit the project shelter.

The Quédate con Nosotros Project works to improve the quality of life of vulnerable children ages eight through thirteen who work and/or live in the streets. Quédate's four-phase program provides vulnerable children with assistance in making the transition from life on the street back to life within their families and communities.

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Building Bridges to Mainstream Opportunities
*Displaced Children & Orphans Fund Guidance on Funding Priorities
and Parameters for Street Children Programming*

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Introduction

DCOF Funding of Street Children Programs

Since the early 1990's the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) has provided substantial funding to organizations working with *street children*¹ in Africa, Latin America, South East Asia, and the former Soviet Union. This work has fallen under DCOF's overarching Congressional mandate to develop and support programs and methodological approaches that strengthen the capacity of families and communities to provide the necessary care, protection, and support for diverse populations of displaced children and orphans. During this time period, DCOF's funding to street-children-serving organizations has paralleled—and where possible complemented—the work of numerous other international actors including UNICEF, the Asia Development Bank, the European Community (EU), and the World Bank.

Program Reviews by Other Major Donors

Since 2000, many of these major donors—in close collaboration with academic researchers and lead practitioners—have stepped back to take a critical look at the preceding twenty years of funding and direct service delivery in the area of street children programming. Many have expressed concerns about the efficacy and sustainability of current work. Some have raised questions about the conceptualization and design of existing interventions. Most also lament the absence of an effective means of measuring the impact of existing programs, and, in turn, making a solid case for continued investment in this important area of work. As a follow up to this review work, donor organizations have published myriad important reports in recent years. The author consulted most of these reports in preparing this guidance document.²

A Future Role for DCOF

DCOF, for its part, has decided that it too should take a hard look at its own experience in funding street children programming, and then determine what, if any, role it should play in the future development of strategies and services targeting this subset of displaced children. To this end, DCOF is actively evaluating the efficacy of its past and current investments. It wants to:

- situate these within the **emerging trends** and priorities of the sector,
- build an **evidence base** for future programming, and,
- provide better **technical assistance** to USAID country missions looking to support ongoing work in this area.

DCOF's Internal Review Process

As a first step in its review of street children programming, DCOF commissioned a desk study of emerging trends in the sector. DCOF next invited a Capstone research team out of George Washington University to study the psychosocial needs of street children. DCOF technical teams then visited newly funded street children programs in Georgia and the Dominican Republic. As a fourth step, DCOF hosted a one-day planning retreat on street children programming in May 2005. This guidance document represents a final step in

¹ One of the perennial debates within the international community has focused on what terminology should be used to describe this population. This issue is addressed in part 1.A. of this document.

² See the “Selected Bibliography” for a complete list of documents reviewed as part of the desk study phase of DCOF's internal review.

DCOF's current internal review, and has been developed to provide guidance to USAID country missions and both local and international implementing partners on how funds from the Displaced Children and Orphans fund will be used in the area of programming for street children.

Five Key Factors for Success

This guidance document comprises five sections, each of which highlights one of *Five Key Factors for Success* in street children programming that DCOF identified during its internal review process. These *Five Key Factors for Success* draw on DCOF’s desk review of available literature and studies, on discussions with DCOF’s lead implementing partners of street children programming, and, on field visits by staff to numerous street-children-serving projects supported by DCOF.

Factor #1. Analyzing the Street Children Phenomenon in a Given Community

At the heart of any successful intervention with street children there needs to be a careful and thorough analysis of the street children phenomenon in a given community. This analysis must be based on:

- A clear definition, delineation, and count of the sub-populations of street-active children, including those who work on the street and live with their family, those who live on the street, and those who may shift between these two situations;
- A careful review of the drivers of street involvement; and,
- An understanding of the complex role of families in the street child phenomenon.

1.A. Using the Term “Street Children” with Precision

One of the great debates in the street-children-serving sector has been over the terminologies and typologies used to describe and classify this particular set of vulnerable and displaced children. Great debates have raged—and continue to rage—among academics, policy makers, and practitioners alike, all unhappy with the limitations imposed by virtually all classification systems. However, none are able to provide a definitive alternative.

Perhaps the key lesson learned in all of this is that any rigid differentiation between groups of street children using static snapshots—children who are “on the street” versus those “of the street”; children who are “street working” and those who are “street living”; children who have “abandoned” family life and those who have “been abandoned” by family; and children who are a “type one, two, or three” of “risk”, etc.—fails to usefully represent the **fluid and dynamic nature of street involvement** by children. Young peoples’ pathways on and off the street are numerous and complex, much more like a self-regulating organic ecosystem than a fixed cause-and-effect relationship. Thus, they defy categorical description by their very nature. Many researchers liken the overall process of street involvement to that of a child having a “**career**” on the street. As Jill Kruger, citing Beazely, Butler and Rizzini, observes:

Perhaps the most useful idea developed in the course of the recent paradigm shift is that street children have careers on the street: moving out of home space, into street space, and through a variety of stages, activities and images – depending on experiences, and increasing age – to the process of leaving the street, which are not unitary and far from always being the result of adult intervention. (Kruger, 2003)

Street children’s relationships with households, extended families, peer networks, and community care systems are similarly fluid and multifaceted. The whole issue of service

planning and service delivery thus needs to work less with addressing simple causal relationships and broad groups of “at risk” children, and more with an intentional focus on addressing key vulnerabilities and capacities of particular clusters of children at particular stages in their street involvement, as well as those of their families of origin. Numerous studies show that the key to successful interventions is a combination of **intentionality of program design, individual tailoring of interventions**, and a willingness to **focus efforts** and not be distracted by trying to be all things to all children.

Recent research shows that street-active children and youth³ blend varying degrees of street working (time spent earning money through street-based work) and street living (time spent sleeping away from home on the street or in street children shelters). The number of children actually living exclusively on the street at any one time represents a small portion of the overall street children population.

Guidance Note #1: It is expected that proposals to DCOF will both clearly articulate the sub-groups of street children to be served by a planned program and carefully describe the assets and vulnerabilities to be addressed by specific interventions. Proposals should differentiate, to the degree possible, between interventions targeting children living on the streets and those targeting children working (and occasionally sleeping) on the streets. Moreover, interventions should be described in terms of the overall street, home, and community-based resources a given group of children/youth might be able to tap into, re-engage, or begin to develop as part of the planned intervention.

1.B. Getting the “Numbers” Right

One common area of exploration by recent reviews of street children programming relates to the whole question of just how many street children there are at a global, regional, national, or local level. Of course one’s definition of “street children” impacts such estimates, but much criticism has begun to be laid at the feet of early advocates of expanded programming for street children for wildly overstating the scope and scale of the street children phenomenon. As well-regarded street children researcher Henk Van Beers observes:

It has finally been acknowledged that the number of children who are living permanently in the streets is but a very small percentage of the total number of children working in the streets. The tens of millions that were previously guesstimated by organizations such as UNICEF and infinitely repeated in (semi) official publications have proven to be wrong by several serious efforts in counting the actual number of children living on the streets: in most cities they do not even represent 1 percent of the total number working in the street. (Van Beers, 1998)

One figure that has come under universal criticism is the often quoted “100 million street children worldwide” estimate, widely attributed to UNICEF in the 1990’s (So too has the early estimates of 7 million street children in Brazil. This figure represents 6 percent of Brazil’s population in 1993, when it was first widely cited). If, as lead researchers now suggest, one focuses instead on children sleeping apart from their families in urban city centers, these kinds of estimates drop significantly—in the case of Brazil, to just 13,000 children nationwide. Pilot

³ Canadian NGO Street Kids International, www.streetkids.org, has begun to use the less derogatory term “street-active children and youth” as a way of better describing this population (mirroring the shift for example from AIDS Victims to People with AIDS).

research by UNICEF in Kingston, Jamaica, and Blantyre, Malawi on numbers of orphans living in homes, institutions, and/or the street found that the number of street children represented less than 1 percent of the total number of orphans.⁴ Such numbers are well below the kind of instinctive estimates local nongovernmental organizations (NGO) might put forth, and are evidence of the need to recognize just how specific a sub-group one is talking about when one describes children living on the streets.

Guidance Note #2: DCOF will expect proposals to present a clear estimate of both children living and working on the street, and of children working on the street yet still living in a household setting. This will provide an accurate picture of where priority service needs may lie, and of the overall scope and scale of the street children phenomena to be addressed by the project. Such realism in estimating populations, does not diminish the need for offering specialized programming to the uniquely vulnerable population of children sleeping regularly on the streets. Nor does it preclude work designed to prevent children working on the streets from converting into children sleeping on the streets. But, it does underscore the need to offer carefully targeted, highly tailored interventions for particular populations of street-active children—especially if one is to reach those most in need of support and investment, and if one is to generate demonstrable developmental impacts across a significant percentage of the sub-group of street children targeted by a project.

1.C. Understanding Drivers of Street Involvement

While much has been written about the impact on children of the length of time spent living on the street, much less is known about the underlying impetus that drives different groups of children onto the street. In the case of countries in which there is no immediate history of war or civil conflict, it is assumed that a range of factors from poverty, to family dysfunction, to school failure push some children onto the streets. More and more, however, street involvement is seen to be part of the economic survival strategy of households and/or extended family systems—street working children provide important economic contributions and meet some of their own needs (including education expenses) at the same time. Some academics and policy makers have begun to question to what degree the presence of street children is itself an indicator (perhaps an early warning barometer) of stressors faced by household economic units, and/or communities more broadly, in a given city or country. This thinking has implications for program design, as it implies the need to develop interventions that do not unintentionally rupture street children’s ties with their households by offering them services conceived of as “rescuing” them from the street. At the same time, program developers may well want to work directly with households using street work by younger members as a coping mechanism for economic crisis, in order to develop alternatives together that integrate the possibility of continuing education and address the many risks present to children working on the street.

It is important, considering DCOF’s other areas of funding and technical assistance, to recognize that other more particular forces can be at work at a local, national, or regional level. Flight from war zones, unaccompanied migration from one country (or province/city) to another, loss of parents due to HIV/AIDS, entanglement in child trafficking operations, or rejection by families due to accusation of witchcraft, are all examples of very particular circumstances under which children can become street involved and eventually live unaccompanied on the street.

⁴ E-mail from John Williamson, November 2004.

Many DCOF partners, in their interim and final reports, have stressed the importance of gathering sound pre-programming information on the nature, scope, and underlying origins of street children populations in the community/area where they plan to work. This process can draw from existing government and non-government research sources, but may also involve targeted field research by the implementing partner as well.

Guidance Note #3: DCOF will expect proposals to describe the information gathering already carried out in the proposal drafting process, and will expect that proposals also describe further field research that might be required in the start-up or expansion phases of the proposed work. DCOF will expect an indication of a clear, research-driven, understanding of the nature of the street children population(s) the program plans to serve, along with a carefully articulated rationale for principal program interventions. DCOF may from time to time entertain two phase, design-build type proposals that incorporate a distinct initial collaborative design phase (including field research) before a final program description is developed for a “phase two,” or full program launch. This type of design may be particularly appropriate where the project seeks to meet the needs of a distinctly new sub-group of street children or represents the first street children project in a given community or region.

1.D. Coming to Grips with the Complex Role of Families

Most reviews of programming for street children ultimately make reference to the difficult and dysfunctional home life of children who end up living or working unaccompanied on the street. It is almost an automatic mantra that children find themselves forced to leave home because of grinding poverty, pervasive violence, and family disintegration. But it is equally clear that many groups never probe below the surface of this dynamic, content to situate themselves in the role of the “good adults” who can rescue children from hopeless family life. Throughout the street children literature (including the major reviews listed above), parents and families often receive only passing commentary and only limited priority in terms of research, programming, and funding. While some practitioners speak of providing counseling to families or workshops on parenting skills and abuse prevention, it is unclear how effective these programs are at fully engaging families as key assets in either prevention or early intervention. There are some significant exceptions to this general rule, but the role of family in either protecting vulnerable youth from unaccompanied street involvement, or hastening their departure onto the street, is an area ripe for more thoughtful research and program development. As one scholar writes:

Why when facing apparently similar socio-economic conditions, do some children maintain links with their families whilst others swap the home for the street? Are there differences in the histories, in the dynamic structures, as well as the like conditions of the families of these two groups of children that could, in some way contribute to the maintenance or rupture of family links? (Consortium for Street Children, 1999)

Action for Children in Conflict, a Sierra Leonean NGO, has incorporated into its program in Makeni the partnering of street children in their temporary care facility with other children in the area from which the street children come. They also make home visits, in part to learn

how the children who remain with their families cope with sometimes harsh discipline by parents or guardians.⁵

One area of particular concern vis-à-vis traditional research methodology on the causes of street involvement—especially as these relate to family life—is the reality, as Butler and Rizzini observe, that:

Information about the family has only been obtained by interviews with the children and not the families themselves. (Rizzini, 2003)

There is also some debate in the field of what roles humanitarian-relief-oriented NGOs and the services they offer might play in actually further “rupturing” the links to families of newly arrived street children, by offering services that serve as a magnet to, or enabler of, increased street involvement. DCOF’s 1999 assessment of its own and other funding in Indonesia touches on this theme. The assessment also discusses the concern raised by local government officials of NGOs’ bias towards street-based interventions and away from family re-unification efforts.

Other criticisms have been laid at the feet of programs in Africa that purport to divert “orphaned” children away from harmful street-based livelihood activities without understanding their role in extended family structures. As Henk Van Beers writes:

In fact a number of interventions to “take children off the streets” or to provide shelter actually interfere with existing survival strategies by (extended) families. (Van Beers, 2004)

A similar criticism is leveled towards institution-based care of street children, even when it is designed to be time limited. For as well-regarded orphan and vulnerable children specialist at Family Health International, Moses Dombo, has observed:

It should also be remembered that placing emphasis on institution based support can be a double edged sword, in as much as it tends to encourage children and households to seek attachment to these institutions as a survival strategy. (Dombo, 2004)

And William Myers and Jo Boyden echo:

In societies where family solidarity is essential for children’s survival and development, it matters greatly whether a strategy for protecting children’s rights reinforces a child’s family ties or loosens them. (Myers, 1998)

Crucial work that needs to be done in this area of street children programming is to invest the resources in better

⁵ Based on field notes from John Williamson (DCOF).

In its final report to DCOF on a multi-year street-children-serving program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) made the following recommendation:

Centers should be transitional, for children who are committed to change and reunification, and focused on long-term development of the child and not short-term care or comfort (with the exception of providing urgent health care). They should make use of qualified staff, who take an individualized case management approach with each child. Children should also be proactive in finding solutions, and additional services such as health, education, recreation, and arts can be done to the extent possible in the streets. Be careful about offering incentives such as reunification kits for returning home. Incentives should be assistance with long-term solutions for reintegration, improved family relations, and improved well-being off of the streets. (IRC, 2005)

understanding and therein addressing the role of families as both protective agents from, and potential catalysts of, street involvement. Some of the most promising work in this area comes from work done on the changing nature of families themselves and the pressures they face as they seek to raise the children in their care. Such work focuses less on blaming parents for their children's behavior, and pathologizing them for their lack of coping strategies, and more on understanding what Rizzini calls "the broad changes to family structure in evidence around the globe." Indeed, there is an emerging literature that focuses on the concept of "**support bases**" (versus families per se) that consist of the formal and informal community and family maintenance systems that enable children and adolescents to develop their abilities and potential. Ongoing research into these new **systems of support** is essential to the effective design of targeted prevention, family re-unification, and community re-integration programming.

Guidance Note #4: DCOF will evaluate proposals it receives, in part, on their ability to describe existing systems of care and support bases in street children's lives, along with the ways in which these might be strengthened, renewed, or restored. Projects designed without careful consideration of family, household and community strengths, resources, priorities, and dynamics will not be supported. Ongoing action research into the strengthening of systems of care will, in turn, be a strongly encouraged part of implementation plans. Applicants will be asked to discuss the possible risk their interventions might cause to existing family livelihood strategies, and how such risks might be reduced through monitoring and adjustment to program design.

Factor #2. Carefully Targeting the Children to Be Served

After completing a thorough analysis of the full range and diversity of street-active children in a given community, it is essential for program developers to next carefully define the specific population(s) of street children a proposed intervention intends to address. Successful projects cannot attempt to be all things to all children, lest they become unfocused and ineffective in their results. Targeting involves two key steps:

- Understanding different possible intervention points in the life cycle or "career" of a given population of street-active children, and
- Paying close attention to the intentionality of design required for effective prevention programs.

2.A. Understanding Different Intervention Points

Much has been learned in recent years about the **gradual steps** most children take towards street involvement. The previous stereotype of the dramatic runaway, or tragic throw-away, has been replaced with a more sophisticated understanding of how children are initiated into street life:

In most cases, leaving home for the street is a gradual process. The child begins to frequent the streets during the day but returns home at night, eventually spending a night on the street. This process enables the child to become use to the new surroundings, to make new friendships and eventually to become habituated to street life. (Rizzini, 2003)

Moreover, while the average age of most street children worldwide is twelve years and older, it is significant to note that in study after study the average age of **first initiation** to street life occurs during middle childhood between seven and ten years of age. This has implications for early intervention programming, a field that has seen considerable success in the recent past, but now requires ever more intentional programming and targeted funding support. Indeed, work with children living unaccompanied on the street for **relatively short periods** of time can be very effective when it incorporates effective relationship building, family identification, family reunification, community reintegration, and long-term follow-up services.

The Impact of Substance Use

The role of substance use as a coping strategy for many street-active children, the impact of substance use and abuse among caregivers, and the challenges faced by programs trying to meet the health and livelihood needs of substance using street children are three challenges confronting many of DCOF's implementing partners. Substance use is a difficult topic for many groups to effectively address. All too often, it serves as a very real barrier to effective re-unification / re-integration efforts.

Work with children living unaccompanied on the street for **relatively longer periods of time** is generally understood to represent a significantly different set of program opportunities and priorities. The focus of this work tends to be on ongoing efforts to build rapport and to address immediate needs (health care, shelter, nutrition, legal aid, and basic education), along with painstaking efforts to develop viable pathways off the street for children ready to invest in serious rehabilitation and life-skills development.

This latter work is generally seen to be less directed towards family reunification (though in some cases this is possible) and more towards **community reintegration**. This generally involves attaining self-support off the street and avoids inappropriate and ineffective institutionalization models of “off the street” programming. Community re-integration can be relatively costly and needs to be designed around multiple entry points, lots of “three steps forward, two steps backward” processes of change, and an ability to gauge a given child’s ability/willingness to commit to a period of serious work and sustained effort before substantial resources are committed.

Guidance Note #5: DCOF expects applicants to be able to carefully distinguish between activities designed to provide early intervention supports and those configured to work with more chronically street-active children and youth. DCOF understands the need for rapid interventions and ongoing follow-up with children targeted for family reunification. DCOF also recognizes the need for thoughtful program design regarding the bigger investments in time, support, and follow-through required to support youth with fewer social and community assets in their transition away from street life. DCOF recognizes that some services addressing immediate needs may be required to ensure the protection of especially vulnerable groups, but expects applicants to articulate how these services will support rather than conflict with family reunification and/or community reintegration efforts.

2.B. Targeting Preventive Interventions with Particular Care

One of the best-regarded street-children-serving programs in the world is the JUCONI (Junto Con Las Niñas Y Los Niños [Along with the Children]) project in Puebla, Mexico. Its strength lies in its diverse range of programming, its integrated approach to service delivery, and its willingness to constantly critique and improve its work.

In 2000, JUCONI took a look at its “prevention” programming to gain better insight into the effectiveness of this area of work it had often cited as being critical to a holistic approach to the street children phenomenon. Like many other street-children-serving organizations, JUCONI had taken to heart the traditional wisdom that “prevention is better than cure,” and “that prevention was always more cost-effective than cures” over the long run. And like many street-children-serving organizations, JUCONI felt confident in the way it was investing its “prevention” resources.

This confidence soon dissipated when JUCONI reviewed its ten years of prevention work and reached the conclusion that its center-based prevention services (operating under the name Community Extension) were not reaching the kind of high-risk children and families who needed them most. JUCONI took the bold step to reconfigure its prevention programming based on this self-assessment, and it made two interesting conclusions as it reformulated this work:

- First, that it would target the younger siblings of existing street children, as they would clearly be drawing from families at high risk for further child abandonment, and
- Second, that they would much more rigorously develop their prevention services so that they could be offered through services flexible enough to be personalized and to respond to the individual needs of each child and her or his individual family members.

JUCONI’s experience speaks volumes to the rather vague claims made by many street-children-serving organizations that they are doing effective prevention work. A review of DCOF past and current funding surfaces many well-intentioned claims of doing broad-based prevention work through workshops for families, arts, and recreation programs for at-risk children, generalized services to parents, and humanitarian assistance to vulnerable households. JUCONI’s assessment of its own poorly targeted work should serve as a prompt to others to more carefully examine their own programs and to DCOF to work with others to set some standards of quality in this common area of programming.

JUCONI’s own analysis of the next steps of their prevention work provides an excellent summary of where this critical program element might evolve:

Integrating prevention work into our programs has been a gradual process and we have needed to increase the size of our educational teams and develop expertise in new areas. In some ways reintegration or “cure strategies” can be easier as they respond to more specific needs (what has already happened to someone), whereas prevention widens the scope....Our prevention work has also

JUCONI’s Assessment of Their Prevention Work in 2000:

Over the years we had built up from experience the definition or profile of a street child as forming part of the most excluded and vulnerable sector of our society. They generally lack the emotional, cognitive and economic resources to access services and do not participate in their local community....This profile contrasts starkly with the families who were participating in Community Extension: the fact that these were keen to be involved in the program, and had children in formal education, shows a pre-existing capacity for participation in the community and already developed strategies to identify and grasp further opportunities. Our conclusion, in short, was that as a strategy for preventing children from becoming street children, our Community Extension service had not been successful since we had not clearly defined who was at risk and who we were targeting. (Lane, 2000)

highlighted the crucial role of JUCONI's Follow-On services, which seek to sustain and nurture the changes made earlier in the intensive services of the programmes. Follow-On is the essential proving ground where we find out if these changes can in fact be sustained and built on in the long term by children and their families. (Lane, 2000)

Guidance Note #6: DCOF expects groups who propose to do “prevention” programming as part of their overall work to clearly articulate the specific target group(s) for this work and how participants will be identified. DCOF also expects applicants to precisely outline how they will ensure that prevention programming reaches the most vulnerable households and individuals versus those simply most able to access the proposed services. DCOF encourages applicants to propose and test creative new programming elements in this important area of intervention. It expects proposals to describe how the evidence bases of demonstrated effectiveness of others in this domain will be drawn upon and incorporated into program design.

Factor #3. Maintaining a Focus on Community and Family Re-Integration

One of the broad areas of consensus in street children programming worldwide is that at the end of the day all entities serving street children must extend every effort possible to re-connect children with the systems of care available to them within their immediate and extended families and broader community. This consensus draws upon the recognition that only a very small percentage of street-active children have no connection with family or community. It also builds upon the conviction that the vast majority of street children (like other groups of displaced children) can best be raised and supported over the longer term in families (natural or foster) and within communities (versus ongoing project support or institutions). To be successful in this focus, there is a need to come to terms with two key items:

- Understanding the dynamics, tools, and methodologies of effective family reunification and community reintegration efforts, and,
- Understanding the role of key community actors such as schools in addressing the needs and aspirations of street children.

IRC's monograph “**Family Reunification, Alternative Care and Community Reintegration of Separated Children in Post Conflict Rwanda**” serves as an excellent example of just how rigorous successful family reunification efforts need to be when it comes to working with the hardest-to-serve groups of children, the most vulnerable clusters of families, and the most intransigent of institutional care models. Relevant highlights of IRC's work are:

- (i) Its emphasis on follow-through and **follow-up** to ensure that family reunification leads to genuine family reintegration
- (ii) Its carefully crafted approach to serving both “difficult to trace” and “**difficult to place**” children
- (iii) Its articulation of four **core principles** that guide its work (best interests of the child, right to be informed and consulted, families should be supported and not replaced by NGOs, a least harm approach to material support)
- (iv) Its understanding of the need to **work with institutions** to reform their mandates and re-train their staff (or help them find alternative livelihoods)
- (v) Its development and systematic use of a sophisticated set of **reunification tools** such as the *The Family Willingness and Suitability Study*, the *Social Network Assessment*, the *Economic Assessment Tool* and *Mobility Mapping* to help analyze household circumstances, coping strategies, resources, and linkages.
- (vi) Its honesty and forthrightness in **normalizing the challenges** faced by reunification work and its commitment to not pathologize children, families, communities, or NGO/ government actors involved in this complex work. (IRC, 2003)

3.A. Understanding Family Reunification and Community Reintegration

In recent years many donors and government policy makers have begun to make family reunification and/or community reintegration priorities for funding. This shift in focus from long-term rehabilitation programming for street children—often via institutional care models—has followed a broader shift in the child-serving sector away from the assumption that poor families and communities are simply unable to meet the needs of some children, or that children living apart from their families are inevitably orphans with no family or community care options available to them.

One of the areas where DCOF has made significant investments across its portfolio of activities is that of family reunification. A highlight of this work has been support to post-conflict family reunification efforts in countries such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone. DCOF now sees that a great deal could be gained from an exchange of ideas, approaches, tools, and methodologies between these post-conflict reunification efforts and the task of early intervention in the lives of children living unaccompanied on the street. The growing sophistication and rigor evidenced in family reunification efforts of groups such as IRC—especially as it relates to their work with “untraceable children” in Rwanda—makes it clear that new approaches and methodologies can and should be tried in this domain (see box).

DCOF recognizes that some street children advocacy groups, most recently the UK-based Consortium for Street Children, have cautioned that the current emphasis on family reunification programming needs to be tempered with a recognition that family reunification can be a complex, labor-intensive activity that is not always successful nor necessarily appropriate for all populations of street children.⁶ DCOF, though, would broaden the discussion to focus on programming that looks to both family reunification and community reintegration efforts as being useful building blocks in the re-establishment, strengthening, or renewal of displaced children’s community-based systems of care.

Guidance Note #7: DCOF expects all applicants to discuss the relative merits of family reunification and community reintegration efforts in their proposals. Groups that intend to integrate this area of work will be expected to show how best practices in family reunification and community reintegration from the street children and parallel fields have influenced program design. Groups that do not intend to include either or both of these components need to provide a clear rationale for not incorporating them and a timeline regarding when and how such work might eventually be included.

3.B. Understanding the Role of Key Community Actors

In their groundbreaking research into the phenomenon of street-working children, Jo Boyden and William Myers have been relentless in their efforts to push policy makers and practitioners in the sector to see the behaviors, decisions, priorities, and goals of street-working children and their families in an entirely new light. This work, like that of IRC and others in the area of family reunification, is of immediate relevance to those working with street children both because most street children are also working children, and because so many street-living children begin their careers on the streets as working children.

⁶ See the January 2005 publication “In Best or Vested Interests? An Exploration of the Concept and Practice of Family Reunification for Street Children” found at www.streetchildren.org.uk.

One area of particular relevance to the phenomenon of street children is Boyden and Myers' honest appraisal of the role of schools as either key social supports for marginalized children or active agents in their further marginalization. For while much is postulated about the role of "dysfunctional families" related to the decision by some children to live unaccompanied on the street, much less has been said about the role that "dysfunctional schools" play in children's decision to abandon community life for one more oriented to street work and living. In a hard-hitting analysis of current schooling for poor children, Boyden and Myers observe that

Work by some of DCOF's current grant recipients seems highly appropriate given broader research being done on the role of schools in strengthening or loosening family and community ties for vulnerable children. Schools must play a significant role within a systems-of-care framework for work with street children, with their role seen to be at times equal to that of families vis-à-vis re-integrating children into community life and community protection. One example is the NINA consortium in the Dominican Republic that is working with local schools as part of targeted prevention, early intervention, and family reunification work.

It is hardly a surprise that so many children abandon school, dissatisfied with the kind of education on offer or distressed by the poor treatment meted out by teachers. Indeed it is important for policy analysts and decision makers to understand that inferior and degrading schooling is as major a cause of child work, often as or more significant than family poverty. (Myers, 1998)

Research by the World Bank and others is also shedding new light on the ways that families must consider both the direct costs (uniforms, supplies, fees, transportation) and the opportunity costs of education (forgoing time that could be spent earning income) in their difficult decision as to whether their children will participate in school, blend schooling with part-time employment, or work full time. The relevance of educational offerings to family livelihood strategies is an important consideration in this decision-making process, as many rigid, "chalk and talk" classroom pedagogies are accurately seen by families and children to add little value to the employability of graduates.

Successful new offerings in the area of non-formal basic education, often delivered via alternative or flexible learning systems, have proven to be an effective and cost-efficient way of providing basic education opportunities to street-active children and youth. They and their families typically understand the need to develop such human assets as literacy and numeracy skills, and livelihood capabilities such as higher-order thinking and problem solving. Many new reports have come out in this area and signal another growing area of opportunity for cost-effective interventions in street children populations.

Guidance Note #8: DCOF is interested in the ways that proposed interventions link with the targeted communities' existing formal and non-formal educational offerings. DCOF expects applicants to demonstrate an understanding of the connections and existing dynamic between educational programs and street involvement, as well as the ways this dynamic might be affected by the proposed project's activities. DCOF is also interested in supporting pilot work in the area of linking prevention and early intervention efforts with school or non-school-based formal and non-formal education programming.

Factor #4. Recognizing the Importance of Collaborative Design

Effective programs for street children cannot be developed in a vacuum. Even the best evidence-based interventions from one community may need to be adapted for successful application in another, and what works with one group of children may need to be significantly revised to be successful with others. Essential to the successful design of projects is the involvement of all of the key stakeholders (children, families, community actors, government, and frontline youth workers) in the design process—drawing from each their strengths and aspirations, and addressing with each key gaps or areas for capacity building and support. Key areas to focus on are four-fold:

- Identifying assets as well as needs among street children
- Engaging key government actors
- Close consultation and intentional collaboration with other service providers
- Focused investment in staff development and institutional capacity building

4.A. Identifying Assets as well as Needs Among Street Children

One of the most useful discussions of ways of reframing street children programming can be found in the recent writing of Catherine Panter-Brick, a long-time researcher in the field of programming for street children. Her core argument is that where real progress has been made in street children programming, the emphasis of work has shifted from “street” to “children”—from concerns about the negative influences and dangers of the street and attempts to “rescue” children, to time spent appreciating the assets and abilities of street-active children and their need for more opportunities to develop livelihood-linked assets (human, social, financial) and livelihood capabilities (positive risk taking, problem solving, and enterprising life skills).

My review examines five stark criticisms of the category “street child” and of research that focuses on the identifying characteristics of a street lifestyle rather than on children themselves and the depth or diversity of their actual experiences....Risk assessment that assign street children to a category “at risk” should not overshadow helpful analytical approaches focusing on children’s resiliency and long term career life prospects. (Panter-Brick, 2005)

Panter-Brick’s research on the assets and abilities of street children parallel the work of other researchers and practitioners who are beginning to understand the more dynamic relationship between young people’s development of livelihood strategies—including street-based, informal sector work—and both their acquisition of new livelihood assets and capabilities, and their investment of earnings in improving their health and in accessing continuing education and skills development opportunities.

For more on an assets-based approach to youth livelihood development see the EQUIP 3 section of the EQUIP123.net

Livelihood development interventions are an increasing component of programming for street children, especially street-working children with ties to household and community supports. Within the broader USAID funding community, programming in microenterprise, microfinance, and economic strengthening that support youth livelihood development are growing areas of interest (along with new efforts to design flexible non-formal basic education

offering and youth-friendly public health services). Recent work on an Open Society Institute (OSI) and USAID-funded project in Tajikistan, *Realizing the Potential of Tajik Youth*, has demonstrated the link between increased livelihood development opportunities and strengthened family ties, improved school attendance, and the creation of new systems of peer-driven social support. This work may be a harbinger of where additional new programming efforts need to be placed to break the cycle of short-term, basic-needs-meeting interventions that do little to prepare street children for re-integration into the fuller social and economic life of community.

Guidance Note # 9: DCOF will evaluate the degree to which proposals have successfully identified and incorporated the existing resiliency and coping strategies of targeted groups of street children. DCOF will expect applicants to demonstrate an understanding of core livelihood development strategies/opportunities appropriate for work with a given group of children. Applicants will also be asked to describe partnerships they may anticipate forming or strengthening with local partners who specialize in microenterprise, microfinance, or other economic strengthening interventions.

4.B. Engaging Government Actors

A recent report from the Council of Europe, along with the recommendations of many previous and current DCOF grant recipients, emphasizes the importance and effectiveness of engaging key government actors and gatekeepers in the design and delivery of street children programming. This engagement can take place on at least three critical levels.

First, government departments and institutions responsible for child and family welfare should be consulted and, where possible, engaged in the project design process. Effective programs understand the funding and policy development priorities and processes of relevant national, regional, and local government units whose eventual buy-in may be necessary to project start-up and/or continued sustainability.

Second, government actors such as police officers, public health workers, school teachers, school administrators, and social protection agents are often important potential targets of planned professional development and capacity-building interventions. Sensitization and skills development activities for police officials have proven to be particularly effective in helping to reduce the level of abuse and arbitrary detention of street-active children and youth. Work with teachers and public health officials has also been effective in reducing or removing barriers to street children accessing these important community resources.

Third, government representatives are often critical members of community-wide program coordination or collaboration efforts, as they are often key actors in the referral and case management process. Similarly, it is important for project leaders and consortium members to build rapport with key government policy makers whose decisions may contribute to the development of either a more empowering or a more restrictive environment for street-children-serving efforts.

Guidance Note #10: DCOF expects that applicants will be able to demonstrate how they have involved government actors in the design of the proposed interventions. DCOF also asks applicants to describe the ways in which their planned activities will engage and impact key government actors (including, but not limited to, areas such as professional development, capacity building, involvement in program coordination and collaboration efforts, and joint policy-development activities). DCOF may ask that applicants obtain letters of support from key government entities, and that these letters describe how the proposed work fits into government priorities and areas for sustainable programming.

4.C. Collaboration Among Service Providers

In one of the bluntest assessments of the current needs of the global street-children-serving sector, Henk Van Beers declared that:

On the local level I would make the plea for a ‘non proliferation’ agreement: in most cities there is no need for more projects – what is needed instead is consolidation and improvement of existing interventions. Interventions should be coordinated and there should be more collaboration between the existing programs. (Van Beers, 1996)

The street-children-serving sector has long been infamous for the turf battles between and among NGOs and government institutions. And, while some communities might well be in need of new programming, most are in need of committed efforts (on the part of practitioners and donors alike) towards harmonized programming and reducing barriers to collaboration. While street-children-serving networks exist in most cities, broader cultures of networking, information sharing, interagency referrals of children, common programming, and peer review of effective practices are often not well developed.

DCOF has seen considerable success in the past from its support of consortiums of local NGOs in Brazil, Congo Brazzaville, and Ethiopia, and has experienced the limits to broad programmatic impact when such collaboration has not been in place. Current funding for the Africa KidSAFE Alliance in Zambia, Project NINA in the Dominican Republic, and the Save the Children initiative in Georgia has opened new pathways for DCOF to field test and then co-articulate with others a set of principles and effective practices in the use of consortium structures to deliver effective, integrated programming in a given community or country.

In Lusaka, Zambia, the DCOF-supported Africa KidSAFE Alliance for Street Children project has encouraged its network partners to diversify in terms of their areas of specialization and focus. Such diversification ensures that partners are not all working in the same geographic areas or providing similar program offerings. It has led to more child-oriented, cost-effective programming, and to an increased focus on referrals of children among partner organizations.

Guidance Note #11: DCOF expects all proposals to describe how planned project activities will be coordinated with other existing interventions in the community. DCOF expects that applicants will be able to incorporate into their proposals a broad and detailed understanding of the work of other key governmental and non-governmental actors. DCOF will also look closely at the degree to which the planned project is designed to function in direct collaboration with other groups' activities or to develop such collaboration among local actors. DCOF will be open to supporting the formation of networks and/or consortiums of local implementers.

4.D. Investing in Staff Development

A common area of concern expressed by key review documents from UNICEF, the World Bank, and others is the fundamental question of staff competency and institutional capacity. Time and time again in reports from past and present DCOF-funded activities in this field, the concern has been raised about high levels of staff turnover, the difficulty in accessing effective professional development opportunities for staff, and the general institutional weakness of many local street-children-serving organizations. While access to stable funding and appropriate levels of compensation for staff are, of course, major drivers in this domain of competency and capacity, much discussion is taking place within the field of the need to invest more intentionally and rigorously in key areas of staff recruitment and development, and retention of institutional capacity building.

Interventions such as family reunification or community reintegration (not to mention targeted prevention work) require levels of professional preparation and ongoing coaching and supervision that many street-children-serving organizations are not positioned to deliver. Often these more complex interventions fail because personnel are unable to follow through systematically at the level of casework planning, crisis intervention, and sustained psychosocial support to children and their families. Unfortunately, overworked staff and underdeveloped organizations tend to blame the client (children and/or families) for their shortcomings or hide behind declarations that such programming will never work with street children. This leads to a level of inefficacy and eventual burn-out among frontline staff, which may, in part, explain the high level of turnover in organizations, where nothing ever seems to improve with the children being served.

Guidance Note #12: DCOF requests that proposals describe in detail the kind of staff development and/or organizational capacity building that will be required to ensure that planned interventions are both effective and sustainable. DCOF recognizes that certain types of programming require more stable and technically proficient staff teams. DCOF is therefore open to applicants prioritizing resources for staff capacity building where this is demonstrably linked to the success of key interventions and will be tracked in planned monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

Factor #5. Paying Close Attention to Results

One of the most enduring challenges facing the street-children-serving sector has been the need to situate work with street children within a traditional results framework, even though much work with street children is not linear in nature, and traditional approaches to capturing outcomes and impacts may not easily apply. Some groups focus their efforts on tracking program outputs (counting numbers of children served and/or individual services utilized) in an effort to be accountable for resources used; but, more and more, donors are requiring that frontline service organizations also track the results of their work in more substantial (youth development) focused ways. Of particular interest is for direct service providers to demonstrate accountability towards the achievement of specific impacts such as improved health, increased safety, and/or the fostering of family reunification or community re-integration.

Street-active children and youth often face numerous developmental challenges simultaneously. This frequently makes it hard to effectively appraise their overall assets and needs, and to prioritize areas for intervention and support. Traditional casework planning and the use of highly regimented, pre-determined programming phases (with corresponding outcome tracking systems) are often not effective in programming for street children, and can, in fact, be an unnecessarily expensive and unproductive way to proceed. Similarly, because of the high potential for crisis and sudden change in functioning, street children often relapse into earlier patterns of behavior, even after long periods of promising improvement. Such relapses can be frustrating for youth workers and M&E specialists alike. Effective results-based work with this population must therefore often take into consideration two emerging best practices:

- Tracking children’s acquisition of both particular competencies and crosscutting developmental assets along with changes in observable behavior, and
- Focusing on well-conceived intermediate results along the road to longer-term outcomes

5.A. Tracking the Acquisition of Both Sector-Specific Competencies and Crosscutting Developmental Assets along with Changes in Observable Behaviors

As Catherine Panter-Brick’s pioneering research indicates (see 4.A), projects that focus only on street children’s deficits and “problematic” behavior (such as their street involvement) will be limited in their scope of work, and all too easily frustrated in their results. On the other hand, those that build from street children’s existing assets and competencies, and track both the further development of these, along with the acquisition of additional competencies in particular areas (e.g., basic education, health, livelihood, and civil society participation) and crosscutting developmental assets (both internal and external as defined by the Search Institute), will generate new possibilities for genuine progress and measurable results.

For, while long-term behavioral change can be elusive, and relapses or setbacks are the norm for many street children, it is possible to track their acquisition of competencies and assets over time. In the asymmetric world of child and youth development, where intensive interventions in the present may only translate into longer-term sustainable change in a relatively distant future, the best measure of progress is often the tracking of the gradual accumulation of the competencies and assets that will eventually form the foundation of longer-term change. An extensive research base on the correlation between the gradual accumulation of developmental assets and the eventual fostering of key promoting and protecting behaviors has been put in place by the US-based Search Institute. And, groups like the Population Council have begun to appreciate an asset-based approach to addressing the risk behaviors of especially vulnerable groups of female children and youth. This is an emerging area of effective practice, and one pushing the boundaries of traditional M&E systems and approaches.

For more information on the **Search Institute’s** pioneering research into Developmental Assets and well-regarded assessment and evaluation tools such as the Developmental Asset Profile (DAP) see www.search-institute.org

Guidance Note #13: DCOF expects that implementing partners will be able to describe their planned results in terms of the *reach*, *depth*, and *quality* of developmental outcomes for participating children. Here, “reach” refers to the number of children and youth served (preferably disaggregated by age, gender, nature of service(s), results); “depth” refers to the developmental competencies and assets acquired; and, “quality” refers to indicators of sustainable behavior change and improvements in well-being among participating children and youth.

5.B. Focusing on Intermediate Results Along the Road to Longer-Term Outcomes

While many direct service organizations find themselves reacting to the ever-challenging day-to-day needs of street children, donors question whether these organizations have a clear vision of the pathway children must follow to achieve meaningful developmental outcomes, and the proactive roles street-children-serving organizations can play in accomplishing this work. Discussions between practitioners and donors on the subject of M&E often reflect good intentions on both sides, but are frequently marked by mutual frustration. One key to bridging the gap between expectations and realities is to develop a focused and disciplined system of mutually understood intermediate results and related *leading* indicators that capture meaningful (though perhaps only incremental) progress towards longer-term outcomes (and related *lagging* indicators of sustainable change achieved). Direct service providers that can keep an intentional focus on such *leading* intermediate results—even amidst the ups and downs inherent in street outreach services, or intensive therapeutic interventions—can demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions and can also gain valuable feedback on where adjustments or changes in design or delivery are warranted.

The public health concept of *harm reduction*⁷ is a useful reference point in this search for meaningful *leading* indicators. It focuses on underlying assets and motivations, and is able to track small steps towards broader change in situations where rapid change is not achievable. Street-active young people involved in substance use may first need to practice behaviors linked to limiting harm (such as not sharing needles or making the switch to less harmful substances) before they are able to make a clean break from all substance use (especially where that use is linked to self-medication and/or coping with trauma or abuse). Similarly, young people looking to reconnect with family and/or community life may need to make a series of short-term visits before they commit to a full-fledged return home. Programs need to be able to track and benchmark such small steps (pushing their staff to be intentional, deliberate, and systematic) while helping street-active children and youth map out subsequent steps to meaningful long-term changes in behavior.

Another way to track overall progress amidst “three-steps-forward, two-steps-back” realities of street life, is to articulate a clear understanding of the common stages of change and to track progress (success) at each stage according to a given project’s theory of change. In this approach, a program can measure intermediate results even during periods of relapse or retrenchment. Once again, in order for a program to do this successfully within a well-developed M&E system, it must carefully develop, and intentionally use, leading and lagging indicators appropriate to the target group and their stage of street involvement (see Factors for Success #1 and #2 above).

⁷ See the work of Edith Springer and the journal *Harm Reduction News*.

Guidance Note #14: DCOF recognizes the importance of incorporating both leading and lagging indicators into the M&E plans of all proposed projects. DCOF also expects that applicants will be able to fully describe the multiple steps participating children and youth might need to take in order to fully benefit from a project's various stages of intervention.

Conclusion

In addressing its Congressional mandate, DCOF's basic approach is to develop and support programs and methodological approaches that strengthen the capacity of families and communities to provide the necessary care, protection, and support for diverse populations of displaced children and orphans. DCOF understands that street-active children represent an especially vulnerable population of displaced children. It also recognizes the need to invest in a full range of innovative street and community-based interventions that together serve to restore the ability of families and community systems of care to meet the developmental needs and aspirations of this displaced population.

After reviewing the work and writings of a broad range of important actors in the global street-children-serving sector, and after taking a critical look at its own portfolio of funding to street-children-serving programs, DCOF is confident that the *Five Key Factors for Success* described in this guidance document represent current best practices in the field. DCOF recognizes that local innovation and continuous program improvement are key features of successful interventions. It also sees the five key factors and related guidance notes not as a static framework, but as important reference points for a dynamic exchange with prospective funding recipients and sponsoring USAID country missions.

DCOF appreciates the efforts of other donors such as the World Bank, UNICEF, the EU, and the Asian Development Bank to articulate holistic visions for effective street children programming, and hopes that this guidance document will provide an additional reference point in our shared aspiration to support innovative, evidence-based, community-based responses to the development challenges and goals of street-active children and their community supporters.

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DCOF's 5 X 5 Effective Practices Matrix for Street Children Programming

Key Actors	Children	Family/Household	Community	Government	End Goal of Each Factor
Key Factors					
#1 Analyzing the Street Children Phenomenon in a Given Community	- A clear delineation of the sub-populations of street-active children - including those who work on the street and live with their family; those who live on the street; and, those who may shift between these two situations	- An understanding of the complex role of families in the street child phenomenon. - A recognition of the opportunities and constraints relevant to change and intervention in family and household dynamics	- A careful review of the broader community drivers of street activity - An assessment of where children work and live - A mapping of existing systems of care	- Identification of relevant policies and practices (e.g., police, social services, health services) along with existing gaps in government responses	- A clear working understanding of local dynamics of street life and potential points of intervention
#2 Carefully Targeting the Children to Be Served	- Understanding different possible intervention points in the life cycle / "career" of a given population of children	- Identifying potential points of intervention to change or strengthen specific aspects of family functioning	- Identifying points of interaction between children living on the street and businesses, services, and the urban population generally	- Identifying points of interaction (positive or negative) with government authorities and structures	- A determination of the children to be served, along with the family, community, and government actors to be engaged
#3 Reunification/ Re-Integration	- Understanding how relevant "push" and "pull" factors contributed to living on the street and their current significance to the possibility for family reunification and/or community reintegration	- Understanding family receptiveness toward reunification and reintegration - Identifying potential risks to child linked to unresolved "push" factors underlying original street involvement - Understanding the dynamics of effective family and community reunification and reintegration	- Understanding the role of community actors such as schools and community health services in addressing street children's needs and aspirations	- Identifying potential funding and/or policy constraints to reintegration (e.g., access to flexible education options)	- Viable opportunities for fuller reintegration into community and/or family systems of care
#4 Recognizing the Importance of Collaborative Design	- Actively involving street children in planning potential interventions - Incorporating case-by-case development of solutions and plans in collaboration with each child	- Involving family members in both identifying and planning solutions, and in describing constraints to reintegration - Supporting interaction with family/community members prior to reunification	- Developing close collaboration among service providers - Investing in staff development and building the institutional capacity of direct service providers	- Engaging key government actors in building the capacity of families and communities to provide care for street active children	- Development of a clear, realistic, well-informed program design that draws on the assets and priorities of all key actors
#5 Paying Close Attention to Results	- Tracking children's acquisition of both particular competencies and crosscutting developmental assets along with changes in observable behavior - Focusing on well-conceived intermediate results along the road to longer-term outcomes	- Assessing the increased capacity of households and extended families to meet the developmental needs and aspirations of children in their care	- Assessing changes in community responses to street children - Tracking the capacity of community institutions and structures to better meet the needs of street-active children	- Assessing any changes in government policy or practice relevant to street children	- Tracking of program outcomes and impacts - Overall assessment of cost-effectiveness - Identification of lessons learned and areas for ongoing program improvement

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