

Footprints Fact Sheet

What is a 'vulnerable child'? We believe that a vulnerable child is a young person who is in danger of not growing up to be a healthy, happy, well-educated and responsible adult. This could be due to poverty, poor health, lack of education opportunities or abuse. Children who live and work on the street, for example, are at serious risk because street life poses many dangers to them.

Who lives and works on the street? There are two types of children who can be found on the street. Those *On The Street* are children who come to the street to work and socialise during the day but return to a home at night time. Those *Of The Street* are children who live on the street all the time.

Do girls and boys live together on the street? There are fewer girls than boys living and working on the street. This is because it is advantageous to families in Zambian culture to keep girls at home for as long as possible (girls can cook and clean, and when they get married the family will receive a dowry payment). It is also easier for girls to find alternatives to living on the street such as early marriage or even prostitution. These solutions provide a home but they often do not provide education, long term happiness, good health or safety. Girls on the street need protection and often end up using sex as a way to find safety for the night. Pregnancy and HIV are therefore common amongst girls on the street and several girls have given birth while living on the streets. It is common to see street marriages which are not recognised by law but show the strong bond which can be forged between a girl and the boy who is taking care of her. If a street marriage comes to an end it can be very traumatic.

Why do children decide to live and work on the street? There are push factors and pull factors which attract a child to the streets.

Push factors include: poverty at home (needing to go and beg/steal to make money); death of one or both parents; abuse at home; too many children at home (Zambians often have big extended families and parents cannot always afford to look after all of their dependants); not getting on with extended family; being rejected by extended family.

Pull factors include: being able to make money; escape from a traumatic home situation; freedom to do what you want when you want; needing to belong somewhere (children on the street operate in groups which have a very strong 'family' bond and are led by a captain); drugs. The prevalent drug on the street is called *Sticka* and is a clear liquid which is believed to be a residue from Benzine or aircraft fuel. Because it comes from fuel it is not an illegal drug but it is very dangerous and highly addictive. After sniffing *Sticka* children become very high very quickly and can forget the traumas that they have experienced. They can sleep anywhere and not notice pain from illnesses. However they are at significant risk while they are on *Sticka*. For example, they may not notice if they are hurt or they can easily walk out on the road in front of a car.



Is it safe living on the street? There are lots of dangers involved in living on the street. Children who live on the street will usually have health problems, some very serious. There are no toilets, showers or clean water facilities so illnesses such as diarrhoea spread quickly and become epidemics. There is no protection from Malaria or TB. Addiction to drugs can kill. There are no rules on the streets and people have to fight to survive. Although children have very close bonds, when they are high they can argue easily and fights can break out, which can lead to stabbings. This means that children on the streets always have to watch their backs.

Where do children sleep, eat and wash when they are living on the street? Across Lusaka there are different sites where street children can be found. Some are within markets where they can make money doing odd jobs or picking pockets, some are at major cross roads or bus stations where there is opportunity for begging. If children make enough money for food and drugs they share it. Some children may be lucky to find a disused building which they can camp in. They may have tins for cooking food and containers for fetching water. Others can find little sheltered corners to sleep and often are unnoticeable to the untrained eye - we call them *Invisible Children* because of the number of people who do not realise they are there. Some children may have permission to sleep in a shop doorway in return for guarding the shop at night. Some children sleep in drainage ditches or even sewers. There is a lot of litter in Lusaka and rubbish piles or drainage ditches are where children can go to the toilet. If children can find a source of water for washing they will do so, but they may go for months without washing properly.

What happens if a child gets sick on the street? When a child becomes sick on the street, it is very difficult for them to get help. Sometimes a concerned passer-by or a group of friends will bring a sick child to Footprints or another organisation, but this will not happen until the child is very ill. HIV is very common on the street and we estimate that over 90% of children are HIV positive. There is no treatment or counselling available on the streets and children who are HIV positive do not realise that, with medical attention, they could live a normal healthy life.

Why don't children just go home? There are many reasons why children do not return home from the street. Often the issue that was the reason why they left home has not been solved. They may be addicted to drugs which they cannot get at home, or addicted to the lifestyle of living without rules. They may be ashamed of returning home with a baby, or the stigma of having been a street child. They may be sick and not want their families to worry about them. Footprints and other organisations work with street children and their families to smooth the path home.

How does Footprints help children living and working on the street? Our outreach activities enable us to gain the trust of the children living and working on the streets. The children are able to confide in us and share their problems during outreach visits. We are then able to support the child, working through their issues with the eventual goal of reintegrating them into their family if this is appropriate. Often the child may need to go and live at a shelter for some time before this can happen. Footprints can arrange this and we will also work with the family to prepare them for taking the child back. We can monitor the situation at home once the child has returned. For some children this is a very long journey with many false starts, but Footprints will never give up on a child. If it is not appropriate for a child to go home, we will support them to become independent and responsible for themselves.

Does Footprints only help street children? Our main focus is on street children because these are the most in need. However we also work with vulnerable children living at home and we support other organisations who look after children: running activities, making donations or putting them in contact with our partners.



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