

Reintegration of Street-Connected Children

Uyisenga Ni Imanzi, Rwanda



THE MODEL

In Rwanda, in 2020, almost 3,000 children are living on the street as a consequence of family poverty, the death of parents, the need for income to survive, juvenile delinquency or mistreatment at home. Street-connected children are regularly exposed to physical and sexual violence, and levels of drug use are high.

Uyisenga Ni Imanzi (UNM) believes that if children are to develop and participate in society to the fullest of their abilities, they must be protected in the home and community. They must be supported to interact with children and adults, and they must benefit from organised early childhood development, education and care.

Since 2017, UNM has been working to reunify separated families and reintegrate street-connected children into society. They meet children and their families in 9 transit centres across Rwanda (Rubavu, Rwamagana, Nyanza, Gitagata, Marembo, CEPAJ, Gikondo, Enfants de Dieu, CECIDAR), to work through a process of reintegration, which takes three months.

UNM then guides a collaborative effort to strengthen the support structures between children, families, and wider society. Children are reintegrated into schools, and particular importance is placed on this area as it is common for families to remove their children from school in order to send them to work. Parents are trained and supported in income-generating activities, and psychological support is given to vulnerable parents, who can also take part in "parent saving groups".

IMPLEMENTATION

Below is an example of how UNM works with street-connected children and their parents in Enfants de Dieu transit centre in Kigali.

- Initial preparatory sessions are held to:
- introduce staff and establish a plan for the reintegration process, and
 - welcome the children and establish trust between them, the staff and facilitators (these sessions include lots of talking, dancing and play).

Seven sessions are then conducted along the following lines:

1. "Naming the problem" - with children
2. "Re-establishing responsibility" - with parents
3. "Naming the problem" - with parents
4. "Tree of life" - with children
5. "Team of life" - with children
6. "Finding resources" - with parents
7. "Building confidence" - with children

A staff training session is also held on the steps of the reintegration process.



IMPACT

- 1 In the year up to September 2020, UNM worked with 1,399 street-connected children and 1,392 children were reintegrated into their families.
- 2 Between 2017 to 2019, 714 children were reintegrated, with all of them attending school; in 2020 during COVID-19, the children who have been reintegrated remain at home and are not attending school.
- 3 UNM has created 30 "saving parents groups", made up of 465 parents distributed across Rubavu and Kigali districts.
- 4 The UNM reintegration model is now seen as a role model which has led to it being adapted by other rehabilitation centres.
- 5 Through this work many more children remain with their families and parents take more responsibility for their children.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The impact and consequences of the genocide in 1994 are still felt today in Rwanda. Children suffer a variety of psychological and social issues related to the genocide including being orphaned, HIV/AIDS as a result of rape, having family members in jail and loss of relatives, friends and properties. There is enduring mass psychological trauma at community level. All of this contributes significantly to the high numbers of children living on the streets.

In March 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Rwanda. As of September 2020 Rwanda has recorded 4,779 cases and 27 deaths. COVID-19 has led to increased numbers of children living on the streets; in March the City of Kigali initiated a drive to remove children from the streets, by reintegrating them with families or placing them in rehabilitation centres.

ABOUT UYISENGA NI IMANZI

Uyisenga Ni Imanzi (UNM) was established in 2002 in response to the high number of children and young adults who became orphans and heads of their households as a result of the Rwandan genocide and HIV/AIDS.

UNM provides mental health care, support to achieve economic sustainability through small business activities, and funds for education and materials for children to attend school. Their aim is to build the resilience of children, facilitate their reintegration into society, and to promote their rights in families and communities.

Find out more about UNM at www.uyisenganmanzi.org.rw
Or contact Chaste Uwihoreye, Country Director, uwichaste@yahoo.fr

CHALLENGES FACED

- Many children continue to live on the streets.
- Some parents struggle to understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to their children.
- At times, children can be reluctant to collaborate during sessions.
- Changing stakeholders' attitudes regarding the reintegration model can be a challenge.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Family for Every Child is a diverse membership network of civil society organisations based around the world.

How We Care is an innovative platform for those working with children and families, across the globe, to share their practice. Our vision is that through the exchange and learning facilitated by How We Care, organisations' family care practice and programming will be strengthened, with improved outcomes for the children they support.

Sign up here: www.howwecare.community



By practitioners, for practitioners.

Children's well-being and protection enables and assures their development and participation in the world." Uyisenga Ni Imanzi