

SPONSORSHIP

Preparation

In 1995 CAS started a sponsorship program for street children. Children who visit the House of Refuge are “prepared” to listen to a teacher or instructor and behave as expected. The length of this preparation period varies from child to child. Some have had a kind of educational background, many start as stark illiterates. Many learn how to behave properly, others need ample time to do that.

Introduction of Trades

CAS tries to introduce these children in various trades. Children are encouraged to take part in trades demonstrated, other trades are shown on videos or the child gets an opportunity to go on excursion to one of the workshops or factories. In general, it takes time for a child to make up his or her mind to choose a trade to their liking. CAS introduced trades such as candle-making and ceramics but noticed that many children did not show interest. No interest was shown for agriculture as well although, CAS started with Hopeland farm project during the same year for that purpose.

Evaluation

In 2003, on the occasion of CAS’ ten years existence as an organization, a survey was conducted on children who benefitted from the sponsorship scheme in the past. About, half of the trained youngsters were located, (all over Ghana) and we were happy that all had found jobs and several were married. However, they had not found a job in the trades they were trained for. In fact, this was logical because unfortunately, there are many unemployed in Ghana.

Traditional Trades

Traditional trades such as carpentry, masonry, hairdressing and sewing are sufficiently taken care of. CAS had to introduce “new” trades such as aluminum fabrication, electronics, sign writing etc.

Doing so also entails that those who are trained can only find jobs in urban centers.

Duration

As a technician myself, I know that the training for a trade takes many years. Years of practice and experience. The bases should be good and a training of three years is the barest minimum. However, CAS had no choice because, for the training, financial support is needed. Because of the expenses involved and the number of children who showed interest, CAS chooses for a training of three years. During this three year period the trainee could sit for grade two of NVTI certificate which could be the bases for further training.

School

Only a few children of the many who roam the streets are able to go to regular school. The reasons are their behavior, their age and their educational background. Often the children wait until they are 14 or 15 before they decide to follow education.

Children are happy to be free, to play when they want to play. Happy not to have to listen to a teacher and follow the rules. But when they wait until they are 14 or 15 it is too late to start with schooling. At the beginning of the sponsorship scheme, CAS placed children even younger than 14 in regular schools but it was not a success. Teachers stigmatized the children who came from the street and the other children had no mercy on them. CAS now places only one child in one particular school and makes sure that the behavior of the child can be acceptable.

However, CAS had also many successes with children who had dropped out of education and got the opportunity to return.

Several completed Poly-tech and some made it to the university. A number of them received scholarships and are now abroad.

Kind of Children

All this has been possible because many of the children were migrants. They came from the rural areas and were eager to go to school or learn a trade. Presently, CAS tries to educate children from the second generation. Some migrant children are still visiting the House of Refuge, but the majority has been born on the streets. This means, the mother is a street woman herself and tries to survive together with her child. The result is that the child had to find his or her way at a very early age. Many are not brought up in the acceptable way. They do not know how to take care of themselves as far as cleanliness and other aspects of hygiene is concerned. They often do not know how to behave well enough to sit in a classroom or to work as an apprentice.

In addition, it is with pain that we notice that many children do not have the “stamina” to follow a training of three years. Many simply do not have the patience to learn for a long period of time.

Shorter Sponsorship Scheme

What to do with these children? We have started with a shorter sponsorship program, we teach children skills. This is unfortunate, because we know these children who have skills cannot find jobs to support their lives. But it will give them an income to survive.

We teach them skills such as cooking, taking care of babies, sewing, and hairdressing, bead-making, painting, play volleyball or soccer, become a boxer etc. In order to learn skills, you need to have some kind of talent. We know some children who are very good in drawing and painting, some are talented footballers, and some easily learn how to cook many different kind of dishes. Unfortunately, only a few have these talents.

The result is that children try one skill after another and cannot make up their mind what they like.

For each skill, CAS has written out three stages which the child has to follow either at the House of Refuge or at Hopeland. When the three stages have been past successfully, the child is placed on attachment. This can be for instance in small restaurant or at a training school for sports.

The training in these skills is limited to a period of one or one and a half year. The expenses are limited because most of their training is done at CAS premises.

Conclusion

We at CAS are not happy that it has come to these developments. You can learn to make soap, but you can never compete with the experts. You can learn to weave a nice basket, but we hope you can find a market for it. You can dream to become a famous soccer player, but often it remains a dream. No, skill training is not solution. We have to brainstorm again and dialogue with others to find solutions for these children.

When we ask you, what should be done with the many children who roam the streets and do not go to school? And you answer; they all should go to school. Then you have failed with your answer. It is simply not possible.