

## *Integrated Transformation model to Prevent Exploitation of Oppressed Children in India*

*Vatsalya initiated a process of addressing various needs of Street Children in 2001. The program has two major goals: (1) Prevention of abuse and neglect (2) Rehabilitation of victims of abuse and neglect. The paper elucidates the life experiences of 286 Street Children including 54 in-depth case studies. It also covers interventions done as part of the preventive strategy for protecting 786 street children from abusive upbringing and a deprived childhood. The intervention period is May 2001 to August 2007.*

*Major preventive measures were: Child-to-Child Education, Peer Pressure Groups, Councils of the Street Children, Legal Literacy Campaigns, Parental Counseling, Economic Empowerment of Mothers, Child Rights Workshops, Sensitization of Police Personnel and Vendor community, etc. As part of our rehabilitation program Yoga, Art, Music, Dance and Theatre, Counseling, Massage Therapy, Animal Assisted Psychotherapy, Intermingling of diverse cultural and social groups and several in-house interventions were tried successfully. The program has highly encouraging results.*

*The exploitative treatment endured by children included severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse both at home as well as on the streets. Their experiences manifested in the form of personality traits such as extreme submissiveness, lack of self-esteem, manipulative tendencies, vindictiveness, revengefulness etc. Substance abuse was rampant among most children. They also exhibited a harsh indifference towards adults in society. The study reveals that the time, duration and severity of exploitation had a direct bearing on process of rehabilitation and the time they needed for settling down back to a healthy and disciplined life style. It was also very evident that the girls responded much more quickly and positively to the rehabilitation measures than boys.*

*The preventive measures employed to protect children from abuse are still being recorded in terms of changes in the attitude of masses, however, the families of 786 Street Children that were included showed remarkable and almost irreversible positive changes in their child rearing practices. Forced labour and beating were reduced by 87% and school attendance increased by 40%. The Police personnel were very forthright in admitting that there was a tremendous and unimaginable change in their knowledge, attitude and practices pertaining to children on the streets. Self esteem, self-directedness and positive optimism enhanced in children living on the streets contributing to their own welfare and prevention of abuse at the hands of adults.*

*Art Therapy and Meditation were two of the most effective interventions that brought about desirable changes in their psyche and behaviour besides Massage Therapy, Counseling and Animal Assisted Psychotherapy. 84% children responded positively to these interventions and the transformation was visible in form of high degree of positive optimism, good academic performance, healthy relationships with peers and adults, team-work, aspiration for higher goals and seeing self in a productive role in future. The attitudinal changes were also measured using standardized psychological instruments.*

*The intervention is a life project and the self sustenance part of it is one of the most interesting and challenging aspect. The project has a great scope of enhancing the outcome and benefit not only orphaned and abandoned children but the poor rural women of India as well. The model can be replicated anywhere in the world.*

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