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child trafficking**

**'We aren't good at e-mail, but we are
good at children' — capacity
building for direct assistance
projects**

**Paper presented at the RECLISA Southern African
regional child labour conference**

Janet Shapiro



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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Abstract

Nell and Shapiro in collaboration with Vula Africa are providing capacity building and training to the action programme partner organizations under the TECL pilot project on commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and child trafficking (CT) in South Africa.

In this paper, the presenters outlines some of the challenges faced by these organizations in their daily struggle to assist children involved in or at risk of CSEC and child trafficking.

Though it is the South African government's task to protect vulnerable children, a lot of the work done directly to assist children at risk is done by non-governmental organizations at grassroots level. It is therefore very relevant to establish what can be done to improve the assistance to these organizations in order for them to improve their services to children at risk.

1. Introduction

When MamKhanyi moved into her flat in Berea, one of the first things she noticed was how many young girls there were on the streets, “scantily” dressed, despite the Johannesburg winter cold. She stopped to talk to them; she invited them to come to her flat for tea or coffee; and she listened to their stories. Horrific stories of rape by fathers and uncles, of mothers unwilling or unable to protect their daughters, of 12 year olds who had abortions and those not much older who had had babies. She discovered that the schooling system had given up on these girls, or else the girls had given up on it because it had nothing to offer to teenagers who had grown old and streetwise but could barely read and write. She learned about the Hillbrow and Berea of budget hotels and brothels, of pimps and drugs and desperate young people who fled from abusive homes in the hope of finding something better. Instead they found that all they had to sell was their bodies, that “better” meant beatings and HIV/AIDS and sex with a stranger instead of a father or uncle or brother.

The remarkable thing about MamKhanyi was that she didn’t throw up her hands in horror and turn her back. The girls said, “if only we had a place to stay, if only we could get an education, training, some other way to earn a living” and, very soon, there were 16 girls in the small flat and MamKhanyi was feeding them, trying to find them places in schools, identifying training that would give them a chance to earn a living without selling their souls. Threatened with eviction by the body corporate of her block of flats, because of the “overcrowding”, MamKhanyi managed to raise some money, purchase five flats in another building, bully some people into giving her beds and bedding. From this grew a shelter, soup kitchens, a permaculture garden and, against all odds, some success stories.

2. The double challenge

Berea/Hillbrow Home of Hope is one of six organisations, working with young people who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation on the streets of Gauteng, who are currently receiving funding through the programme *Towards the Elimination of the worst forms of Child Labour* (TECL). Some have a twelve year history of doing this work (these include Kid’s Haven in Benoni and Lerato House in Pretoria), others, like Berea/Hillbrow Home of Hope and Rahab Centre, are five or six years old, and one, New Life Centre was established just last year (2005).

These organisations face a double challenge: the first resides in the work – it is the challenge that is at the core of this conference, the challenge of the children themselves. It is more than enough challenge on its own. It involves nightly visits to city slums, knocking on doors in overcrowded flats and houses to find frightened children, huddling in the dark, daily visits to budget hotels and brothels, to “sell” the idea that there may be alternatives to the so-called glamour, of dirty bedding, grubby nylon nighties, drunken men and inevitable sickness and death. It involves long hours in hospitals, demanding that medical staff treat a four year old who has just been raped, even if “their” hospital only deals with 18 year olds and over, vigils at hospice bedsides for those they found too late, sheltering under bridges or in culverts, deserted even by their child companions because of the stigma of their illness.

It involves daily battles with overworked or under-caring bureaucrats and police officers and social workers who want the problem to disappear behind the doors of Berea Home of Hope or New Life Centre or Kid’s Haven but don’t stop to worry about who will pay for the hot water, the clothes, the food, the transport and the loving care that they know will be provided. It involves spending long hours at schools because children who have been uncared for, damaged by life, cause “trouble”, “want attention”, behave in “socially unacceptable ways” and, if they are “your” children (and MamKhanyi probably has more than 100 children, all of whom she regards as “hers”), you have to go to bat for them and try to save them from themselves.

That is one side of the challenge, the side that the remarkable women and men (and, without wanting to be unfair to men, it is mostly women) who run and staff these organisations, embrace, sometimes with anger, always with determination and the most extraordinarily loving hearts. It is the other side of the challenge we want to focus on here. It is the challenge of keeping an organisation going, of ensuring that the rent is paid, that there is money for the meals that must be provided, that there are systems to make sure the money, so hard-won, doesn't get stolen, that the demands of donors are met, that the Social Development grant that hasn't come gets followed-up, that the myriad of forms that bureaucracy requires are completed correctly, and in duplicate, that reports are written, proposals prepared in the many different forms that different stakeholders expect, that e-mails are retrieved and answered.

3. Getting the priorities right

This paper deals specifically with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or CBOs (community-based organisations). To a considerable extent, at least here in Gauteng, the Government's Child Labour Programme of Action relies heavily on such organisations to provide services in addressing child prostitution, and it hopes, in addition, through the organisations, to gather more information in the under-researched area of child trafficking. It is an extraordinary thing that, when there are people who are prepared to do the really difficult things, very often to do the job of government, certainly to do the dirty work that most of us are happy to ignore, we often make it so difficult for them, and measure them against standards of administrative efficiency that few government departments, only some donors and remarkably few businesses are able to meet.

The six organisations supported by TECL in its pilot projects on CSEC and child trafficking, are at various stages of their development. Some, Like Lerato House and Kid's Haven, have fairly substantial infrastructures. They employ, in the case of Kid's Haven, almost 100 people. Kid's Haven has come some way since the founder, Moira Simpson, pitched tents in the gardens of the Benoni Welfare Department in a desperate attempt to force the Department to assist her. Kid's Haven now has a shelter and a village, run established outreach programmes, parenting programmes, an educational bridging programme, a pre-school programme and a family re-unification programme. They keep detailed records on all the children, and what isn't written down is certainly in someone's head. The staff know every child by name. Almost all the staff, and volunteers from as far afield as Germany, work directly with the children. A bookkeeper comes in once a week. The few administrative staff deal with the telephones, setting up meetings, typing up records and reports, responding to queries, issues related to the premises and equipment.

The reality is that, while a query to Karen, who doubles as the director's personal assistant and everyone else's administration support, may get an immediate response, an e-mail to Terri, who runs the multi-faceted education department, or to Sam who "does" outreach and prevention, may not get a response at all. They do not have e-mail access on their desks, and, in any case, spend very little time at their desks. It was Terri who gave me the title for this paper when she said, after a query about an e-mail to which there had been no response: "We aren't good at e-mails, but we are good at children." She is absolutely right.

At the other end of the scale, in terms of infrastructure, are the newer organisations in Hillbrow/Berea, with very few staff members and some volunteers. Until TECL funded them to buy computers and get connected to the internet, receiving an e-mail meant a 15 minute walk to the internet café, paying for using the internet café (often from one's own pocket), and then a 15 minute walk back. (Few of the organisations have transport and, while staff and volunteers walk long distances and take kombi taxis if the distance is really too far, when they are dealing with sick girls and raped toddlers, they often have to take metered taxis for which they pay, also from their own pockets. Few of them earn more than R 1 000 a month.) Some of the organisations are now connected and do receive e-mail.

Some are still “waiting for Telkom”. Even those who do have e-mail, have not yet become addicted. If you want to be sure someone reads an e-mail, you had best send an SMS saying “check your e-mail”. (Cell phone technology has been a much easier adaptation for most.) Even then, one of my colleagues visited our sixth organisation, which hovers between an office in Pretoria and services in the Winterveldt, to find that the person in charge had over 300 unread e-mails. He just hadn’t got around to checking.

Why so much about e-mails? Because the problems with e-mails epitomise the problems with assumptions about e-mails, access to e-mails, computer familiarity, paper work in general, that so many donors make in their interactions with organisations like these. The assumptions are flawed. Flawed not because the organisations are not doing a good job, flawed not because they are obdurate, stubborn (although anyone who has seen MamKhanyi demanding medical attention for one of her girls knows she is that, when it counts), flawed not because they are stupid and don’t deserve your funds, but because they work under very difficult circumstances, and they are better at children than they are at e-mails. And the truth is, irritating though it may be when one needs an answer or information or a report, they have their priorities right.

That said, there is no doubt that these organisations would like to be able to meet the demands made on them. They are eager to be accountable and to learn the skills that formal accountability requires. They welcome anything that is offered in terms of capacity building and fit into their schedules, by some magical method of making days longer than 24 hours and weeks longer than seven days, workshops on fund-raising and materials development, sessions on Excel and filing, hours on reporting formats and requirements.

In this context, the TECL decision to provide a capacity building facet to its funding of six organisations dealing with commercial sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking in Gauteng, is a very positive one.

4. The capacity building project

As indicated, in addition to funding the six projects, TECL has also contracted with a small team of organisational development practitioners to provide capacity building support to the organisations. There is a careful line to be walked here. Quite correctly, such support can only take up a limited percentage of the total amount available for the organisations, and, as the funding for each organisation is quite limited (under R 300 000 in every case), this means that the funding for the capacity building work is also limited. The need is limitless. It encompasses support in reporting on beneficiaries, support in financial reporting, support with resource mobilisation, support on governance issues, support with planning and with monitoring and evaluation, support with financial management, support with human resource systems, support with networking. The list goes on.

The project is a time-limited one and neither the financial support nor the capacity building support will be available beyond much more than a year. The capacity building project began providing support early in 2006. There have been many learnings since then, not least for us, the capacity building team. The organisations are learning all the time. They are thirsty for ideas, for systems, for new and better ways of doing things. TECL and the government has also had much to learn and, as the Gauteng CSEC / child trafficking project is intended to be a pilot, it will, hopefully, be able to put the learnings to good use in any future such projects.

5. Learnings from the capacity building support experience

It is early days yet, and there is still, no doubt, much more to learn, but, for now, some of the key learnings and ideas we have identified in terms of providing support to these organisations are:

- The capacity building team can provide useful support to the organisations in negotiating and mediating the relationship with the donor from the onset and should be brought on board as soon as possible. The organisations might well be desperate for funding and might accept contracts which they are not necessarily able to fulfill or which shift their focus away from work that they have prioritised. The capacity building team can help them to understand the terms of the contract and, in some cases, to negotiate for terms which they are better able to fulfill.
- Clarify terminology and definitions before the contract is even drawn up. Negotiations of targets and reporting should be based on a clear understanding of what is meant by terms such as “withdrawal” and “rehabilitation”.
- Be very careful about making assumptions that community-based organisations such as these are computer-comfortable and log-frame savvy. As noted above, this is not necessarily so and the assumptions can lead to misunderstandings.
- Develop and pilot reporting systems before introducing them to the partner organisations. These organisations do not have the capacity to deal with repeated changes in forms and formats. Keep things as simple and as un-confusing as possible. Most of the organisations are operating with very few staff, all of whom are over-committed to the actual work of the organisation. Particularly in a programme such as a TECL, which is linked into an international system (through the ILO), the reporting requirements are, in any case, very demanding. To the extent possible, they should be simplified on the principle of: less is better.
- Where these organisations are a part of a much bigger programme which has international links, as is the case with the TECL CSEC / child trafficking projects, let the link to the international experience be a positive one that goes beyond sometimes onerous reporting. There needs to be a way to engage the organisations in learning and growing from international experience. So, in addition to more academic conferences such as this RECLISA one, is there not some way to get CBOs from different countries together to tell their stories to one another, to share their experiences, their programmes and their ideas? The potential synergy could be explosive and exciting.
- As an extension of the previous bullet, help organisations to locate what they do within the bigger picture: Why does the problem exist? How has it been addressed by others? What role can education realistically play in addressing the problems? What alternatives exist?
- Terms such as “lifescills”, “vocational skills” and “accreditation” need to be interrogated. For some organisations “lifescills” is about “knowing myself”, “setting objectives”. For others it is entrepreneurship. For some “vocational skills” is call centre training, for others it is beadwork. The organisations with whom we work have already started discussing these issues and sharing their understanding among themselves. Forums such as this conference need to be feeding into this and offering realistic alternatives for the organisations to explore. There is an urgency to move ideas and discussions from the conference floor into the shelters and drop-in centres.
- Encourage networking but don’t force it. Networking among organisations is enormously important. Not all problems and solutions can be shared, but the net of connections gets exponentially extended as people share their networks with one another. However, there is an element of competition, sometimes fuelled by donors, so the assumption that organisations will immediately recognise the advantages of joint activities is premature. Trust needs to be built. On the other hand, use the expertise within the organisations as a basis for sharing. The dynamic interactions that have taken place at the workshops held with the TECL CSEC / child trafficking organisations thus far have been exiting and productive and the foundation of trust being built augurs well for the future.

- There is a role to be played in mediating the relationship with government departments. Given the situations with which the organisations cope on a daily basis, they may well see government departments as “the enemy”, and officials as using them while thwarting their efforts to help children and failing to provide financial support. Finding people within government departments who are willing to sit down and talk through the problems (and these people certainly exist), and assisting the organisations to formulate their concerns and issues, helps to create a constructive climate and, we hope, may lead to more useful resolutions of frustrating problems.

6. Conclusions

Much of what the capacity building project is trying to do is to support these organisations as they navigate the precarious move from survival to sustainability. While a few of the organisations have some degree of stability, the others are still lurching from crisis to crisis, struggling to be proactive in the face of seemingly overwhelming demands. There is an abundance of energy and innovation in the organisations, but they need some space – space to plan, to think ahead, to get some coherence to their activities.

This is all a work in progress and it is too soon to reach any definitive conclusions. Located structurally, as we are, between TECL and the organisations, it is sometimes difficult to mediate the very different needs. On the one hand, TECL requires relatively sophisticated reporting systems to feed into national and international data. On the other, MamKhanyi has to walk three miles, there and back, from the shelter to her mid-town office, every day; she has to deal with one of “her” girls disrupting a class at school; and she has to get a critically ill child to the clinic. That is when she isn’t counselling, feeding, organising training, doing home visits, “begging” for a donation towards a vehicle to get the children to school or hospital, or persuading the body corporate that the six months back rent is going to be paid any day now, as soon as the donor contract comes through.

The support of programmes like TECL is essential and, in order to access that support, the organisations have to be able to meet certain requirements. There needs to be a balance between meeting these requirements, on the side of the organisations, and adding value to the work of the organisations on the side of the donor organisations. This added value can go far beyond the financial support. TECL, for example, is potentially a channel to a wealth of experience in similar organisations, locally and internationally, and an access point to higher levels of government where the organisations can feed into policy issues. We believe that having a bridging mechanism such as the capacity building project has the potential to be very useful. We certainly feel privileged to be involved in exploring this potential.