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RESCUE, REHABILITATION, AND RESTORATION: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SOLVING THE BURDEN OF STREET CONNECTEDNESS IN BUNGOMA, KENYA

Clinical Research

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Reach International Children Center (RICC) was established with the aim of rescuing, rehabilitating, and restoring street connected boys in the city of Bungoma, located in Bungoma County, in Kenya. In this study, we will describe the strategies employed by RICC to achieve this objective. **Methods:** The Kenyan government recognized that street connectedness was a major psychosocial issue in Kenya (1). Abundant Life Church, a Christian not-for-profit organization established RICC with the aim of rescuing, rehabilitating, and restoring young boys back to the community. The Rescue: Young boys (age 8 to 12 years) are identified during outreach programs. The boys undergo medical clearance and are accepted into a structured program at RICC. The Rehabilitation: The rehabilitation program at RICC involves assessment and training in five dimensions: Psychological, Social, Academic, Physical development, and Spiritual. The Restoration: Most boys are restored after eighteen months. Following restoration, the staff at RICC continues contact with the restored boys to monitor how well they have adapted to their home for a period of 12 to 18 months. **Results:** A total of 21 (n=21) boys have graduated from the program. The average duration of the rehabilitation phase is 18 months. Fourteen boys (67%) are thriving, two (10%) are in progress and five (24%) need ongoing support. These results indicate a 76 per cent success rate for the program. This study describes an innovative solution for the problems of street connectedness in Kenya.

KEYWORDS

Street Connectedness, Homelessness, Glue Sniffing

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, there is a huge and growing population of street connected boys. There are over 3000 street connected children in Bungoma County, Kenya. Approximately 120 children sleep on the streets every night in the city of Bungoma, with over 50 per cent of them abusing drugs. Street connected children disproportionately experience preventable morbidities and premature mortality (1). The Kenyan government recognized that street connectedness was a major psychosocial issue in Kenya. Inhalants, such as glue and paint thinners, are often used to suppress hunger and stay warm. Unfortunately, inhalants can lead to several complications. The medical complications seen in glue sniffing include physical and mental dependence, pulmonary hypertension with cor pulmonale, restrictive lung defect, encephalopathy, and peripheral neuropathy (2).

Reach International Children Center (RICC) (https://reachchildrenscenter.com)_was established with the aim of Rescuing, Rehabilitating, and Restoring the street connected boys from the city of Bungoma, Kenya.

Abundant Life Church (https://abundantlife.church) a Christian, not-for-profit organization established RICC in 2018.

In this study, we will describe the strategies employed by RICC in rescuing and rehabilitating young boys who were street connected, eventually restoring them back into the community.

Methods

The Rescue:
Young boys (age 8 to 12) are identified during outreach programs. These outreach programs include the assistance of older street connected boys. Once identified, every effort is made to identify and find biological relatives and guardians. The necessary papers are processed with the local government authority and, after undergoing medical clearance, the boys are formally admitted from the street into the RICC program.

The Rehabilitation:
According to the Kenyan government, the maximum period a child is supposed to be living in Charitable Children's Institutions (CCI) is 2 years. The rehabilitation program at RICC was structured to be completed within this time frame.

The boys are admitted into a home with house parents, in-house social workers, domestic staff, recreation therapists, and academic tutors. The boys undergo psychotherapy sessions to address emotional needs and are enrolled in school according to their intellectual capabilities.

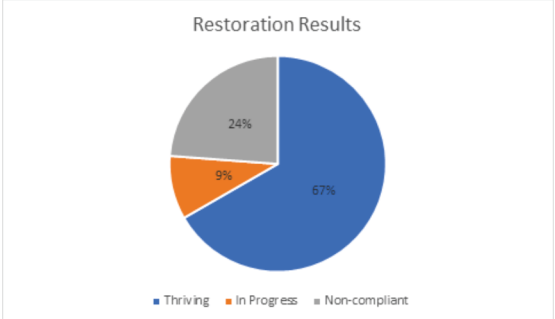
The rehabilitation process involves assessing the boys in the following areas:
Psychological: Standardized rating scales are used to assess emotional well being.
Social: A culturally sensitive instrument was designed and used to assess the social development of the children, which includes subjects like arts and music.
Academic: The boys are enrolled in regular schools according to their abilities.
Physical development: The boys' interests and abilities in physical activities are assessed.
Spiritual: The boys are assessed in their spiritual growth, while not enforcing any religion.

Restoration
Most boys are ready to be restored after about 16 to 20 months. Prior to restoration, specific steps are made to restore the boys back into their family of origin. These steps include parental training, assessment of readiness for the family, reconciliation meetings, assessment of potential placements, and eventual restoration.

Following restoration, the staff at RICC continues to keep contact with the restored boys to monitor their ability to adjust to home. In cases where the home of origin is not suitable, there is an attempt to identify next of kin. If this option is not feasible, fostering or adoption are considered.

RESULTS

A total of 21 (n=21) boys have graduated from the program. The average duration of rehabilitation is 18 months in the program.



14 boys are described as thriving. Thriving is defined as being completely stable and functioning well in the environment, not returning to the streets, and not using drugs.

2 boys need additional help and support, including ongoing financial, psychological, and emotional support.

5 boys were assessed to be non-compliant. These are boys that resist change, despite efforts to support, motivate, or encourage them.

The overall success rate of the program is about 76 percent.

CONCLUSION

This study describes an innovative solution to the problems of street connectedness in Kenya. Although the preliminary results are very encouraging, longer duration studies will be necessary to accurately identify the various factors that result in boys described as thriving, and that will help achieve a thriving rate of closer to 100 per cent following this rehabilitation and restoration process of street connected boys in Kenya.

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