

Run, run as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man ...

Last year our Annual General Report began with the words 'Ons Plek ... A Runaway Success ...' referring to an advertisement well placed in the Weekly Mail.

This was to celebrate the statistics of two independent research studies which backed our statistics that we successfully prevent all but 5% of our yearly intake from becoming street children. This is why there are usually only 7 girls living independently on the street, although each year between 120 and 150 girls run to the street. **The impact of our service has had astounding success.**

But unlike the Gingerbread Man who is a temporary runaway success, we need to keep on our toes. Accordingly the year 2000 was dedicated to evaluations of our service by staff, committee and girls. In the process existing programmes were confirmed and new directions decided on, with particular reference to the Aids crisis.

Questions arising in the evaluation 2000 and Ons Plek's responses to these

An average of only 7 girls living independently on the streets!!! Isn't it time to close Ons Plek?

The reason there are only 7 girls is because every year Ons Plek's interventions enable 95% of potential girl street children to choose an alternative to the street.

Many girls at Ons Plek now have never been on the streets of Cape Town. Isn't it time to move to the community?

Many girls at Ons Plek find home so unbearable that they have begun to sleep at different neighbours' houses or on the streets where they live. They are referred to us by community members. We accept their referrals because this pattern usually predates a move to the city streets where there is more money and where one does not draw the often negative attention of neighbours. In this way our help to street children also prevents girls in the process of becoming street children from doing so.

A shelter in the community would achieve the same. But ... which community? Since children do not run from community to community but from community to the town centre, a local service would only help the locals. *By staying where we are, we are able to offer a service to runaway girls from all communities around Cape Town and beyond.* Given our resources - 10 staff and 2 large household size buildings - and the fact that we are succeeding in our primary aim of prevention of female street children, we have decided to stay in the Central or "city" community.



PAM JACKSON

... are we getting there?

UNESCO Visit

We were honoured with a visit this year by UNESCO's goodwill ambassador, Ms Ute Ohoven, and UNESCO's director, Dr Dieter Berstecher as part of an evaluation tour to South Africa. We were not on the tour, as our period of UNSECO funding finished in 1999.

But Dr Berstecher wanted to meet Pam because "she is the only funding applicant who asked not to be given more than we needed." Accordingly we met with them over two interesting days to share ideas and to be guided in our planning.

What added value does a city community give?

A city community tends to be made of people from many different communities. This makes it a neutral place. Many girls are with us because their families have not been able to prevent them being raped by neighbours who are seldom arrested. These girls feel far safer away from the neighbourhood rapists or inter-gang warfare which may target them. They need a neutral place to strengthen themselves away from condemning neighbours, embarrassment in front of peers and/or dangerous men. A major advantage of being in community is to be able to be involved in building the community. Ons Plek misses that. But a major plus about being

in the city is that we remain focused on female street children and do not get drawn into a myriad of local community issues.

Outcome of Evaluation 2000

The staff at Ons Plek would like to be in a community setting where we could be involved in community matters and be doing primary preventative work. However, we realise that participating in building a community is a very long term commitment which is the task of several Non-Government Organisations and indeed the whole government. Given our resources and our successful method, we therefore committed ourselves again to our primary aim i.e. preventing runaway or potential runaway girls from becoming street children!

HOWEVER we want to build on our success and extend our work into preventative work in the community.

Surely the 800 000 expected AIDS orphans means more street children. Can Ons

Plek Projects extend its services to cope with them?

A NEW DIRECTION arising out of the evaluation is that we should extend our residential facilities by about 20 beds. This is to meet the reality that placing the children back home or with relatives will become a slower process than it is at present. Reasons include that many adult relatives will be ill, or dead, or over-burdened with children of other relatives affected by AIDS. Not only will there be more children at Ons Plek, but they will probably stay longer. Some will need to spend their last days due to the illness in our care. We have long wanted to buy the building next door to help in this. Although we need capital for the building, our existing running expenses need to be covered before we can extend our fundraising. This year the donors (UNESCO) of our capital fund

asked us to convert this fund to urgently needed running costs for 2001-2002. In 2001-2002 we will therefore fund-raise to extend our premises to cope with increased numbers.

800 000 AIDS orphans can never be accommodated in children's homes!

Cape Town Child Welfare Society is focusing on *equipping communities* to care for the increasing number of orphaned children in the community. Their 'Isolabantwana' or 'Eye on the Child' programme has inspired us to share our skills with community members. Over one month we teach investigative and assessment skills with regard to:

- the family's strengths, family resources;
- direct child care skills for children who have been living outside of normal family routines.

ONGOING PROGRAMMES 2000- 2001

24-HOUR ACCESSIBLE EARLY INTERVENTION INTAKE PROGRAMME

Girls are referred to Ons Plek Intake Shelter within hours or a few days of arriving in the Cape Town CBD. In the last year Ons Plek has also received a strong increase in the number of referrals of girls who are in danger of abusers and gangs in the area where they are currently living.

The girls' circumstances are assessed immediately on arrival. The girl is then referred to our family preservation or family re-unification programmes.

Statutory services are provided by our social work staff.

REUNIFICATION AND PRESERVATION PROGRAMMES

In both programmes, family interviews are held to resolve the breakdown in the family.

FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAMME

Staff hold family meetings and family building sessions with families. Early intervention in family conflict arising from different values between parents and children, as well as facilitation of discussion about negative family dynamics, frequently result in the family being preserved.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROGRAMME

Ons Plek believes that children growing up in children's homes is second best. Wherever possible children should grow up in their families of origin, failing that in another family and lastly in a children's home. It is necessary to assist families to carry out their responsibilities towards their children and for children to grow up in the most empowering and least restrictive situations. This year so far we have managed to return 57 (49%) girls to their homes or extended families – nearly half of all the girls.

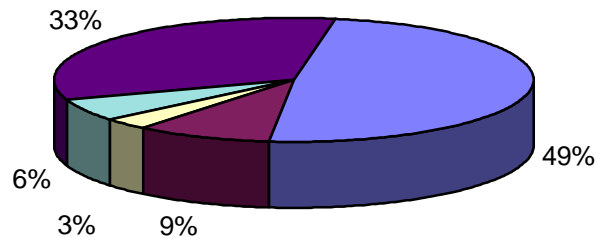
LONGER TERM CARE

There is a small core of 15 (13%) girls who are with us for more than 2 years.

➤ What happened to the girls?

Out of 116 children this year:

- 57 (49%) went home/to relatives/community (Two are living and working independently)
- 10 (9%) went to other children's homes
- 7 (6%) are back on the streets
- 4 (3%) are back in the community in informal situations
- 38 (33%) were at Ons Plek and Siviwe in March 2001.



These girls are highly unlikely to return home before they are self-supporting, due to their home circumstances. They are also hard to place in foster care due to age/behaviour. Most of them have regular family/community contact with support from the Ons Plek staff with regard to difficulties they experience.

VICTIM SUPPORT

Ons Plek won the NICRO Whistle Award for Victim Support 2000. Winning the award was a real encouragement in this difficult area of work.

We provide intensive victim support for girls in our care who have been assaulted, abused and raped. Staff provide counselling for the child and her family, as well as supporting advocacy in this area. We provide the intensive follow up work needed to keep track of the progress made by police detectives, bail conditions, the whereabouts of perpetrators, changes in prosecutors on cases, changes in court dates and issues arising with regard to translators and intermediaries.

INFORMAL DAILY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

On first intake the girls are usually very preoccupied with the issues which brought them to the streets, and in addition they tend to struggle to concentrate due to the restless and often substance dependent lifestyle on the streets. When a child first comes to the shelter she may well drift away simply

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following her latest desire. Our Morning School provides a developmental programme to prepare the children not yet ready or able to attend school or work and to assess the most appropriate educational placement for each girl.

This year Morning School flourished with the additional input of volunteer interns who have helped us build the practical vocational component of the classes considerably. In addition to the basic English literacy and numeracy lessons, these classes, which was attended by 46 girls in the course of the year, now include baking and beadwork, very basic financial skills taught through a business game as well as opportunities to sell the goods made. Plans for 2001-2002 include employing a full time trainer to do this work on an ongoing basis.

FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

All girls at Ons Plek attend some form of educational programme/s. Our many faceted approach includes social-educational assessment and counselling, scholastic and developmental assessment, a range of support structures such as a homework and school visiting programme, and supplementary education.

Supplementary education sessions take the form of informal sessions including English reading and communication sessions, computer based learning activities and art.

Holiday programmes also provide supplementary education and included swimming, science, geographical, art and 'roots and culture' activities.

Of the 43 girls who attended formal school in the year, 28 were with us at the close of 2000. Twenty five girls passed – keeping our pass rate just on 90%. Our aim remains to help girls to ACTUALLY master their school work, rather than just to be promoted through the system.

VOLUNTEERS

In the reporting year we made more intensive use of volunteers, especially student interns who worked full time for Ons Plek for periods ranging between 3 and 10 months. Sixteen individual volunteers and two groups of volunteers extended the work of the projects considerably last year. They provided a range of activities, including computer skills training, reading, art, drama, education, leadership training, pottery, swimming and baking. Student interns helped implement a candle making

course for older girls including packaging, basic financial skills and sales skills.

HOMEWORK AND SCHOOL PROGRAMME

Children who have lived on the streets or without a stable home base almost invariably struggle at school. Teachers often struggle to integrate children with different needs into their sometimes very large classes. Our school support teacher helps the children understand their school work and the social skills they need at school better, but also gives the teachers valuable insights into effective ways of working with the girls. Partly due to working with younger and younger girls, and partly due to choosing schools and teachers carefully where possible, the working relationship between Ons Plek staff and class teachers was excellent this year.

COUNSELLING PROGRAMME

Emotional healing is crucial to the success of girls interacting with family, employers and teachers. Their state of mind affects their ability to study and to concentrate on everyday tasks. While it is difficult to quantify emotional changes, we can identify significant changes in the emotional well being of each girl as we look at her growth over a period of time. Our counselling programme remains an ongoing process.

Some girls rapidly overcome behaviour patterns, such as a slightly disabled young girl who was constantly miserable and victimised at school and at home when she first came. Within three months she had become confident and something of a self appointed 'bully-buster' by giving important information to staff about unkindness and unfairness between girls, and by standing up and speaking out loudly and clearly and directly to people who are horrible to her. However, mostly emotional changes are slow, but looking back over the year we see girls who found their depression, anxiety, aggression totally overwhelming when they first came, now able to cope with conflict, increased responsibilities and loss, without losing hope and direction as they work out their new dreams and plans.

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME

Baby, Child and Home Care Life Skills Programme

Many of the girls dream of having their own home and becoming mothers one day. At Ons Plek they learn home making, home care, baby care and parenting skills, in order to avoid the cycle of their children

also running away to the streets. This training in home and child care is an important preventative service.

Other Life Skills

The daily programme is structured to teach healthy relationship skills and reinforce these in practice. In addition to learning a range of social skills as part of the daily household routine, girls also attend vocational preparation sessions which teach them how to use the tele-phone and telephone directories, prepare CV's, approach prospective employers and work in teams with others.

CULTURAL ROOTS AND RITES OF PASSAGE PROGRAMME

Closely related to family reunification, the need for this programme arises out of the great lack of a sense of belonging which affects the girls' behaviour and progress. In this year the programme grew to include visits to museums which reflect both our own and other cultures. In addition to learning about Xhosa culture and South African slave history, holiday programmes this year included a sequence of events around Jewish history, WW2 and the holocaust. The girls have a natural empathy for those who suffer severely. These programmes brought a new cultural openness to both staff and girls. Girls who needed to do so continued to visit traditional "home" areas, especially in the Eastern Cape. In some cases the visits developed into permanent placements

for the girl concerned.

Others have come from back from 'emaXhoseni' overjoyed about renewing contact with siblings and others with whom they thought they had lost contact forever. They are frequently able to recall important early life experiences and significant people more clearly for having seen the people and places they had half forgotten. They were also proud that they could take provisions to their families and show off their ongoing education!

In our previous report we mentioned that we have traced families even from beyond our borders. In December 2000 the girl whose family was traced in Harare was taken home by a staff member. After a few days in Zimbabwe she starting speaking to the staff member about memories and fears she had been unable to recall in her counselling sessions in Cape Town. Now, after a few months of struggle to adjust to learning her first language over again, and to adjust to family life after 7 years away, she recently told an Ons Plek volunteer who phoned her that she is happy now and starting work in a restaurant soon.

Finding their own 'roots and culture', and becoming aware of the place of our own cultures in the global village has a significant effect on the children's emotional healing.

... programmes brought a new cultural openness to both staff and girls

STAFF TRAINING PROGRAMME

Ongoing learning is part of the world of work in the 21st century. Ons Plek Projects provides training to all staff, but particularly focuses on providing learning and promotion opportunities to staff from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Our priorities are accountability, efficiency, active participation for all staff in the staff team and a way of working that enables each staff member to grow in their career. Significant amounts of commitment, effort and time is spent on this area, and fruitfully so. The outcome is a high staff morale, self-esteem and dedication to the children which goes beyond the call of duty.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising continues to take up a considerable amount of time, and has been as difficult as usual, but we managed to finish the year with a combined deficit of only R2142 for the period 2000 - 2001. Since we are planning to expand our work in essential ways, fund raising will remain an important facet of the work.