Leaving street life

How can centres assist street children in leaving the street life?

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Abstract

This is qualitative study about Kenyan street children. The aim of this study is to get a better understanding of the pull and push factors towards the street and towards rehabilitation centres. The question formulation is; How can rehabilitation centres assist street children in leaving the street life?

25 former street children have been interviewed in a combination of focus group and individual interviews. The theoretical framework that is used for the analysis is elucidation the perspective of childhood, the street child and the street, theories about socialisation and stigma. The result shows: Pull factors exist in both directions. The pull factors towards the street are freedom, friends in the streets and drug addictions. The pull factors towards the centre are access to education, a chance to be treated like full human beings and to be able to get a better future. The street children are active social agents who have to have a desire to leave the street, it is not possible to force them off the streets. What is offered in the centre has to be viewed as better than what they have in the streets. One way for the centres to help the street children to get the desire to leave the streets is by helping them to focus on their future. The centre can also help the street child to make the transformation to the centre easier. The most important aspects is to offer drug rehabilitation programs and make the re-socialization process easier by acknowledge the positive things the street children have learned in the street and to treat them as active social agents.

Keywords: Street child, centre, leave, education, drugs, future, freedom, stigma, socialization, re-socialization, childhood, social agency, Kenya, Africa
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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2012 I worked as a volunteer in an organization having a newly founded center for street kids in Mombasa, Kenya. When I arrived the former street children had just been in the center for two weeks. It was amazing to see the changes in the children during these first weeks when they were able to get somewhere to sleep, to get food, love and the possibility to go to school. The children in the center told me about other centers they had been to, and reasons to why they had left them. They had been abused, not given enough food and treated in a non-respectful way.

I became interested in how these centers worked and how it would be possible to make them better. I thought that the children ran back to the street because the centers were bad. By creating better centers all street children would stay in the centers and there would be no more street children. Based on this idea I wanted to create an evaluation tool for street rehabilitation center, built on what the former street children believe is a good center. I applied for a Minor field study scholarship from the Swedish International Development corporation Agency to perform this study.

Half a year went by, and I was reached by sad news from my friends in Kenya. All the former street children had escaped from the center and went back to the street. I was puzzled, since I could not understand why they decided to leave a warm bed, regular meals and a chance to go to school. Why did they run away to go back to the streets where they would sleep outside on piece of cardboard, often hungry and in fear of being abused or raped?

To get a better understanding of the problem I started to read previous research about the subject. It has been done a lot of research about street children. I read about why they ended up in the streets and how life in the streets is, but it was hard to find research regarding why and how street children left the streets. I realized that my research could fill a whole.

One year after my first trip to Kenya I was back in the country and started to interview former street children. I was still interested in the rehabilitation centers, since I believed them to be an important part of leaving street life. I had however started to understand that sometimes it was not enough to offer a good center. To fully understand how street children leave the street it is also important to understand what the street means for the street children and why they sometimes decide to run back. This knowledge can help street children to leave the street.
When the street children are living in the streets the majority of their human rights are not fulfilled. The Convention of the child can be divided in three parts: rights concerning protection, providing and participation. Street children are not protected, they have to provide for themselves and they have received participation mostly by accident because they have to (Ennew, 2000: 176). When reading all the articles of the Convention of the child it becomes apparent that the children’s human rights are not provided for when they are living in the streets (Ennew, 2000: 176-7). It is therefore important from a human right’s perspective to assist street children in leaving the streets, so that their human rights can be fulfilled.

1.1 Problem formulation, purpose and question of research

Today many children are living in the streets around the world, where the majority of their human rights are not fulfilled. One way to help street children is to offer them a place in a centre that can provide them with food, shelter and education. A problem for these centres is that a big part of all the street children that come to a centre runs back to the street. The aim of this study is to get a better understanding of the pull and push factors towards the street and towards rehabilitation centres. To be able to help street children it is important to understand why they decide to go back to the streets and what can make them desire to leave the street and stay in a centre.

The question formulation for this thesis is therefore; How can centres assist street children in leaving the street life?

1.2 Definitions

The definition of a street child will in this thesis be based on Kaime-Atterhög’s (2012) definition. A street child is defined as a “boy or girl, under 18 years of age, for whom the street has become his or her ‘home’ and source of livelihood and who is not under the care of a responsible adult” (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 2).

The definition of a former street child is a person who, according to the above definition, was a street child before s/he came to the center.

1.3. Material and limitations

In order to get as much information as possible from the respondents it was crucial that they trusted me as the interviewer. This is particularly difficult to create with people who have been living in the streets, since a part of surviving in the streets is that you learn to trust no one (Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008).
The plan for the study was to go back to Mombasa and work in an organization where I had been volunteering the year before. The interview sample would be the children in the organization and other children that I could come in contact with through the staff of that organization.

This plan was altered since it was not possible for me to stay in that centre during the research for this thesis due to management problems. This alteration was made just a couple of days before I left for Kenya, which lead to a situation where I did not have a centre that could be my base. By help from friends I came in contact with another centre, where I one and a half week later was able to start working. The centre had been running for about ten years. When this study was conducted there were 25 boys between 14 to 24 years in the centre. Eight of the boys who attended high school and who were studying at schools near the centre lived permanently at the centre. The rest of the boys lived in boarding schools and were only at the centre during the holidays. Due to a teachers strike during the months when this study was conducted many of the boys that should had been in boarding school where instead living in the centre, which gave a greater access to respondents. Four full-time employees, called "caretakers", and a cook worked in the centre at the time of my study.

In addition to the 15 boys that I was interviewing at this centre, another four boys were interviewed at the centre where I had worked the year before. During my time in Mombasa, I got to know another woman who had been working with street children in Mombasa for around ten years. Through her I came in contact with additional eight former street children that I could interview, seven boys and one girl. I finally interviewed two former street girls who lived in a sister project to the centre where I had my base.

All together, interviews where conducted with 25 children and adolescents aged 12-24 years, 22 boys and three girls. The sample had a clear gender imbalance because it was difficult to come in contact with girls that had been living in the streets. Fewer girls then boys are living in the streets, and in Mombasa there exists only one centre for former street girls and this centre where not interested in letting their children participate in the study.

The decision was deliberately taken to chose to work with centres that had a good reputation. This decision was based on a fear that children at a centre that did not treat them well would be too afraid to talk about their experiences in the interviews. The children that were interviewed were living in four different centres. The vast majority
of the former street children had been living in at least one other centre before the one they lived in at the moment of the investigation. This implies that in reality this layup cover the experiences from more than the four centres where the interviews were conducted.

1.2.2 Criticism of the sources

This study is based on interviews and the answers the respondents have been giving. There is always a risk that the respondents were not reliable or have been withholding information that can have affected the result. All respondents were aware that I had received permission to interview them from their staff and the founders of the centres where they were living. I assured them that nothing they told me would be passed on to the staff or owners of the centres, but there is still always a risk that they refrained from talking freely based on this fear.

Also a gender factors might have had an impact, since it might be hard for the respondents to talk about a few things since I was a woman and most of them were boys. Previous research shows for example that sexual abuse is common both in the streets and in some centres (Beasley, 2003: 112, Fahmi, 2007: 111, Huang et al., 2004: 822, Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 34, van Beers, 1996: 198). This was nothing that came up in the interviews when for example talking about feeling safe in centres or about hardship of street life. It might be that the former street children that I interviewed had not experienced this, but it might also be that they did not feel comfortable to talk about these things during the interviews.

The relationship between the respondents and the interviewer were not equal, due to factors such as age since I was older then them, that I was a volunteer at some of the centres and because I was white and compared to them wealthy, something I had experienced gives status in Kenya. This might have lead to that the respondents responses was not totally reliable, since there is a risk that they decided to give answers they thought I wanted to hear and/or that they left out some things.

Another critique towards the choice of source is that for the benefit of this research it could have been of interest to also interview children who was currently living in the streets. Interviewing both street children that had been in a centre and decide to run back to the streets and street children who never had chosen to go to a centre, even when offered, could have given a better understanding for why some of them prefer the streets before living in a centre. To interview street children in the streets is
however difficult, since it is hard as an outsider to earn their trust. To be able to create this trust either an excessive time had to be spent in the streets or contact would have had been taken through a person that the street children already trusted. It was not possible to spend the time needed within this study and no contact with a person who worked with street children in the streets on a daily basis existed. Therefore the decision was made to focus on children who for the time being were living in a centre. The extensive use of drugs in the streets, such as glue and marijuana, also contributed to that it was believed to be a too difficult to interview street children in the streets.

1.2.3. Handling of references
To protect the respondents’ identities their names are not presented. In the results many citations are presented, but only the person’s age and gender are given. Also other information such as names or other information that can make it possible to identify the centres that the children are or have been living at have been removed. The study being conducted with children from four different centres lessens the risk that it will be possible to link citations to a single individual.

1. 3 Research ethics
Working with children and young people require ethical considerations. This is especially true when doing studies with street children, as they often are more vulnerable than children living with their families (Young & Barrett, 2001). The fact that the interviews were conducted at centres where the respondents were living required extra ethical requirements in relation to the respondents’ voluntary participation.

The centres both supported the study and gave permission for the respondents to take part in the study. There was a risk of creating a situation where the children felt forced to take part in the study. Measurements were taken to lessen this risk. The respondents were given information that I was interested in interviewing them but that it was fully optional for them to take part, and if they were interested in taking part they would let me know. At the interview situation, I began by explaining that it was optional to answer my questions and if they did not want to talk about a subject they would just let me know. They also got assurance that I would not let anyone know what a single person had told me. The interviews were recorded, but only after they had given their approval for this.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Perspective of childhood, the street child and the street

How the different concepts of street child, childhood and the street is interpreted and understood is important for how street children are believed to be rehabilitated in the best way.

2.1.1. Perception of childhood

In research regarding street children it is a common statement that the street children have had their childhood stolen. Since they are living for some part of their childhood in the streets it is believed that they do not have a childhood (Hecht, 1998: 70-1). This raises the question about what childhood is? Childhood is often viewed as a state of innocence, passivity, play and education that should be spend in the homes together with their family (Blerk, 2005: 9). Children are viewed as passive recipients of adult culture that needs to be nurtured and socialized by the adults around them. They are expected to live at home and being taken care of by their parents (Magazine, 2003: 304). What is often forgotten is that this understanding of what a childhood should be, is a modern middle class western interpretation of childhood (Beasley, 2003: 126, Niewenhuys, 2001: 543, Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 153).

Historically, all the way in to the beginning of the 20th century, children were believed to be a vital part of the economic survival for the family. The children had to work to contribute to the survival of the family (Baker, 1998: 49, Hecht, 1998: 71, 82). This is still the case for the majority of the poor children in the world today. They have to work to help the family to survive. These children also have a childhood, but it is different from the middle class western version (Baker & Panter-Brick, 1996: 162, Beasley, 2003: 126, Hecht, 1998: 72). The poorer children’s childhood is instead of being focused on play, irresponsibility and school, their childhood contain of work and responsibility for the family’s survival (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 84).

2.1.2 Perception of the street child and its social agency

What a childhood is believed to be, have an impact on how the street children are being viewed. Street children are often believed to be out of place from the “normal” society. They are believed to live in a reality opposite to what a proper childhood should be. The street children are therefore often viewed as abnormal based on what

Traditionally the street child has been viewed as either a victim or a criminal (Diversi, 2006: 386, de Moura, 2002: 353, Panter-Brick, 2002: 151-2). If viewed as a victim the street child is believed to be an innocent, passive victim who has been forced into the street. The best way to help the street child is to get him/her off the street and as far away from that life as possible (de Moura, 2002: 353, Mugo, 2004: 45-6, Ortiz de Carrizosa & Poertner, 1992: 408). This view of the child fits into the western middle class view of childhood, where children should be protected and cared for by adults (Magazine, 2003: 316). The other common view of street children is that they are small criminals with lack of moral and ethics. They are believed to do everything to survive in the streets. The street child is therefore viewed as a threat to society and should be taken away from the streets, in the best interest of the society. The best way to help them is to force them away from the streets and discipline them until they have regained values from the common society (de Moura, 2002: 360-1, Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 84, Mugo, 2004: 41-4, Ortiz de Carrizosa & Poertner, 1992: 408, Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 152).

The problem with both these two views is that it does not capture the whole picture of the street child. If the child is viewed only as a victim its entire agency is taken away. If the street child on the other hand are viewed as a criminal, the structural reason for why the street child end up in the streets and what they are forced to do to survive in there, is ignored (Butler et al., 2009: 15).

Another way to understand street children’s presence in the street is that they are viewing the streets as a better option than life at home, due to factors such as poverty or abuse. The street children go to the street in search for a better life and in the streets the street children do what they have to do in order to survive (Beasley, 2003: 108, Butler, 2009: 13).

One example of how important the interpretations of their actions are is how their ability to adjust to circumstances to gain what they need should be understood. This may either be understood as if they are manipulative or it can be viewed as an effective cooping strategy to survive (Baker, 1998: 49, Orme & Seipel, 2007: 496).

By viewing street children as social agents who are active participants in the creation of their lives gives another understanding for how to best help the street child (de Moura, 2003: 363). They are not believed to be passive victims who are just waiting
to be saved and they are not criminals who should be punished into better behaviour. Instead they are viewed as resourceful and resilient individuals who are able to survive under very harsh conditions (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 154, Malindi & Theron, 2010: 730, Veale, 2000: 136-7). The efforts to help street children have to be created together with the street children in order to be successful (Panter-Brick, 2002: 154, 161).

However, one problem with presenting street children as active social agents is that social agents also have accountability. This has the risk to create a view where street children are believed to have chosen to live in the streets and therefore should not receive help to get away from there (Drybread, 2009: 345, Panter-Brick, 2002: 154). The problem with such an interpretation is that it is ignoring the structural dimension of the problem. Even if the child decided that the street is a better choice than living at home or in a centre, this only means that s/he believes that street is the best choice among the choices s/he has (Baker, 1998: 54, Butler, 2009: 15).

One way to explain this is to see agency as either thick or thin. Thick agency is when a person has a lot of different choices to choose from, whereas thin agency is when s/he has few choices to choose from. How many choices a person has is often due to structural factors, such as poverty or age. The street children have few choices, thin agency, due to their poverty and their low age (Klocker, 2007: 85-92). Even if they made the choice to go to the streets, they cannot be held accountable for it, since they choose that option among the few options they had, as a choice of the least worse of two bad ones (Raffaei et al., 2001: 397).

Another view of agency and its limitations for the street children is presented by Schimmel (2006) who is arguing that to have a full freedom and agency is only accomplished when there is a full understanding all the consequences from that decision. As a child it is difficult to fully understand the long-term consequences of the decision to leave school and go back to the streets. Also other factors that impact a person’s understanding of the consequences of their actions, such as drug use, are making them less accountable for their actions. Street children should therefore not be held accountable for their actions (Schimmel, 2006: 220-2, 226).

2.1.3. Perception of the street

The place where a person does something does not normally define who that person is. A child who is playing in the garden is not a garden child and a child who is
working in the field is not viewed as a field child. However, street children are defined based on where they work, and in some cases, sleep. They become a street child (Glauser, 2003: 147, Hecht, 2000: 151). Since the street is so closely connected to who the street child is believed to be, it is important to have an understanding of the different perceptions of the street.

The streets can be viewed as an inhuman place to live, or it can be understood as a safe harbour from the children’s home life. The street is harsh to live in, but it is still possible that it is a better alternative compared to where the street children come from (Butler, 2009: 17-8, Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 222). The street can therefore be viewed as the solution of a problem, instead of being the problem (Beasley, 2003: 108).

The socialisation role of the streets can also be understood in different ways. The street can be viewed as something totally negative where it is not possible to learn anything good or useful. It is however also possible to view the street as a very harsh place to live in, but still a place where the street children are able to create some good memories and valuable learning outcomes. They can for example learn survival skills, adjustment to different situations and how to gain friends (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 84, Webster, 2011: 435, Fahmi, 2007: 75-6, 114, 123).

2.3. Socialization, de-socialization and re-socialization

Socialisation is the process where new culture is transferred to new members and internationalised by them. The first socialisation process occurs when the child is young. The parents or other important persons in the child’s life transmit the knowledge to the child and learn the child how to be and behave in the world. The child inherits rules about how to behave and which attitudes and values are appropriate in the culture where they are brought up. Through this process human learns appropriate ways of acting, interpreting and feeling (Beasley, 2003: 109, Giddens, 1998: 42-3, Passer et al, 2009: 18). This first socialisation is by many believed to be the most important, but even after this socialisation people continue to be socialised in to new surroundings and groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 287-8). This continued socialisation is rebuilding on the knowledge people already have (McHugh, 1966: 357).

When radical change in a personality is required it is sometimes not enough to be socialised into the new environment and/or group, since the person might adopt
values that are contradicting to the old ones. An example of this is when criminals have to readjust to a life without crimes. To make it possible they might have to first de-socialise and then re-socialise. De-socialise means that previous socialisation is undone, through giving up old norms, values, attitudes and behaviours. When this has been done it is then possible to re-socialise, to learn new values, behaviours, norms and attitudes that is contradicting to the one that was learned in the first place. To grow through this process is in some ways to create a new identity (Bar-Yosef, 1968: 27-9, McHugh, 1966: 357-363).

2.4. Stigma

Stigma can be defined as “Stigmatised individuals posses (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context” (Crocker et al., 1998 cited in Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 369). There are three types of stigma: physical attributes, uncontrollable stigmas, such as religion, and controllable stigmas, for example obesity or smoking (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 370). People believe that a person who has the stigma is not seen as fully human and they build up an ideology of the stigmatised as inferior and as a threat to others, which exclude the stigmatised person from the community (Goffman, 2014: 11-17).

The stigmatised person can in some situations get rid of their stigma, for example if they had a big birth mark in their face. The risk is however that even if they do not longer have the stigma they will always have the memory of being someone who had the stigma (Goffman, 2014: 11-17, 28). Controllable stigma creates harsher reactions and more extreme discrimination; since the society believe that it is possible for the stigmatised person to choose not to have the stigmatised attribute (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 370). Another risk for the stigmatised person is that s/he will start believing in the stigmatised picture everyone else sees and start feeling different and as it was something wrong with him/her. This lead to that the only time the stigmatised person can feel at home and accepted is together with other people who are stigmatised of the same reason (Goffman, 2014: 11-17, 28).
3. Method

This study was performed with a qualitative method. In a qualitative method fewer respondents are interviewed more deeply to get a deeper understanding of the subject (Bryman, 2009: 149-152). Since the aim of the study was to get as thorough understanding of the subject as possible, this was believed to be a favourable method. The interviews were conducted in Mombasa, Kenya, where I spent ten weeks during the summer of 2013.

To be able to interview the respondents it was important to earn their trust, this is particularly important when interviewing street children who often have difficulties in trusting people (Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008). To create this trust was easiest done in the centre where I worked as a volunteer, since there it was created through daily interaction with the children.

The centre had besides me another volunteer, and we work around 5-8 hours per day in the centre. We lived in a house a couple of minutes away from the centre since it was believed to be inappropriate to live in the centre. As volunteers we helped the kids with their homework, planned different activities, watched TV and ate with them. These activities were a good way to get to know the boys and to gain their trust. The first interview was conducted after I had spent three weeks in the centre, and the other interviews were conducted during the following five weeks.

I still had some contact with the centre where I had worked the year before and my intention was to be able to interview some of those children. To be able to reconnect with them and regain their trust, I used to go and visit them on my spare time, and I was there in average one day per week. The interviews with these boys were conducted my last week in Kenya, since it took time to regain their trust.

There were two situations where I, due to lack of time and lack of natural access to the interviewees, where not able to build a trust for me. One case was in relation to the former street children that I came in contact through a woman I got to know during my field study. In this case it was possible for me to interview them without getting to know them first, since she, as their supervisor, showed that she trusted me. When they saw that she trusted me it became possible for them to trust me enough to talk to me. In the second case, with the two girls in the sister organization to my base organization, I did not have any accompanying person in the interview situation. There was therefore no one there that they trusted who could verify that I was
trustworthy. This made the interview very difficult to carry out, since they questioned my intentions with the interviews and how I would handle information. This created a situation where I got significantly less from this interview than what I had been able to get under more favourable conditions.

3.1. Method of interviews

My previous experience was that Kenya is a fairly hierarchical society compared to Sweden. In my experience Kenya also have a school system that is more focused on getting the kids to learn facts than to think freely and to question things. These two factors led to the belief that there was a risk that the respondents might view the interviewer as an authoritarian figure and therefore would not feel comfortable to talk about some of the subjects. I believed that they would feel more comfortable and more relaxed if they were placed in a group with other children they know and who had experienced similar things. At same time, it was believed that some things might be too private to talk about in a big group, which would require individual interviews as well (Bryman, 2009: 300-339, Hennink, 2007: 10-12). The original idea was therefore to first perform group interviews, to create discussions and make the respondents used to the interview situation. The plan was to then follow up with individual interviews with the same respondents where it would be possible to ask follow up questions and if necessary more personal questions.

This setup was however modified during the field study, since it turned out that this was not an efficient way to conduct the interviews. The group interview setting that was expected to make the respondents more relaxed and more open turned to have the opposite outcome. The respondents were not used to be interviewed in this way and talk about these issues in groups, which led to a situation where they were asked a question and then they answered one after another in a circle. The discussions that the method was believed to create did not occur and instead of making them feel relaxed the group interview situation seemed to make the respondents more nervous and tense. Individual interviews were thereafter tested and turned out to work much better. After trying with one more group interviews, this time with people who knew each other very well to give it the best starting-point, with the same bad results, the decision was made to only conduct individual interviews from here on.

For the interviews a questionnaire was created with open questions (Bryman, 2009: 301-302). This questionnaire was updated and changed during the period of the field
study. If the same responses were given from many respondents these questions were removed while other questions were added based on the answers that were received during the interviews. The interviews were conducted as far as possible without using the questionnaire in an active way, to create a feeling of a conversation more than of a regular interview.

The interviews where initiated with the same three questions: age and name, when they came to the centre and what they thought about the centre when they first got there. Following these questions, wherever possible it was tried to let the respondents tell their story in their order and then incorporate the remaining questions where they fitted. The questions therefore came in different order from interview to interview. In order not to miss something important, the questionnaire form were taken out in the end of the interview and checked so that no questions had been missed.

All the interviews were conducted in English, which is one of the official languages in Kenya. Some of the respondents were not able to communicate well enough in English for the interviews to be conducted in this language. The plan was to use an external interpreter when performing interviews with them. The plan was to, through my contacts, find an interpreter that was used to work with kids and who could come to the centre several times to get to know the kids before the interviews started in order to create a trust for him/her. This plan was however abandoned, since the respondents refused to tell their stories to a stranger. They believed that they could not trust anyone coming from the outside and were afraid that this person might tell others about their stories. Their suggestions were instead that we would use one of the staff persons who worked in the centre as an interpreter. I feared that this could put the children in a tough situation if they wanted to talk about some negative things regarding the centre they were living in. This had the risk to create a situation where the respondents either had to lie to me or to the staff person; the decision was made to not use staff persons as interpreters. In two cases, with the children from the centres where I had worked the summer before, the solution that the children felt comfortable with was to let the two children who spoke a little bit better English interpret for the two that were not able to communicate in English. The children decided whom they wanted to interpret for them, and the interviews were conducted as individual interviews but with the other child interpreting. These four interviews did however become considerable shorter than the other interviews, around ten minutes compared to the average of one hour due to their limited understanding of English which made it
hard for them to have longer conversations about the questions. In other cases, I was not able to interview those whose English were not good enough. This lead to that a total of three potential respondents were not interviewed.

The interviews were between ten to 105 minutes long, depending on how much the respondents chose to share during the interview. The average interview was around 60 minutes. All interviews were taped with the respondents permission for future transcription.

All the interviews were transcribed to a full. To keep them as authentic as possible no changes were made to the citations, neither sentence construction or grammatical changes. The result was then categorized in to different themes depending on the most common topics that came up (Ryen, 2004: 107-113).
4 Previous research

4.1. Who is a street child?
There have been street children as long as urban cities have existed (Ennew, 2000: 170). In 1979, during the UN international year of the child, the street children for the first time became an important issue on the agenda Ennew, 2000: 170).

A difficulty with researching about street children is that there is no common accepted definition of what a street child is (Panter-Brick, 2002: 149). One of the definitions that still are widely used is the definition UNICEF founded 1986 in a way to better understand street children in Latin America (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 1). They made a distinction between children who are living permanently in the streets and those who are staying there during daytime but go home and sleep with their family. Children who lived permanently in the streets were called street children of the streets. Children who came to the streets to work during the day but went home in the evening were called street children on the streets (de Moura, 2002: 357). The problem with this definition is that research has later shown that it is hard to distinguish between these two groups since most of the children move between them. Some children live permanently in the streets during the weekdays but go back home in the weekends. Some children live in the streets during school break but live at home during school time and some children spend some months in a rehabilitation centre and then go back to the streets (Baker et al., 1996: 175, Fahmi, 2007: 109, Glauser, 1997: 146-7, Panter-Brick, 2002: 149, Turnbull et al., 2009: 1284).

The problem with not having a clear definition about who is a street child also makes it difficult to estimate the correct number of street children. Without a clear definition it is difficult to know whom to count (de Moura, 2002: 256, Panter-Brick, 2002: 153-4). To find out if a street child is permanently living in the street or is only occasionally spending time there, one way is to ask them. However, this has the disadvantage that they might not give confidant answers (Hecht, 1998: 171). The other alternative for researchers is to spend a long time with the street children to find out who is living there permanently. This alternative has the disadvantage of being long lasting and therefore more costly. A final problem with estimating the number is the fact that street children are highly movable which make them hard to count (Glauser, 1997:146-7).
There are more consequences of not having a clear definition of who is a street child. It also affects the decision regarding whom of the children that should be included in the research. This may create a situation where results with street children who live the majority of their lives in the streets might be compared with research performed on street children who mainly live at home (Ennew, 2000: 179, Glauser, 1997: 150). It is important to remember that, even if all researchers would have been using the same definition of what is a street child, it is still not possible to treat street children as a homogeneous group. All street children have different backgrounds and different reasons for being in the streets. There are also differences between countries and cultures (Butler & Rizzoli, 2003: 14, Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 82, Hecht, 1998:96, Kilbride et al., 2000: 4, Magazine, 2003: 316).

4.2. Why do they end up in the streets?

Poverty is believed to be one explanation of why the street children end up in the streets. Poverty makes it hard for the parents to support their children (Dybicz, 2005: 765). It is common that parents send their children out in the streets to work or beg for money as a way of supporting the family. It is also common that parents work in the streets and have their children to work with them. Through this work the children become exposed to the streets, they see that other children are living there in a more permanent way and may also get friends among the street children (Aderinto, 2000: 1200, Butler, 2009: 18-9, Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 3-4). Research has shown that it was very rare that a child became a street child over night; the most common was that the transition was made gradually. The children learned to know some of the street children; they then started to spend more time in the streets for later starting to sleep a night or two in the streets. Through this process the connection to the family became weaker and eventually lead to the child spending more and more time in the streets (Butler, 2009: 18, de Moura, 2002: 357, Rizzini & Butler, 2003: 185).

One problem with using poverty as the main cause of the existence of street children is that only some poor children end up in the streets (Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 208, Kilbride et al., 2000: 136-7). When street children are asked about why they are in the street, one other common reason is abuse at home, verbally, physically and/or sexually (Bordonaro, 2012: 417, Hecht, 1998: 55, Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 3-4). Physical punishment is common in most of the countries where the research regarding street children has been performed. It is viewed as a natural part of raising children so
not all physical punishments were believed to be an abuse. The street children distinguished between fair and unfair physical punishment. Physical punishment that was viewed as a punishment for something they had done to teach to behave in a better way was viewed as fair. Physical punishments were believed to be unfair when the children were unable to see a connection between the physical punishment and something they have done, or if the physical punishment was too severe compared to the child’s wrongdoing. It then became a reason for leaving home (Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 218, Hecht, 1998: 86-7). Since physical punishment is viewed as a natural element during child rearing some of the street children explained that they normally told people that they left home due to poverty. Leaving home due to poverty created compassion from other people. Leaving home because of physical abuse, on the other hand, created more hostility since the street children then were believed to have been a bad child who deserved to be punished (Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 201, 212).

Another common reason for the children to leave their homes was family breakdown, for example by the death of a parent or divorce (Butler 2009: 16). Especially divorces seem to affect the children negatively. Many of the street children reported that their new stepparent did not like them and many times abused them, both physically and sexually (Fahmi, 2007: 113). Also to get along with their stepsiblings was viewed as a problem, and it was common that their new stepparents treated them unfair compared to his/her biological children, for example by giving them less food or force them to work (Fahmi, 2007: 113, Butler 2009: 16).

A fourth reason to why the children went to the streets were that they felt that the rules at home where to strict and after having had some experience with street life they preferred the more free life style (Beasley, 2003: 111, Rizzini & Butler, 2003: 185-6, 194, van Beers, 1996: 195).

Peer influence could also influence the child to decide to go to the streets. The children had friends in the streets that told them how great street life was and tried to convince them to join them (Beasley, 2003: 111, Bordonaro 2011: 14). There are also cases of children whose mothers are living in the street, and these children are therefore born in to the streets (Shanahan, 2003: 365).

In the research about street children it was long believed that the street children had been abandoned by their parents and/or where orphanages. However, later research has shown that most of the street children are not abandoned; it is even them who
argue that the children rather are abandoning then being abandoned (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 85-6, Benitez, 2003: 134-5). Due to the situation the children have at home they view the street as a better option. The streets are not believed to be a problem; instead they are viewed as solution to a problem. The street is believed to be safer than their homes (Beasley, 2003: 108, Bordonaro, 2012: 416-7, Bordonaro 2011: 7, 10, Butler, 2009: 17-8, Raffaelli et al., 2001: 397, Turnbull et al., 2009: 1285).

Some researchers however put emphasis on that even if it is the children who many times are abandoning they have first been abandoned by parents and sometimes societies who have not been able to support for them. According to them the child is first abandoned and therefore decides to leave for the streets (Veale et al, 2000: 135).

4.3. Life in the streets

To be able to understand why the street children might prefer the street before a centre it is important to understand how the life in the street is.

4.3.1. Friends in the streets

Previous research shows that friendship in the street is important for most street children. The friends become for many of them a sort of family, who give them love, acceptance and care. These groups sometimes also work together and split their income (Kilbride et al., 2000: 74, Orme & Seipel, 2007: 493). There are though also examples of street children that do not work together in groups. They prefer instead to work alone since they believe that the other children will steal from them (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 84, Hecht, 1998: 28).

Violence is common between street children, both between different groups but also within groups of friends (Hecht, 1998: 137, Heinonen, 2000: 150-1).

4.3.2. Money

Being able to get access to money is one the things the street children appreciate most about the streets. The children have different ways to get hold of money (Orme & Seipel, 2007: 496). For younger children it is common to beg for money. Begging becomes harder when the child grows older. It is believed to be effective until the child is about 14 years old because people still view them as innocent and want to give them help. When they grow older they are seen as young adults who should earn their own money. This change in perception, from innocent child to young adult, also
The street children also perform smaller jobs, such as helping out in the market place, washing car windows, guarding parked cars and selling smaller goods that they easily can carry around (Hecht, 1998: 52, 193). An alternative way to earn money can also be to collect and sell for example paper or metals (Hecht, 1998: 193). There are also illegal methods to earn money, such as minor thefts or pocket picking and stealing watches, or by selling drugs (Hecht, 1998: 51, Kaimé-Atterhög, 2012: 2-5).

4.3.3. Drugs
The reported proportion of street children using drugs differs. Some studies found that everyone who has been in the streets for a couple of months used drugs, whereas other studies reported that only about half of the street children used drugs (Hecht, 1998: 61, Ribeiro & Ciampone, 2001: 46, Rizzini & Butler, 2003: 188-9). The studies also found different frequencies of drug use. Some found that everyone was addicted whereas another study found that some of the street children just used it as a social thing and not all the time (Fahmi, 2007: 144). It was common that other street children introduced the new children to the drugs, particularly glue, either by own choice or by force as a requirement for being part of the group (Embleton et al., 2013: 4-9, van Blerk, 2005: 10-11).
The most common drug is glue, which is cheap and easy to get hold of. The children use glue since it make them feel less hungry and cold, and it also gives them strength and confidence to beg or steal (Embleton et al., 2013: 1, 5-8, Kaimé-Atterhög, 2012: 21, 36, Kilbride et al., 2000: 121). When asked in questionnaires a common answer from the street children were that if they got money they preferred to buy food before glue. Many participant researches have however shown that the street children many times prefer to buy glue before food which points to a more serious addiction (Embleton et al., 2013: 3). Another drug that is quite common in marijuana, and some also used more heavy drugs (Ribeiro & Ciampone, 2001: 46).

4.3.4. The society’s view and violence
The children found that the way they were judged by society was hard to stand. They were viewed as worthless, thieves, junkies and not worth to be treated like humans. Most of the people treat the street children very badly and hostile, including officially instances as for example the police (Diversi, 2006: 387, Kilbride et al., 2000: 78-9).
In many countries it is a problem that it is illegal to beg and to sleep in the streets (Kilbride et al., 2000: 70-1, 120). It is often also illegal to sell things in the streets, a fairly common work for many street children (van Beers, 1996: 196). Since this makes most of the street children’s lives illegal, they often get problems with the police. This is particular apparent in the answer to the question what the children feared most in the streets, where the most common answer were not the lack of food or the risk of sleeping outside, instead it was the fear of the police and their violence (Dunford, 1996: 27, Kilbride et al., 2000: 7). It is common that the police abuse them, for example by holding them upside down and pouring bleacher in their nose or hit visibly pregnant girls in the stomach (Hecht, 1998: 125-7, Kilbride et al., 2000: 95). Also common people are seen to use violence towards the street children. In some countries it was even common with death patrols that went out and killed street children believing that they did the society a favour by cleaning the streets (Hecht, 1998).

4.3.5. Street girls and sex

Research has found that it is less common to see girls than boys living in the streets. It is believed to be several explanations for this. In most cultures where street children exist, girls are brought up with stricter rules since girls and women are believed to belong more to the private sphere in the home than boys. It is therefore viewed as a bigger step for girls to leave their homes for the street (Aderinto, 2000: 1203, Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 218-9). Some researchers however argue that the fact that girls in many cases are living under stricter rules at home makes the street, with all its freedom, more appealing (van Beers, 1996: 198).

Street life is harder for girls than for boys. Girls have fewer ways to earn money, since a lot of the smaller jobs that boys do are not available for them. Therefore their most common way to earn their living is by begging or selling sex (Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 218-9, Kilbride et al., 2000: 116, Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 158, Sorber et al., 2014: 5-6). Sex is another reason why it is viewed that life in the streets is harder for girls. The street girls are often forced to sell sex to survive. Other street children and people from the public, for example policemen, also often rape them, (Fahmi, 2007: 147, 153). To be able to survive on the streets girls often need to have what they call a boyfriend, a boy who protects them against other boys. These
boyfriends are most often paid with sex; something called survival sex (Kilbride et al., 2000: 62).

It is a common view that all street girls are prostitutes. Research however shows that not all girls are prostitutes, some of them sell sex occasionally for survival but not on a regular basis and some of them never sell sex (Fahmi, 2007: 112). The common believe that all street girls are prostitutes make life even harder for the girls in the streets, since it creates an even more negative view of them than of the street boys (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 154).

Research shows though that it is not only girls who are selling sex or being raped in the streets, also street boys sell sex and are being raped. It is common that older boys rape younger boys and it is viewed as a part of street life (Beasley, 2003: 112, Fahmi, 2007: 111, Huang et al., 2004: 822, Kaimé-Atterhög, 2012: 34, van Beers, 1996: 198).

One explanation to why it is more common that research find that girls are selling sex and are being raped is believed to be that it is viewed as more taboo for boys to be subject to these things. The male victims may therefore hesitate to reveal this for the researcher. It might require some sort of confident relationship with the researcher – a relationship that takes time to develop. A lot of the researcher regarding street children is being done through surveys performed by people the street children are unknown to, which have the risk of not creating that sort of trust for the interviewer (Baker et al., 1996: 172).

4.3.6. Food and shelter
Besides to the risk of being hit by the police or being raped during the night two other problems for the street children were to find food and shelter for the night. Research shows that they have different way to find food. They can for example buy it with money that they received by begging, working or stealing. They might get leftovers from restaurants or they might visit different feeding programs that provide food (Hecht, 1998: 49). Research however shows that even with these opportunities they were not able to find food and had to go hungry many times (Hecht, 1998: 54, Rizzini & Butler, 2003: 194).

The street children often sleep in groups to be more protected. Besides for the fear of assault during night one other big problem was coldness and rain (Kaimé-Atterhög, 2012).
4.3.7. Street life compared to everyday life in their society

Many times when street children’s living arrangement are assessed it is compare to western living standard and are therefore believed to be terrible. Research shows however that street children in many cases have better physical health than other poor children from the same country. Three studies have found that street children are less malnutritioned, are taller and heavier and have a higher growth status than poorer children that are living at home in the same region. This is explained by the fact that even if street life is hard and it often can be difficult to find food, life at home for many poor children can be even harder in this regard, since they have lesser opportunity to access food (Baker et al., 1996: 172-175, van Beers, 1996: 196, Panter-Brick, 2002: 160-1, Veale et al., 2000:137). This research and other statements from the children, such as that they can as well sleep on the ground in the city as they can sleep on the floor in their shack at home, have raised the question for some researcher about if the street children actually are so much worse off in the streets than they are at home (Baker & Panter-Brick, 1996: 165, Hecht, 1998: 103-4).

The street children have to provide for themselves and therefore have to work, either by begging, doing easier task or steal. It has therefore been believed that they do not have time to play as other children. Research however shows that street children many times have more time to play then other poor children in their country (van Beers, 1996: 196).

4.4. Leaving the streets

A lot of research about street children has been performed, especially about how they ended up in the street, how street life is and why it is believed to be so difficult for the street children to leave the streets. There is however surprisingly little research about what actually makes street children leave the streets (Karabanow, 2008: 772, Raleigh-Duroff, 2004: 561). This part will first summarize the reason to why it is hard to leave the streets, such as freedom, drugs and friends. Focus will thereafter be on summary of the existing research about what can help street children to leave the centre. Finally the role of the school and centres will be investigated and the chances to reunite the children with their families.
4.4.1. Addiction to freedom and the immediate way to live

Street life is a special way to live with a lot freedom and a very immediately way to live. When the street children try to leave the streets it is often difficult for them to adjust to a normal life again. They have become used to have a great amount of freedom, to do what they want, when they want it and without anyone telling them to do or stop doing something (Beasley, 2003: 119, Butler, 2009: 20, Butler & Rizzoli, 2003: 10, Webster, 2011: 441).

The children also becomes use to live their lives in an immediately way. Focus in the street is on surviving today. There is no time no meaning to plan for the future. Everything they owe can be stolen during the night; therefore it is pointless to save food or money for tomorrow. It is better to use everything today and just owe the t-shirt and shorts they are sleeping in (Beasley, 2003: 121, Butler, 2009: 20-1, Rizzini & Butler 2003: 199).

The inurement for these two factors, freedom and this immediate way of live, make it difficult for the children to leave the streets. They miss the freedom and had a hard time planning and have patience to wait for things that will happen in the future. They have a hard time following strict rules and schedules (Beasley, 2003: 119, Butler, 2009: 20-1). Some of the people who work with street children believed that the street children in fact are addicted to the street life (Bordonaro, 2012: 419).

One way to understand why the freedom is so important for the street children is by viewing it as one of the few things street children have in their life. They are proud of their ability to take care of themselves financially (Beasley, 2003: 115). When they leave the streets and for example go to a centre they become a subject for aid, which is viewed as if they are giving up the responsibility for their own life (Turnbull et al., 2009: 1286-7). To expect them to give up this freedom the things they are offered instead have to be sufficiency appealing based on what the street children desires or need (Davies, 2008: 326-7, Webster, 201: 428).

To leave the street life is also for most of the street children equivalent to leave their street life identity, and it is not easy to change an identity (van Blerk, 2005: 19). Research shows however that even if there is great amount of freedom in the streets, it also exists rules and norms in the street regarding for example how to act and who is having the most power. So even in the streets it exists some rules and some structure, it is just different and less widespread than in the rest of the society (Beasley, 2003: 119).
4.4.2. Difficult to leave drugs and friends

Also their drug addiction made it difficult for the children to leave the streets, and it was common that they ran back when the abstinence became too severe (Embleton et al., 2013: 3, 8)

The street children also believed that it was hard to abandon their friends in the streets, since they many times had been the only people who loved and understand them (Beasley, 2003: 126, Bordonaro, 2011: 14, Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 211, Karabanow, 2008: 781-3).

4.4.3. Stigma from society’s view of the street children

The fact that the society has such a negative view of street children makes it more difficult for them to leave the street life. The negative view makes street children afraid to go back home, since they are afraid of not being accepted in their family or village (Baker, 1998: 63). Research also show example that it is more difficult for former street children to get a job even if they got an education, just due to the fact that they had lived in the street. There were also examples of street children who were picked on by classmates because they used to have been living in the street, which lead them to leave school (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 157). The stigma they have been living with on the streets also makes it important for the former street children to be treated as a normal person with respect (Butler, 2009: 24, Karabanow, 2003: 383).

The way society treats the street children also make it harder for them to trust adults and authoritarians. This makes it more difficult for the street children to leave the street life, since even if people tried to help them; the children many times did not trust them (Webster, 2011: 442)

One way to handle this stigma when the street children is leaving the street is to try to help them to value the positive things the street have learned them. One study shows for example that the street children valued some of the things they had learned in the streets and where proud of the fact that they had survived in that harsh environment (de Oliviera et al., 1992: 180).

4.4.4. Age and dreams

Two of the factors that seemed to affect how easy it was for the street children to leave the streets were their age and their length of stay in the streets. Among rehabilitation centres it was believed that it was easier to help young children that had
been in the streets for a short time, since they had not yet too adjusted to the street life yet (Drybread, 2009: 343).

Kaime-Atterhög (2012) has shown that even street children who have been in the street for long are able to leave the street life behind. To be able to succeed Kaime-Atterhög believes it is important to have understanding for the life in the streets and where the children came from (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 44)

Research also shows that expectations and dreams for the future are important for motivating the child to change (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005: 250). One study done about American street children showed that one of the most important thing for being able to leave the street was that they had dreams for the future (Raleigh-Duroff, 2004: 565-6). This study also showed that it was important for the street children to have the will to change. It was believed that it was not possible to force someone to leave the street instead the will had to come from the child itself (Raleigh-Duroff, 2004: 565).

A study from South Africa showed that it was easier for the street children to leave the street life if they hade a role model who had been able to leave the street before them (Malindi & Theron, 2010: 724). The study from South Africa also found that adults, such as social workers, could help the street children to develop a more positive view of them. With this more positive view it was believed to be easier to leave the street life, since they started to believe that it was possible and that they were able to (Malindi & Theron, 2010: 725).

### 4.4.5. Centres for street children

There are many centres for street children. The problem is though that even when street children are able to move into one of them it is very common that they leave the centre and go back to the street (Turnbull et al., 2009: 1283).

The reason the street children give for leaving the centres are that they are not treated well in the centres. It is a common claim that they often are abused in the centres and that they are not treated with respect. Some of them also make complains regarding food, that they do not get enough and that it is not good (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 159-160, Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 22). When the centre failed to provide security or emotional support the street children went back to the street (Conticini & Hulme, 2007: 220).

Most of the centres for street children are operated as NGOs and many of the countries do not have any regulation or inspections of the centres. Therefore some of
the centres are not taking adequate care of the children and some of them take advantage of them to earn money and some mistreat them (Ennew, 2000: 180-1). Research has found that the relationship between the caregiver and the street child is important in order to be able to leave the street (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 10). Another problem with the fact that most of the centres are run as NGO is that many of them lack staff that is trained for working with difficult children. The staff persons are in many cases volunteers with no proper education and a high turnover that make it difficult for the street children to create attachment and confidence in them (Diversi, 2006: 3, Schimmel, 2008: 218).

Physical punishment is common in most of the countries were research about street children have been conducted. The street children had the opinion that it was not a good idea to give former street children physical punishment, since they have been experiencing so much violence in the streets. It was believed to just harm them more (von Acker at al, 1999: 401).

Problem to get along with either the kids or the staff in the centre can also be a reason for leaving. In the street when they have a disagreement with someone it is common to move along and live in another place, which can make it a natural way to react in the centre as well (Hecht, 1998: 179).

However, low quality of the centres or conflict with staff or other children cannot explain all the children who run back to the streets. Research shows that there also exist centres and caregivers that are well functioning and treat the children well (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 7, Schimmel, 2008: 217-8). One explanation for why the street children still run back to the street is, according to Kaime-Atterhög (2012), that their emotional maturity are in many cases delayed due to their upbringing in the streets. This make some of the street children less mature than others of same age, which might lead to misunderstanding of the care givers reasons for what they are doing (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 38).

Another common explanation from the street children to why they left a centre is that they believe that the rules in the centres were too strict, which made them miss the freedom in the streets (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 159-160, Turnbull et al, 2009: 1286). Research has shown that when the centre is driven by strict discipline it is more common that the children leave the centre then if they children are allowed to be a part of creating the rules (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012: 27-9, 33).
A final important note regarding centres for street children are that there are in many cases disagreement regarding the purpose of the centre between the people who run them and the street children. The staffs in the centre view the centre as a way to leave the street life permanently whereas many of the street children view the centres as a way to leave the streets for a period. They see the centres as a sort of vacation where they can go and get some food and care for a couple of days or weeks before they go back to the streets. It is often common for the street children to try out many different centres to find the one they like the most (Magazine, 2003: 310, Rizzini & Butler, 2003: 192-3, Turnbull et al., 2009: 1286, van Blerk, 2005: 15).

4.4.6. School
There has not been so much research performed about the role of wish to attend school as a reason to leave the street. Only in one study from South Africa was the will to attain school found to be a reason for the street children to leave the streets (Malindi & Theron, 2010: 725).

There is however more research about why it is difficult for street children to go back to school. The former street children have a hard time to focus and get used to following the rules. Since they have been out of school for so long it is often difficult to decide in which class they should be placed, if they should be placed according to their age or their knowledge. In most cases they are placed according to their knowledge, which might imply that a 14 year old from the streets can be in the same class as seven years old. This creates situations where the former street child is bullied which can lead them to leave school and go back to the street (Mugo, 2004: 144).
5 Result

5.1. It should be better in the centres than in the streets

Many of the street children want to come to a centre to get a chance to get a better life. The most important is therefore that the life in the centre actually ends up being better than in the streets, if it is the same they can as well stay in the streets:

Those other once they used us to make money. You are just staying there. They don’t take you to school, they don’t give you clothes, sometimes there is missing food, so there is no difference. Boy, 18

The teacher who were there, this guy we jus to call him officer, this guy if you broke the rules which we used to do, he started to give some hard blows, you know he is a teacher but he used to be a boxer, so he beat you up, there is no difference from the place you run, it feels like it was just the same, so we run back to the street. Boy, 20

You know in grandsons we just used to be there. No one was going to school. You are given big clothes that cannot even fit now, very big once that can only fit very big men. Boy, 19

I decided that it was no difference between there (in the centre) and the streets so I went back to the streets. Boy, 19

To be able to find out how the centres are the street kids had different tactics. One was to listen to the reputation of the centre among other street kids:

Actually people used to say nice things about this centre and so when I got such a chance you don’t turn it down. They used to say that this centre is a good centre and people who used to run away from that centre and come back to the streets, those people they were really condemned by others. They were told “oh you left a good place by coming here, we are looking for such a chance, if you get such a chance you don’t run away” That spirit really came in me and I really understood that this centre was a good place to be. Boy, 17

Some of the staff and founders of centres goes out in the street and talks to the children. This is viewed by the respondents as a good way for the street children to get a feeling for how the centres are. It is believed that the centres that do this are more interested in the street children. It also gives a chance for the street children to be confident in the centre and the staff:

The founder’s way to approach us was different comparing to other centres. He took it step by step. He didn’t just come to us and said ”I have a home I will take you and do this”
First he came and made friends with us so he started to help us when we were still at the streets so we got that courage, we knew this person has a goal and this person really want to help us. And that’s why I decided to settle. Boy, 18

People on the streets liked the founder since he just came there and interacted with us. So we thought he was a man who were interacting. As long as he come and interact with us and show what he has, that was a true picture for this centre being a good centre. Boy, 17

The next step is to actually go to the centre and check it out:

I decided to come and have a look. I didn’t say that I would come and stay, because there are some centres, where I had stayed but then moved away from. So I wanted to look how it was here. Boy, 19

First you test how their food taste, maybe if their food is good you will continue eating, say this food is nice, and if it is not good you can’t eat something that you don’t like, if this centre is bad I cannot stay there. Boy, 19

We decided to check it out. We came there and it was nice, welcoming. We agreed we would come one day; tomorrow we will go there. For us it was difficult to believe, we had been in town for many years so we had seen many people tricking people. Someone telling we are helping children, you go there and maybe they are just having a business, we call it black market. Boy, 20

There are a lot of stories going around about centres that profits on the street children. One example of this is stories about different centres that take the money that is donated for the children to buy things for the staff. Another example are stories about people that go to the streets and take pictures of kids and then fundraise money by saying that they will open a centre, which they never do. This makes the streets children suspicious regarding peoples’ intentions and if they suspect that a centre is taking advantage of them they go back to the streets. It is believed to be better to live in the streets by yourself than live in a centre when someone is making money on you, money you are not gaining any advantage from:

The sponsors when they used to send money for buying food or whatever the owner of the centre used to take money from the centre to buy things for himself. When we recognised that what he was doing, my friends we came back to town and said we can’t help someone to gain wealth for himself, so we just decide to come back to town. Boy, 14

I was staying there for so long time because they told they were taking us to school, but people just came and took photos of us that they sold and they were just making money on us. Boy, 19
Even you, you can’t stay, you know that someone is giving money for me to go to school, go to good school, but I’m not been taking to that school, so I wonder what am I doing here? Girl, 25

I had stayed in the streets for long, and I have seen so many white people they have come there only to use the street boys you know, so many I have seen that have used those boys, only to take pictures, sometimes they bring bread, they just bring bread and take photos. Boy, 20

It was also common to believe that the staffs in the centres were taking things from the centres home to their own families:

Volunteers come here and brought these shirts, nice shirts, and they say keep them and give the boys later, and after there you don’t see any shirts around. When they have gone, you see nothing. Like footballs, volunteers come and bring many footballs, first they put one and put on the ground, but the rest of them you never see in your life, so I don’t know where they go. If the sponsors give good shoes, you never see them. Even the teachers and the owner of the centre has their real own family according to me, I think that when the good things come in the family, they have their own family, they pick them to their own families. Boy, 19

Since the regulation and follow up routine for street rehabilitation centres in Kenya is very low many of the stories about how centres take advantage of the street kids to make money is most likely true. There are however also stories that are created from only suspicions. One example of this is that the owner in one of the centres was driving a fancy car and there were suspicions by some of the former street children that money had been taken from the centre to buy this car. Other explanations, as for example that the owner came from a wealthy family or had an extra job was not considered. This shows how sensitive the former street children are for being taken advantage of.

Another explanation to why there is so many stories going around about centres that exploits the street children is that when street children run from a centre back to the street, they have to justify leaving that centre for themselves and for everyone else in the streets. This leads to bad talk about the centres:

“When we go back to street we are starting talk bad about you, that is how we do, that centre is not nice, they teach people bad, we talk, talk all the street. We say bad things about that centre” Girl, 25
5.2. To treat them as humans with love and respect

To be a street child in Kenya is tough in many ways. One of the more difficult things many of the respondents talked about, was how to handle that people in the society view street children as less human.

They call us dust, so they have to remove them, and they can do it but they are just looking at them as it is dust and they send the police to sweep the dust, and you can’t just take all the children and take them somewhere, when you take them by force they will come back. Girl, 25

Due to this it is important that the centres treat the children with respect and as normal people, as one of the respondents talks about here:

The centres are very different. Because this centre and the other centres there is a very big gap. You know in this centre they just treat street boys as special people and they treat you like a human being. But there (in the other centres) is not that special treatment or treating you as a human being. If you don’t want, then you go. If you don’t want to follow instructions, then just go. They don’t even want to counselling you. "Why are you not doing this? Why are you doing like that?” Boy, 19

When they feel that the staff in the centres still see them as street children it make them angry and make them wonder why they are in the centre. If the staff there will view them in the same way as people viewed them when they were in the streets, they could as well have stayed in the streets.

You can do a mistake and teacher instead of correcting you, he can tell you “you think this here is the street where you used to do like the way you want?” so that is what teacher can tell you, so is that what make people angry. Like if I can do a mistake you are reminding me about the street, that mean you helping me but you still have the things of street on me. So if you are thinking of street of me why didn’t you leave me there to continue, so that is what is going on. Boy, 19

What street boys have in common is only that /.../ he used to be call a bad boy, a street boy, so in any place he is, he think that, does this people love me or those they just looking at a street boy? That thought of the street boy. So sometime you can get some street boy misbehave like street boys because that thought of in mind, I’m a street boy, I’m a street boy, people are looking as me as a street boy, that direction of street thinking. Boy, 19

The view that if it is not better in the centre than in the streets, then they can as well go back to the streets, is apparent even here. If the staffs in the centres treat them in
the same negative way as people treat them in the streets, they might as well go back to the streets:

You know like here in Kenya street children are not taken as complete human or a family. They are not people and they are not important. /…/ It depends with people and there understanding. If you find a person that doesn’t understand well, he just talk to you as a dog. But if you find good people, as I did in this centre, then it is easy for someone like me to understand, because the bad thing that I came to understand was that when you treat street children as if they are not a human being they hate that. And if they hate that no negotiation, they will just go back to the streets. I am not saying that at the other centres all the people were like that but some. Even with the boys. And you find that the teachers have instead of reducing that stupidity in the boys the teachers have add it, and you find that everyone is rude and you find that if everyone is rude and there is no communication. Boy, 19

If you don’t know how to talk to them in a polite way they will just go. If for example, let’s say, a boy come from the streets and you find him with glue, and you start just telling him no in this centre we don’t allow this and you start shouting to him and beating him I know for sure after that he will go away. Boy, 18

In Kenya physical punishment is often used both in schools and at home. The interesting thing is however that all respondents were strongly against using physical punishment on former street children:

Instead of beating someone you can just tell them, because when you tell someone really a human being he can understand, but when you beat a human being it is likely for you to add that cruelty in him. Boy, 19

You are not helping them, you are destroying them, because even in the town they used to be beaten, so if you beat them, they will be oh this is just like, they will go back, you came here to beat me, you are not my mother you are not my father so I will be angry and they will go back to the streets. Boy, 14

Another important side of treating the former street children with respect is to listen to them, both when they have problems and when they are doing something wrong. The children from the street are used to that no one believes in them and that their opinions are not valued. This makes it important for the staff to show that they are listening to them:

Listen to them, if they have a quarrelling to each other they have to call both to sit down and talk to them, not just call one person and ask him why did you two do this and this,
you have to call them both and to ask them what is going on, what is the problem, and you solve it this way. Boy, 19

If he ask you something, hi teacher I have this problem, you cannot just shout at him “Go, leave me, I have a lot of work to do here” no, you can just call him and sit with him down and ask him what kind of problem and you solve it well. That is they way you can help the children, to understand him and sit with him. Boy, 19

You first advice him before you punish, maybe you punish and they run forever, before you punish you can ask him to tell you the reason to why he did this. Boy, 20

Street children are used to people trying to take advantage of them and they have a hard time to get confidence in others. One example where this was shown in the interviews was in trusting the staff to keep their problems to themselves. If one of the former street children decides to tell one of the staff members about a problem, the most important thing was that the staff member did not go and tell everyone else about the problem:

Maybe it is something that is private, there I think you chose wisely, who can keep it secret what you just told them? When it comes to matters that concern your privacy I think you should go to any teacher that you think will be able to keep the secret that you are talking about. /.../ You make sure before you tell him that he does not tell anybody, because if he tells anybody I will be angry and the trust will be over. Boy, 19

You have your secret in heart, there is no one you can tell, you trust no one. If you tell that teacher he will tell everybody, you say something but a single one, I come to you my problem is only that, I told you my secret after a few times I will hear with everybody around that you are like this and this. That is what happens in the centre, you can talk to one person and immediately your secret can be to everybody around. That’s why I always be on my side, there is no friend, no one, that way I don’t like anybody to know more about my life, because people, especially in this centre, there is no secret. Boy, 19

Since street children are viewed in such a negative way in the rest of the society when they are living in the streets, it becomes important that the staff in the centres show love to the children from the streets:

The most that hurts the street kids is being hated, those people are being hated of the life they are living there, so if you just show them love you will be closer to them, like they will start see the difference. Boy, 19

So for them when they come to the centre they need to be shown love. Maybe you find that this people don’t care about me so we need to go. Maybe the teachers there are taking
bad, they are taking rude about them so maybe they feel that; no maybe this place is not good for me so they run away. Boy, 17

I think it is good for the teacher to show love towards the person who is new from the street so that he can see that he also is loved. If you show love against a person he will remain. He will feel that “I am being loved, I am a person” You know boys at the streets they are being abused they are not being trusted so if a teacher show love with a person that person will become comfortable. So parental love is very good and it is a very good way to make a person to remain at a centre. Boy 18

In the interviews it however became quite apparent that their understanding about how you show love is not always given, so sometimes even if the centres want to show the former street kids love, it can sometimes be hard due to that the former street kids sometimes view a hard rule that is implemented as if they don’t love them:

Sometimes. Like when a book from school got lost, your money from shopping at Christmas they cut it. That thing make me feel that they don’t like me. It was not just me, any boy that lost something they cut it. Boy, 21

There were also some ideas about that if the staff in the centre love the children in the centres; they have to give them materialistic things. If they were not able to do this it was interpret as if they did not love them, without giving any thought to if the centres actually had the money or not:

Maybe children can see that you love them, again you give, when they want something you can just buy for them, but not beating them, don’t telling them I don’t have money, they know that you are not loving them, so they will run away, and then they will getting made, but if you are giving them like 50 KSH, they know that you are loving them, but if you are just caning them and telling them no food, telling them no shelter, no clothes, they are just wearing thin clothes, that is not a good thing, that is not a child’s right anymore. Boy, 14

Like swimming, playing footballs, like taking them to enjoy themselves in the zoo, parks, something like that, you show again so they know that you love them. Then you are taking them to beach, different things, so they know that you are loving them, if you are just putting them in the house, you are just moving going where you go, then you don’t love. Boy, 14

5.3. School can be both a pull and a push factor

One of the things the street children were not able to access when they were living in the streets was education. Everyone, besides one, that was interviewed expressed that
the biggest reason to why they had come to the centre was that they had been offered to go to school.

I’m not been taking to that school, so I wonder what am I doing here? I didn’t come to just eat and sleep, in the street I was eating and sleeping. Girl, 25

My first thought is that it’s a good place because people are going to school. Boy, 16

When I was still in Mombasa I heard that those who were still at the centre were taken to school. So I wanted to go back to Nairobi to go to school as well. Boy, 18

According to me I wanted to go to school. Because I was, my background is very poor so I didn’t go to school. I was really getting angry because I was seeing some going to school but I was not going, so I was feeling really bad. So when I was given that chance I was really happy. Boy, 17

On the question why it was so important to go to school almost all of them referred to the future. They wanted to go to school to be able to create a better future for themselves; to get a job and to be able to have a family. The value of knowledge was also viewed as something no one can steal from them:

If you have knowledge no one is able to grab it from you. Even if a certain can steal many things from you, but not your knowledge. The knowledge you have no one can steal it, so I think to have knowledge is everything. Boy, 17

To achieve the goals. To have a good future. Cause without education you can’t do anything. Boy, 16

I was wanting to get education so I can talk to people outside there. In Kenya it’s a hard life, if you don’t have education you are nothing. So I wanted to have education so I can manage to communicate with the people. Boy, 17

On a direct question about if they still would have been in the centre if they had not been offered to go to school the answer was no. This showed how important school was for them. Even if they were in a centre that offered them other things such as food, shelter and a bed, if they were not taken to school they would still go back to the streets:

For those centres I have been in, we where just there, they told us wait for tomorrow, tomorrow another child will go back to school, people are not going to school, we are still there, just eating and relaxing, so I quit it because of that, so I went back to street life. Next year I will go back to school, when next year will come nothing will happen, they are just keeping us there to eat and sleep, that’s why I say it is better to go back to the street.
For me for those centres I was want to go back and continue with school, that was why I was in the centre. Boy, 20

It was the same problem with that centre, just staying there, giving us food, they were not taking us to school, every time they told you they will take you to school, but when the time come they will tell you we haven’t found anyone to take you to school. So like we continue just waiting, for me that one was not easy, to continue staying there, so I went to the street. Boy, 19

To be able to go to school can however both be a pull factor towards the centres and a push factor back to the streets. Sometimes even when the will to go to school existed it could became too difficult for them in school. One of the hardest things was to be able to follow the rules and strict discipline that exist in the schools. This could sometimes be so hard that they decide to leave the centre:

A difficult rule to follow here (at the centre) is the rule of going to school daily, that rule is very difficult to follow especially for the people who not yet have decided to change then they find that rule really difficult for them. Boy, 17

Yeah school can be a reason (to leave the centre), because maybe it is hard there, you know when you are going it is like you are climbing mountain, you reach a place and you are like “Ay, I can’t go beyond here” Boy, 17

In Kenya there exists both governmental and public schools. Private schools has a better reputation since the classes are much smaller, around 25 children per class compared to governmental schools were up to 100 students are in the same class. It is also experienced that he teachers are better and more dedicated in private schools. There is however one down side with the private schools and it is that they are very strict, which can create a problem for children that are coming from the streets:

Because the life of the school was so hard, it was my first time to go to boarding school, and then you know the boarding school is so hard, you can just stay there if you are so tough, there’s no anything, there’s no freedom there, the best thing there is reading so it was so tough. So when we close to school, when we came home, I said I would not go back to school I had to run away yeah. So I went to the streets. Boy, 19

Private is more better than government. But the street boy with the private school is a big problem, in the street you never had any education, when you come from the street you don’t know how to read, you don’t know how to talk English, and then you go to private school, there is a lot of subjects, there is no time to rest. So in the street you don’t know how to read, everyone in the private is talking English, so you feel like I’m the one who
don’t know English here. I am the one in the class that don’t understand what the teachers are saying, so he will run away, because he feel that he is the only one who don’t understand how to read, he is the only one. But in governmental school is for good for starting point, in the governmental school you can find that you are not the only one not talking English. Boy, 19

Another issue with attending school when they came from the streets, is that many of the kids from the streets have not been attending school at all, or just one or two years. When they come to the centres and are placed in schools, they either have to go in a lower class with much younger children or in a class with children in their own age but where they are not able to follow since their knowledge is too low. This many times created a situation that was difficult for the former street children, which can make them decide to go back to the streets again:

Because you can find someone that is forced to do, someone was forced to do primary and they were already old, so when they go to that schools, they are maybe embarrassed they are big and they go to primary school. Boy, 19

At first it was not easy, when I came to the centre I said that I wanted to go to standard four, when days goes I found that class four was little children, I decided to tell the teacher that I wanted to go to standard six, when I came to standard six I was not able to read and write so it was hard for me to concentrate. Boy, 18

Many centres have a rule that the former street children have to be in the centre for a predetermined time before they are taken to school. This was believed to be a way to give the former street children a chance to adjust to normal life so that they would be able to handle the rules and structure in the school. It was to some extent also an economic question since the centres did not want to pay the costs for taking children to school if they are not sure that they could manage.

Yeah, because you cannot take a person from the streets and take him or her straight away to school. When he get there he might start acting crazy like he is used to act in the streets, maybe abusing the teachers. But if you first take him to the centre, rehabilitate him, and are a good role model so he know how to best relate by the time you take him or her to the school he know how to behave. It is a good way. Boy, 19

You can just keep them like one month like to change their behaviours and then you can let them go to school. But to keep them around for like one year, like no doing anything, just staying there inside the centre, it is not good, yeah so like, they also have their right to go to school and learn not just to stay in there. Boy, 20
Some centres can take like two years so they know your behaviour, they don’t want to pay for you the school fees and then in the end of the term you quit the school. Boy, 19

The respondents could understand why it could be a good idea for them to adjust to a life with rules and structure before they go back to school. It could however still be a problem to be able to wait and have patience. If someone was impatient it could lead to that they decided to run back to the streets:

I thought that the same behaviour that I had for the other centres would happen. The other centre I was living at you found that you were being tested for three months. Since sometimes, when you start to go to school it takes one year before you are bought a uniform, so the next year you go to the permanent school outside the centre. Because you go to interview in the same centre for one year, then you have proved that you can go to school. Then they bring you everything, like the uniform, and then you go to the school outside. I was impatient; I didn’t want to wait for so long time. When I came to here I didn’t even finished three months then I joined my primary level. It took like 2,5 month before I started school. I went to class five. Most of the centres where I was before they told me that I should go to class two or three and I was a big boy so I was bored with the decisions they made. Boy, 19

One of the things that can help the children from the streets to be able to start go to school again is to have a home teacher that comes and help them during that first period of time before they start go to school. This will both help them to catch up in school and it will also make them occupied with things to do during the first time, so that they do not just sit around and wait.

Let me say if that teacher was not there I could not have waited. Because that most of the time I spent with her, teaching me and so, because it was almost three months I spent living with her. Always with her. I don’t know what would have happened if she was not there, because I don’t know if I would have been able to behave. Because that was how it happened, I can say that I was lucky to find here and she was the one who helped me and changed my mind. Boy, 19.

If you are from the street, you joined the centre today, there will be no one to play with him because everyone will be in school, they will become bored, and he will think that street is better. Boy, 19

The amazing thing was that we were brought a teacher every evening to teach us. The problems that I had in mathematics and science they just helped me with that. And within eight months, the more I was learning the more it was opened because I knew when I came
here I didn’t even know how to talk the word hi. So it started with the people saying hi, hi, hi and then in the books one plus one, ten plus ten, fifteen times fifteen. Boy, 19

The respondents also talked about that not everyone in the streets wants to go to school. Some of them would prefer to be able to learn a profession instead. Among the respondents there was one who told me that he had not been interested in going to school when he came to the centre:

In my head I knew it was a better place then where I was. I knew that it was good food and shelter but I hated education. But I decided better here and there I was, so I decided to come and have a look. Boy, 19

Later on he however changed his mind, mainly due to the staff in the centre who encouraged him to go to school and told him about how important it was. This shows that it is possible to motivate even the children who are not interested in going to school from the beginning.

I was encouraged by my sponsor and she was the one who were teaching me ABCD those kind of things. She was telling me that I should go to school, I was like "I don’t want to go to school" and she was given me some reasons to why I should go to school, so then I decided so that so then I will go. One of the teachers was telling me the same things that my first sponsor was telling me. Then I decided that if these things that I was being told was true then let me try. Then I tried with education. Boy, 19

5.4. Factors that pull them towards the streets

5.4.1. Freedom

When asked about what they missed most about the streets almost all of them answered it was the freedom in the streets. To be able to do what they wanted:

A lot of things you can miss; friends, freedom. A spiritual freedom is normally a thing that drag people down. Since if you go somewhere where it is no freedom and if you are from a place with a lot of freedom you just feel that you are going to a jail. That thing normally drag you down, and you just find yourself going back. Boy, 17

When I was in town I was free to do what I wanted. Then I didn’t understand that these teachers are trying to protect us. Not to go to the bad side, but going the good way. It was very hard. Maybe the teacher can tell you don’t go out without permission, so you are feeling very angry, why, I want to go, I want to go. Maybe you want to go visiting, then teacher told you this is not the right time to go. So it was very difficult. Boy, 17
Freedom, you know every place has a rule, in town when you are alone no one is telling you do this, do this, you do what you want. The first thing (I missed) was freedom, to do what I want. Boy, 14

One of the boys said that for him and his friends, when they came to the centre, it had been hard to even stay inside the house:

I started to be just in the house, first of all that was a hard thing staying in the house. Being in the house, first we could not stay in the house for 20 minutes, we always wanted to be outside. Boy, 21

In the streets they were used to do what they wanted, therefore it often was difficult to start following the rules in the centres. They were used to take care of themselves and not have anyone to tell them what was right or wrong:

Because some people they come there and they think maybe the rules are hard and they saw that I can’t live here I miss go because they knew that in the streets there is nobody who rule them tell them, to give them the rules, don’t do this, don’t do this, yes because they know there they are free. Boy, 14

When I came to the centre there were rules, tougher than today, so it was hard, for example when you go out, punishment, you do what, punishment. I used to be in a freedom world, now I’m like a prisoner because every time punishment, so you decide to run away. Boy, 19

Yeah like it was hard because of being under new rules when someone tell you to do something was very hard, I had never been brought up that way. For me my life was, I have been in the streets ever since my parents died, I had no other option the to go to the streets, I had no other one that could bring me up in a home manner. So it was very hard like to getting back in to new rules. It is like someone getting out of home, want to go to the streets, that person will find it difficult to be in the streets, so it was like that. It was hard like to get into new rules and to new laws. In the streets the laws are in your hand, if someone messes with you, there is nothing else, you fight. So it was hard, it was just like new rules and laws. Boy, 21

Many of the respondents talked about that the fact that the street children are so used to the freedom; to be able to do their own choices, so if you try to force them to do something it will not work:

They don’t like to be forced, because they are used to freedom, then you force them to do the opposite thing like they won’t even be concentrating on what you are doing for them, not even if you are helping them, they will start doing, in the other centre they started
right away to put up the rules, and people were starting to come out one by one, so it failed that centre. Boy, 19

When you come from the streets you have a life of streets on you, so you feel like that it’s nobody can tell you anything, you are rude you know. Boy, 19

The difficulty, and many times unwillingness, to follow the rules also made the lack of freedom a reason to why some of the boys decided to leave the centres.

I was one of them, I run to the streets and now I am back. First of all is the challenge that is here, first of all here is no drinking beers, no smoking, here is no where just decide today I want to go and spend a night at town and to spend, no. Here we are following the rules of the house, so if someone is the first day, he will just see this place is hard I can’t sit here really, because like every day as usual I have to go somewhere sit watch a movie, to go to disco dance, and here there is no like that, so it is hard. But you have to be patient. Boy, 19

That time I stayed at the centre for two months, then I was really young, I was like using glue and I was used to freedom in life so the time they take me to a centre they gave me the rules, they told me don’t smoke, don’t do this, don’t do that so I was feeling that they did not like me, they gave me a lot of rules so I was feeling ah I go back to the streets where no one can tell me nothing, just living myself, just doing anything I want, so I went back to the street. Boy, 21

It was many challenges, because it was very different. I was used to have money, I was used to use drugs, so when you meet someone that tells you, you have to stop immediately, it is not easy. It is a challenge, so you feel like go back to street because here are some rules and I usually don’t do good with rules. Boy, 20

When they had stayed for a while in the centre it became easier to give up this freedom, mostly because they could see the value in the other things they gained instead. As one boy explained it, he would be able to get that freedom again, just not right now:

So for me I started seeing that the freedom I used to want is no longer important. The one I wanted, I needed freedom to do my own things what I wanted to do, so like I started thinking time for those will come after I have settled, I will do everything I want to do, but right now I have to focus. Boy, 21

It is interesting to see that also regarding this issue, not everyone felt the same. Two of the respondents did not believe that the streets offered them more freedom than a centre:
Which freedom? Even here it is freedom. In the streets there is no freedom, you are being chased by the police. That is not any freedom. Here it is freedom, you can do what you want, you can play, you can do anything. But in the streets, can you play? You can’t play. You don’t have any freedom. You are playing but you know that a police may come and arrest you, but here you are playing, you know that when it is reaching dinner time you are going taking, so here in the centre it is much more freedom. Boy, 16

When I am staying alone I am so afraid, because some other boys will come and rape me. No, even I didn’t know about freedom, I did not know what freedom was. Girl, 23

5.4.2. Money
Access to money is seen as an important pull effect towards the streets. The street children normally beg, perform some small jobs or due minor thefts to earn money. When they are living in the streets they therefore always have access to money. To get use to not having money anymore was believed to be one of the more difficult things when moving to a centre. One of the respondents described it as an addiction, which he believed was more common than to be addicted to drugs or freedom.

Okay, for those boys who were coming and run away for example, what they miss, especially some times you know, most of them money. When you were in the street it was not as in the centre, in streets you can go ask for money, you can go for money and then you get some money. Money is the major issue. Especially for the young boys, here there is no money, here there is nothing, because they don’t have any way to get money, so they run, they think that in town, there life was good because there they was used to ask for money. Boy, 19

I say if you are used to have money always and those places, and then if you came to this centre and you are not given money, no you are not given, you are just given food, so if you start to missing to cut money then that thing will risk to start dragging you down. Then you will just go back there to look for money. Boy, 17

The need to have money also creates situations where they, even in the centres, find a way to get money, for example by stealing things from the centre and sell.

In the streets we are used to have money, so when you to any centre, you are not given any money so you find that you will have the desire to be with money, /.../ most of them learn a way because of having that mentality that they must have money. Boy, 18

The urge to have money is clearly connected to the urge for freedom. To be able to do what they want without having to ask someone else for permission.
That is why we think it is better we stay of in the streets and work and do some things to get our own money, then be helped. For me it is better, because I have every time to beg and I am not used to that. I have every time to beg, oh please I am sick, please take me to the hospital, that is also, I used to when I am sick I run to the hospital because the hospitals are free for street children like me. I will go back to the street again, I don’t have to come to you and ask please can I have money, no. So that is simple life, I don’t need to ask you when do I go bath or wash my clothes or I ask you I need clothes, no. I don’t want to do that. I don’t see anyone before me, I just see me and me and me, that’s why it is better to go there. Girl, 25

5.4.3. Drugs

All of the boys come from the streets, and to come out of the drugs is a big deal, it is hard, it is hard to say bye, bye to drugs. Boy, 19

Children that are living in the streets frequently use drugs. The younger children starts with sniffing glue, since that make them feel less cold and less hungry. It also helps the street children to become braver, so they dare to beg and/or steal. The drugs also help them to forget about street life. Taking drugs becomes a way to handle the sufferings in the streets. The older also uses marijuana and other harder drugs.

Taking marijuana was not my style. But sniffing glue, I didn’t like to, but I had to gain that confidence. And prevent me from feeling that coldness. I started with glue in Nairobi and it is very cold in Nairobi. So I had to use it. I remember that I had a small shirt and I had to twist my body within that shirt. When you hold yourself you cannot feel the cold. If I am hungry I don’t fell that I am hungry. Boy, 19

I was lucky I was not yet addicted. But I was really used to it. At that time, you know if you are taken to a better place far away from it, your mind starts forgetting about it. At the street every street boy tell you that you have to take the glue, it is a part of the life. Without it you can’t survive. Boy, 18

When they go to the streets they are good, but when they start stay in the streets they start get some bad. So that is the situation of life. Most of them are smoking to reduce the stress, you know, when you have already smoked you don’t think much. After smoking you can’t think big, you just think I have smoked now I’m high, you feel like unbelievable things. You can sit by the road and see the vehicles passing and you feel that you are rich. That is why many of the boys are using the bang, or any drugs. Even if you are using bang, yes you can feel that you have no problems but that is not the solution of the problem. Problem will be still there, after smoking, after they come down, they will still have a problem in their mind. Boy, 19
The drugs make it harder for them to leave the streets life:

Someone who is using the drugs it is not easy for him to think that he should go out of the streets, not until someone rescue that person. I was thinking the other day when I was at my school ”What if that teacher hadn’t come to pick me, where would I be now?” Boy, 19

Not all of the respondents felt that they were addicted when they came to the centre. For some of them it was therefore fairly easy to stop using the drugs. For them it had been something they used out of necessity to coop with street life, but when leaving street life behind it was possible to stop. However, many of them were addicted when they came to the centre that made it harder for them to stay. The urge to get drugs becomes too strong so some of them decided to run back to the streets again.

The biggest thing, the thing that also confuses those people, drugs. Like it’s hard to leave, especially glue, it is hard to leave that thing. Someone can be removed out of the streets, and they will go back in two days because of glue, and if he go back you will find him with a bottle. Boy, 21

Some of them had been in drugs for ten years, so it was very difficult to take someone there and tell them you are going to stop everything, so people, so some say it is better to go back in the streets where I can find it. Boy, 20

Other boys run away from here because they don’t want to go to school, they miss glue, because they are addicted, they can’t sit even one week without that glue so they run away. Boy, 16

It was believed to be more difficult to stop using marijuana than to stop using glue. So if a street child had started to become addicted to marijuana it is much harder to help him or her to leave the streets:

Marijuana is the cause of everything. Because if you used to take marijuana then you can’t stop. Boy, 19

The hardest thing first was the drugs, leaving the drugs were very hard cause for me I didn’t smoke cigarette so much but I was using marijuana so much, so for me it was really hard to leave it. And then even when I was coming to the house I was still doing it. Leaving marijuana was a big problem for me. Boy, 21

The drugs also make it harder for them to change when they are in the centres. The abstinence makes them angry and irritated, which makes it more challenging to try to work with them:
The person who is trying to help the street boys or girls he have to have a kind of heart, because it is not easy and you have to be strong cause the first time it’s really hard because of, hard to stop, taking those drugs. Stay like somewhere here from morning to evening without using it, so you will just find that if he didn’t get those things he use to take you will find him like so angry, he is not in a good mode /…/ and the first place it wasn’t easy, even me I couldn’t even stay for two days at that time without using any kind of drugs, it was too hard. Boy 20, 84.

5.4.4. Did they learn any positive things in the streets?
To live in the street as a child is a difficult thing that requires some skills. I was therefore curious about if the respondents believed that they had learned something in the streets that could be useful in the rest of their lives. Interestingly, regardless of how I rephrased the question, none of the respondents believed that they learned anything positive in the streets.

5.5. Friends
Friends were believed to be both a pull factor towards the centre and a push factor back to the streets.

5.5.1. Friends in the streets and in the centres
Sometimes when the street children come to a centre they came together with some friends from the streets. To have old friends with them in the centre may create a sense of comfort that can make it easier to stay in the centre. If their old friends decided to run back to the streets, they instead worked as a pull back towards the streets.

So I was having a friend that time, I really loved that friend that much. We stayed for one month and then that friend told me that we must run away back to the street, he said that they don’t want to take us to school, so I have to listen to that friend so we just run away again. Boy, 17

I have been tempted to run back to the streets again because I came with my friends, some of my friends run back, so I was tempted to run back but I just got advice from another boy, and that boy told me if you look and you will be like someone you will be lost, you want to make a life, a good life, so you have to find your focus. So that one get made me a bit stronger so I don’t run away. Boy, 20

When the others, when they were running, there is no good there (in the centre) is no other friends and I loved them so much so I went to back to the streets also. Boy, 14
The friends that they had left in the streets when they came to the centre could also be a reason for leaving the centre, because they missed them too much:

I didn’t like the centre because of my friends, because I missed my friends in the streets. When we were together in the streets we were partying, so I missed to party with them, I was coming out of the centre to go back to the street. Boy, 20

Also the children who are in the centres when they arrive can work as a push factor away from the centres:

Why did you leave that centre were you were before? Just because of stress, many people are bulling other people so I didn’t expect to stay there again. Boy, 16

Sometimes the big people took the food and they hide it so they could not get much food to eat, and when it went like that then he goes. Boy, 14

They were older than me, just me and one more boy who were younger. Many times I was afraid of them. Even when I was telling the staff, this still complaining about me telling the staff, so they were still beating me. It just continued like that. Boy, 14

On the other hand, when the interaction with the other children in the centres was good it could be an incitement for staying in the centre and for changing their life. The other former street children in the centre could also work as a role model to show the newcomers that it is possible to make changes:

I just saw that the other boys were surviving this rules, so why can’t I? So I was just doing as the other boys were doing. And actually I looked at some boys that just came to the centre 2005 when it was just started and up to that time they were still there so I just knew I could also do what they were doing. Boy, 17

Also the younger children can be a role model for the older:

If a big boy see the small boy cleaning the floor he will just think if a small boy can do this what about me? Boy, 19

The power of peer pressure in the transformation from street life to a life in the centre, was also a reason for why one of the respondents did not think it was appropriate to take too many new street children in to a centre at the same time:

Help one by one, it is not encourageable that you take a lot a lot of them at once. You start with less and then when you come to the place when they get something. Then the others that will come will learn from them, because now they will be good morals, and then they
know, here it is supposed to be like this, here is a rule here, and everything will be okay.

Boy, 19

When the former street children start in school they are also able to get new friends who do not have any street life experience. This was also believed to help them to leave the street life behind:

They have friends there (in the boarding school), but not friends from the town, they have new friends. Those friends can help them to change, when they have friends who don’t do things they used to do in town. They will get use to do things with these friends. When they come back for midterm their mind will not be focusing on the streets, there mind will be focusing on this new friends. It is not about the friends in the streets, they will just forget about, they will change their mind a good life away from the street life. Boy, 14

5.5.2. To be able to live with others and handle fighting

Many of the respondents talked about a difference between the friends they had in the streets and how they were living with their friends in the centres:

In life of the streets there is no friend, yes there are friends but there is no real friend that you can miss, the street is just a life style. Someone you think is a friend is someone can steal from you. If you buy glue, when you sleep, someone you think is a friend can come and take it away from you. So there is no friend. So when you come to the centre you really don’t miss friends, but yes you can miss just life, but not friend, you can miss the life you were living, because you were many, smoking together. Just there is no rule, there is no boundary, even in the midnight you go to Casablanca, you miss that life really. But there is no friend in street, just a life style that you miss. Boy, 19

In the streets they were used to fight, that was the only way they knew to solve their conflicts:

Fighting were there among us, small mistake we fight. There is no talking, we fight. Every time there is a small mistake there is nothing, just fight. Boy, 21

During that time they were fighting each and every day, from morning in the evening, abusing each other, but now days people have changed and we have reached far. Boy, 18

In the centre hose early days, people used to fight, the boys, they had to be challenging each other. So if someone had made a mistake to another boy, there were no solution, they could fight for two hours. Boy, 20

Almost all of the children answered that one of the most important thing they had learned in the centre was, how to live and socialize with others without fighting:
How to live with people. How to live appropriate. Most important how to live with people. Socialisation. Boy, 18

To live with others, how to live with others, cooperation. Boy, 17

I have learned many things, respect each and another. When I was young in town I was not use to respect people, I was doing what I wish, no respect. That thing has helped me to respect people, to talk to people nicely. Boy, 14

I have learned that if you do bad thing you have to ask for forgiveness and you should not be told to not to fight. Boy, 14

At the same time, the ban towards fighting could at the same time be a push effect away from the centres, especially when the former street kids had a conflict with the staff or management in a centre:

If you are listening to only person you just hired, and I’m just me and I have nobody to go to, so it is better I go back to where I was nobody tell me this and that and when I I fight. Some times these centres it is most, they are making me going back there. I need somebody to fight for me, and you are there and you pretend you are my parent but you are not fighting for me, who will fight for me? So I have to stand up and fight for myself, and I can’t fight for myself in your house, so I go back where I can fight probably. Because if I fight in this house you take me to police. So I go where I can fight, you can go on with your centre. Girl, 26

5.6. What can make them change

The respondents said that it was really difficult to change from street life to a life in a centre. There are however some things that can make the transformation easier. The first thing is to keep the former street children occupied. Also counselling them, understanding them and help them to keep a focus on the future was believed to be important.

5.6.1. Have something to do

The most common tip the former street children gave for how to help someone stop using the drugs is to keep the person busy. They always have to have something to do, since as long as they have something to do it will help them not to think about the drugs:

When you are addicted it is very hard to leave it. So I tried to forget it. I was keeping myself busy, when we closed school I really liked football, so when I was feeling stressed I was playing football and that mind was going away. Boy, 17
The thing mostly help us we don’t just leave that person without anything to do. Because if he found himself have free time just sitting somewhere the only thing he will think is how he can go back to the street and get the stuff, and come back. You will not even see a change in that person, so I think a good way to help is that you should give that kind of person something to do, not just sitting. Boy, 20

To keep one busy does not just help to get free from the addiction with drugs, it also helps to become used to the life in the centre.

Most of the time she was spending with me just counselling me. Some times when we were tiered we made some necklaces. So you find that every time I am busy, I am not thinking about the streets. And when in the evening they give us one movie and then we watch. So you find that there is no time for thinking. It was like my first paradise in experiencing life. Boy, 19

If they will start thinking about where they come from they will just go back there. You have to engage them in activities. In the mornings they have studies, after studies there is a movie, after movies there is football, still when they come to realise it is the evening. They will just adapt, but if they will just stay as they are doing here they will just go back to the streets. Cause now the boy will just go there to that stone and just sit there alone and he will just start missing and going back there. Boy, 17

When they are being idled and they got from the streets they will just start thinking. Like when they are seated, they will start thinking I miss this, and then one will start, I want to go out, and when they go out they will do it, when there is something to keep them busy, to be talked to, the night go, and another night goes and another night goes and they will get use to it. But when they are just there sitting, doing nothing, it will not help. Boy, 21

5.6.2. Counselling
Another way to help the street children to adjust to the life in the centres is by counselling them. However, the respondents believed that this was not done enough in the centres right now:

We need counselling, but they are not doing that, when we do wrong they tell you go away from the centre. Boy, 19

We need a professional, someone that can counsel you, there is people there they have studied for counselling, they can counsel you even when you are going to kill yourself you can’t cause they know how to counsel someone, but here it is no one. We need people that can counsel, a teacher that can understand you. A teacher that know what is life. Boy, 20

One part of counselling people that are addicted to drugs was the importance of informing them about the negative impact of the drugs:
One they have to tell them the effects of using drugs, they tell them how they can try to stop, because if you don’t tell them to stop without telling them the effects, they will just say you don’t want them to use those drugs because you are not using them. So you have to tell them the effects. Give them medicine to reduce the effects. Boy, 18

Even if someone was told the bad effects of the drugs it can still be hard to change:

I was addicted. I like to smoke so I run back to the streets. They told me this thing is not good (to smoke) but I felt, why not good? When I am smoking I feel like I am okay. So when they say that is not good it means that they don’t like me. Boy, 21

They therefore believed that it was important to have counselling focusing on particularly drug abuse, something none of the centres was offering. Over all the respondents were positive towards counselling, but they believe that the will to change had to be their own in the first place, otherwise the counselling would not work:

How can you help them? Yes, you can give them counselling, but there is some that you can give counselling but they are just person, it is up to somebody to decide what he or she want. After counselling, he or she will go back to do the same thing. Boy, 16

5.6.3. Understand them and listen to them

Another way for the staff to help the former street kids in the changing process is to show the former street children understanding for what they are coming from and what they are going through:

First, there need to be someone who has an experienced of street life, like what is it to be in the streets. Because those guys like to change is not easy, it is not easy. Sometimes it even take more than two years, that person has not changed. They also need someone to be tough on them, when you be soft, they will be hard on you, but when you are hard on them they will also play soft, they will like ah it’s like this and they will understand. Boy, 21

One important part of understanding them is to know how to treat them. In the previous chapter the respondents talked a lot about how important it was to not be to hard to the street kids in the beginning when they come to a centre, since that will just make them go back to the streets again. At the same time it might be necessary after a while to become stricter towards them. Sometimes the staffs have to be hard to them to make them understand the severity:

But being soft on them it will make them harder. Because street is street, street there is no being soft, so if you become soft you will be down. How are they behaving after you have
been treating them in a soft manner? How is there change? If there change is not there then you start become harder on them, so that they will see that this person understand street life. What street life is. Then they will also start adapting and getting in to the rules. Because for us when I first met the staff here, she was soft on us, but then a few times after she started to becoming harder. /…/ Started becoming harder and people change, started following the rules slowly by slow. It’s just a matter of not being soft but being harder. Boy, 21

At the same time when asked about what would had happened if the staff would have been hard on them from the beginning, if they still would have stayed, he answered:

I don’t think so, because that was the way of living, that was that it was drugs, even if she had said that earlier I don’t think we would have been here. We would have just left, I think all of us. Boy, 21

So it is important to be softer to them in the beginning and get to know them and how they work. Then after a while the staff can start to become harder and stricter in case the desired change is not created. It is important to be aware that the change will take time and a lot of energy, it is therefor important that the staff who works with former street children have patience:

Yeah, it is very important to have patience, because once you start thinking, these people are big headed, once you start thinking about ah these people are going to change really? You will not make, you mission will be a failure. Because you will quit and they will go back, but when you become patient it will reach you in time, if Carly had stopped we would not be the people we are right now. Boy, 21

Step by step. The management. At the first place when you bring them to the organisation you must first tell them the rules so that the rules are there. So when something goes wrong you correct him at the first time. Then try to explain all the negativity of their behaviour. If he has been misbehaving, everything. It is step by step. But if you are angry at them or talk to them in an upset way they will be going back. Boy, 18

It’s a bit difficult to make them following the rules since they are not used to it. Just give them a chance to change, even if the boy has gone wrong against the rule just tell them that is wrong and then give them another chance to change day after day. He has done this thing wrong you tell him, repeat, you tell him it’s bad. Then you see if the boy has changed. Boy, 17

One of respondents also acknowledge that it sometimes is not easy to work with former street children:
Yeah when they break the rules, you will not feel good, oh this people like I am really helping them but they don’t see what I am doing to them, so you will start feeling they don’t love you. Then like most of them will not be talking to you so you will start to feel lonely, there is many challenges. Boy, 19

It is likely that the former street children will make mistakes and have setbacks in the process of leaving street life. It is therefore also important that the staffs are aware about this risk and that they are willing go give the street children another chance:

When I went back to the street it didn’t even take a week before I was back at the centre again. So even if someone runs back if they give him a second chance, you see that this person really wants to help me. Boy, 18

So you just don’t know what that person thinks, even one stays for one year and then they went back, and you think what are they thinking. The temper is very short, so when you do something small to him or her, that person will over react and even forget what the plan was, what will come in mind is “It’s nothing. In street I was doing this and this” They start talking you are not helping me, I came here, please let me go back. That is how it is when the person go back. And then when they go back they will stay for one week, they will start regretting it. If you don’t get a second chance to come back then you will stay there. Boy, 21

5.6.4. They have to be ready to change

All the respondents believed that it is not possible to help someone who is not ready to leave the drugs or street life behind. The centre can do things to make it easier for them, for example by keeping them busy and give them counselling, but it will not help if the person is not ready to change:

Change begins with you. So if you have decided to come to this centre then you must have accepted to change. You know the centre cannot catch you or beat you to change so changes are decisions. Boy, 17

Once you decide, I can say that it is choice, it is a choice for you to change, once you come out of the streets you either want to go back or you want to change. So I can say it is a choice. Boy, 21

To change life is like playing football, if you really mean to play football and be a star you have to play hard. And know that’s what you want. Boy, 19

Not all the children in the streets are ready or interested in changing:

You know by the time you go to the streets you find different kids, and not everyone wants help, and not everybody wants to go back to school, he is not ready. Boy, 19
One of the boys explained how it had been for him when he had been to a centre before and was not ready to change:

The other centre was pleasure. I wasn’t ready to leave the streets, so I just went there for some time. I was not ready to settle. Boy, 18

To be able to change the will to change has to come from the street child. To change is still hard, so even if they have the will it will sometimes not be enough:

Everyone wants to change. But now it’s normally something that drag some people back, so if you accept that thing to drive you back you will not be able to change. Boy, 17

Like I came with some boys but actually I don’t think life was so easy for them (here in the centre). They left the centre. If someone comes to a good place and then they leave and go back to a bad place, then that means that this side is more difficult than that side. I can’t tell why life was more difficult to them. It just shows that life on this side was not good for them. For them life at this side was not easy but it was easy on the other side. The only thing that is different between this centre and other centres, you can’t say that they went back because they were not eating good food, you see. So the only thing that might have made them to leave is because they were not attentive and maybe they were not ready to change. Boy, 17

When I was in centre first, many people has come to the centre and they have gone away. They are right now in the streets, so they come, they were ready to change, others people faith is too small, yes you have faith but your faith is not strong enough to get what you want. You have faith, you want to be this, but for short time you’re faith is gone. Boy, 19

5.6.5. Focus on the future

One way to increase the readiness to change for the children is to focus on the future. In the streets they live in an immediate way where there is no point in planning for the future:

They don’t think of tomorrow, they only think of what they are eating today, they don’t even care about where they are going to sleep, they just know that it is there everyday. So what am I eating, that is the biggest thing. How am I getting drugs today? So those are the two major things that always are in their minds, how am I getting drugs and how am I going to eat. Boy, 21

The first step for the children in the streets is to start believing that there is an alternative to the life they are living. Because if they cannot see that it will be hard for them to change:
You can go to someone and you tell them about their future and they tell you me, I have been born here and I will be here so you don’t have anything to tell me. Boy, 21

Encouraging them, talking to them. Like before, giving them hope for life, it is something more than being in the streets, you know, if you live in the streets you will end up in the streets forever. There is old guys living in the streets, when we meet them they were in the streets and they are still in the streets, they are becoming old there and they don’t want to leave. Boy, 21

Asking the street children about their future can be a way for staff and other adults surrounding them to help them starting to desire a change:

There is people who used to come and encourage us in the streets, so I took that encouragement and filed them in my mind, I reasoned with myself, I sat down and thought about how life would be, I was seeing my friends been taken to prison, others were killed. Boy, 14

Ask them to think what will be in head of you, asking them do you want your kids to be here with you. That one will also motivate them to make them think. To be honest, someone that tell a street kid that thing is someone that care. If you ask them about there future they will start thinking about it, for me that is the biggest thing, for me that made me also want to think. Boy, 21

There is people that is ready to change, but their faith is not enough, for their faith to be back they need someone that can counsel them in a good way. Boy, 19

When they had started to think about who they would be in the future and what they would do, it gave them an extra incitement to try to come to a centre, go to school and change:

Because I was there in the streets, and I saw my life was going on, then I say I want a look for a centre. Boy, 13

Why did you decide to stay here in in this centre? I wanted to have a better future and to be a good person who is beneficial to the society. Boy, 18

And then I see if I go there, and if I grow I will be a person who has need if I stay here my life is going on bad. Then I have kids in streets you see, I think that is, I say no, let me go and learn. I have to finish the school, university, college, all of them. Boy, 13

I decided to stay in the centre for my better life tomorrow. Boy, 19

I was like it, because the life of the streets it was not good, I saw that it was good to stay there because maybe I will get help and I will go to school and I will be good, maybe when I grow up I will be a good person and I like it because of that. Boy, 13
The access to money is one of the most appealing aspects of street life. It is easier for younger children to access money in the streets then for older. For the young children it is fairly easy to beg for money when living in the streets, since people are more willing to give money to small boys than to grown men. This fact also became a reason to focus on the future:

They think money is important, they are thinking for today, not tomorrow. Yes today I will go back to street to get money, I will beg people for money, what about if I grow up and am like 20 years, can I beg people for money? So they are thinking for today, not tomorrow. Money you will get, but not tomorrow you cannot be able to ask for money when you are big. Boy, 19

What I can say just bringing the people that is ready to change and counselling them slow and teaching them about how life is. How you can be tomorrow, yes you can get money when you are young, to beg people for it in town. But think about tomorrow, years to come when you are 20, how can you beg? Just teach someone reality, tell him reality about life. Tell him today and tell him to remember about tomorrow, because life is not just about today. Boy, 19

One of the things that many of the respondents mentioned was the wish to get a family in the future. It was important to be able to offer the future family a better life than what they had. This wish became a motivator to leave street life:

I am ready to change, ready to be a father of someone. I am ready to be a good husband. I am ready to have a family with me, so I recall my family and I which I some day can have family with me. Someone I can call my wife, my baby, someone that can call me sweetheart. So I decide to change, surely I decide to change because I want a good life. Not only to be rich all over but just a good life, you can have a small house, a car, but you have a good life, you are not rich, you are not poor but you have a good life. So that is what I’m wanting, that is why I change my life. Boy, 19

The first thing I sat down on myself and I asked myself question, those things I was doing in the streets they were not good. It is up to me to decide if I want to use them again or if I want leave them. Because in the end of the life I will be an old man, so who do I want to show my family? Then I decided that I want to change and leave everything. Boy, 19

The respondents believed that the good centres can make a difference in the street children’s lives. One of the respondents summarized it like this:

The centre has already changed my life a lot. I was no one but now I am someone. I had no life but now I have a life. It will be a message to those that are on the outside there, to
show them that it is possible to change. There in town there were no future, but here in the centre I saw the future. Boy, 17
6 Analysis and discussion

A child who is living in the streets, sleeping outside during rainy and cold nights, going hungry for a whole day, being abused by the police and sometimes raped in the evenings, is offered a place in a rehabilitation centre but is running back to streets within a week. How can this be understood? Why does it seem to be so difficult to help street children to leave the streets?

One way to understand this to consider which childhood the street children’s life is compared with. As previous research shows, there is studies that have shown that street children are better of regarding weight and length compared to other poor children living at home in the same area (Baker et al., 1996: 172-175, van Beers, 1996: 196, Panter-Brick, 2002: 160-1, Veale et al., 2000:137). To be able to understand why the street children go back to the street, it is important to have a broader understanding of what the streets mean to the street children. As previous research has shown, many of the children in the streets are not abandoned they have chosen to go to the street since it is believed to be a better option than staying at home (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 85-6, Benitez, 2003: 134-5). The street is perceived to be a solution to a problem and as more safe then where they came from (Bordonaro, 2012: 416-7, Bordonaro 2011: 7, 10, Butler, 2009: 17-8, Turnbull et al., 2009: 1285).

I believe that this perception of the streets is important to remember in order to understand why street children act the way they do.

I also believe that it is important to understand the role of the street children, they are not helpless victims that are waiting for someone to rescue them. They are active agents who have created a life in the streets. As previous research has shown they are able to access food and money (Hecht, 1998: 49, 52, 193). They have somewhere to sleep, even if it is outside. They have friends and they have the freedom to do what they want when they want (Orme & Seipel, 2007: 493, Beasley, 2003: 119, Butler & Rizzoli, 2003: 10). When they go to a centre they are leaving another life behind. They are also viewing the streets as a possible alternative, which means that the centre they go to have to be better than the life they had in the streets. In the process of leaving street life there is therefore factors that push and pull both towards the streets and towards the centre.
6.1. Pull factors for the centre

What the centre offers has to outweigh what they have to give up in the streets and/or it has to be something they cannot access in the streets. This study shows that it was two things the streets children were not able to access in the streets: to be treated as full human beings by the society and to access education. These two factors can therefore become pull factors towards the centre, away from the street.

6.1.1 To be treated like a full human being and give them love

The respondents gave many examples of centres that did not give them enough food, that were abusing them or mistreated them in other ways. This therefore confirms what previous research has found; not all centres for street children treat the children well. One problem with street rehabilitation centres is that the majority of them are run by private Non governmental organisations (NGOs). The inspections and follow up from the state is almost non-existent (Ennew, 2000: 180). If the street child is treated in a bad way they will not stay in the centre. The street children have already survived once in the street and are therefore not afraid of going back there again if they believe that the centre is worse than the streets.

The importance of being treated with love and respect in the centre can also be understood as a reaction to how the street children are treated in the streets. Street children are viewed very negatively by the society and they are often treated in a harsh way. To be a street child can be understood as having a stigma. Many different negative perspectives are attached to a street child, such as laziness, dishonesty, being manipulative and stupid (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 369-70). The society does not treat them as full humans due to this. As long as the street children are living in the streets it is impossible for them to get away from this stigma. It is only by leaving the streets it is possible to separate them from it. This is one of the things the street children cannot achieve while they are living in the streets. It therefore becomes an important pull factor towards a centre.

The importance of this factor came up several times during the interviews. One example of this is when the respondents are explaining that if the staffs in the centre will treat them as street children as soon as they make a mistake, they can as well go back to the streets. Because one of the things that are different in the centre, compared to in the streets, is that in the centre they can get away from being treated with the stigma that comes with being a street child. If they are then treated with the same
stigma in the centre, there is no reason for them to stay in the centre, since then the centre is not better than the streets. This can also be understood from Goffman’s (2014) view that even if a person have the stigma removed, by moving away from the street, s/he will always have the memory of being stigmatized (Goffman, 2014: 11-17, 28). Therefore every time someone treats them as if they still were street children it will hurt the former street children.

I would argue that by understanding that to be a street child is a stigma, it becomes easier to understand why even something that can be viewed as unimportant is believed to be important for the former street child. The respondents were for example talking about that some of the centres were given them clothes that were too big. This can be believed as being of little importance, since in the centre they will at least get clothes compared to the street where no one where given them clothes. But by understanding this in light of the stigma that they have been living in the streets it becomes important that they are viewed as normal. One way for others to start viewing them as normal is if they have clothes in the right size.

To get away from the stigma of being a street child, can be a pull factor towards the centre if they are treated in a good way. It can at same time be a push factor back to the streets. Since if they are not treated well they might as well go back to the streets. Kaime-Atterhög (2012) showed in her study that sometimes, even when the street children were treated well, they misunderstood the caregivers reason for action, due to that some of the street children are less mature then their friends in the same age. One example of this in this study is when the respondent views love as giving the children material things. He therefore interpret that if they do not give him things, they do not love, without considering how much the centre might have. This shows one example of how difficult it can be to try to help street children.

### 6.1.2. Education

One of the findings in this study, that have not been so apparent in previous research about street children, is the importance of education. All the street children interviewed, besides one, believed that access to education was one of the most important reasons for why they left the streets. If they were not offered to go to school when they came to the centre, or if they believed that it took to long time before they were allowed to start, this lead to in several situations that the street child decided to
go back to the streets. The timing for when the former street children are taken to school is therefore important.

The study however shows that it is not uncomplicated for the street children to begin attending school after spending time in the streets. It was hard for them to get use to the rules and discipline in the schools. It was also difficult for them to sometimes either have to attend class with distinctly younger children or go to a class with children in their own age where they were not able to follow due to lack in knowledge.

The difficulty to be so much older than the other children in school and be so far behind can also be understood with the stigma theory. The street children were often viewed as stupid and worthless when they lived in the streets. Therefore it is a risk that when they feel like they are behind in school, this will bring back memories from the stigma they felt in the street, which can increase the severity in the feeling.

It is therefore important not to take the street children to school too late, since then there is a high risk that they will run back to the streets. At the same time it is also important to not take them too early to school, since it is a risk that it will become too overwhelming for the former street children that also can imply that they run back to the streets. One way to tackle this problem, which was presented by the respondents, is to have teachers that come to the centre and educates the street children during their first time in the centre. This will help them to catch up in school, get used to rules and structure and at the same time keep them occupied and give them a feeling of that it is a difference for them to be in the centre compared to living in the streets.

Not all street children want to go to school. The study though shows that it is possible in some cases to create an interest for the school in a child who at first do not want go to

**6.2. Pull factors towards the streets**

Even if the street children are allowed to go to school and are treated well in a centre, many times they still go back to the street, why is that? Previous research has shown that it is mainly three things the street children miss when they leave the streets; drugs, friends and freedom, and this study confirmed those findings.
6.2.1. Drug addiction
One the most common explanation the respondents gave why someone runs back to the street is because they are addicted to drugs and the abstinence becomes too severe. The respondents gave two suggestions for what may help in this situation. The first one is to keep the former street children occupied. As long as they have something to do it help them to keep their minds away from the drugs. Sometimes this is not enough however and in those cases it was believed that drug counselling has to be offered. Taken into consideration how common it is to use drugs in the street, I was surprised by the lack of knowledge and focus it seems to be in the centres about drug addiction. My recommendation would be to put stronger effort in this issue. To train the staff in the different method that exists in helping addicts and to start working actively with this in the centres. Since regardless how determined the former street child is to stay in the centre, if s/he has a drug addiction the will to stay will in many cases not be enough.

6.2.2. Friends
This study showed that friends could be both a pull factor towards the streets and the centre. Most of the times when the street children come to the centre they had to leave their friends in the streets. As previous research shows, many of the street children do not have any regular contact with their families. For them their friends in the streets become sort of a family (Kilbride et al., 2000: 74, Orme & Seipel, 2007: 493). Example of the importance of friends is found also in this study. In the first example the respondents decided to run back to the streets to see his friends. In the other case the friend of the respondent decided to run back to the street in order to be able to be with him because he loved him so much. It was also examples of when bullying from children within the centre made the respondents go back to the streets.
To convince the street children to stay in the centre it is therefore important that they gain new friends. Friends in the centres can work as role models who show that it is possible to leave the street life. Friends outside the centres, from school or a football club, can also help the children to adjust to life outside the streets.

6.2.3. Freedom
The love, or what some researchers call, addiction to freedom the street children was confirmed in this study (Bordonaro, 2012: 419). When coming to the centre the respondents missed to be able to do what they want when they wanted. One of the
hardest things in joining a centre was to get used to the rules and regulations. I believe that to fully understand why freedom is so important and why it is so difficult for the former street children to get used to having a limited freedom, two things have to be considered.

The first is that, as previous research has shown, when the street children are living in the streets their freedom is one of the few things they own. They cannot keep any possessions and they are often mistreated by the society. The one thing they own that no one can take is their freedom (Beasley, 2003: 115). This makes it difficult to give it up, and it will only be done if what they get in return seems to be worth more.

The other factor I think is important to remember is that street life might not have the same rules, norms and values as the wider society, but it has its own (Beasley, 2003: 119). The children are not un-socialised; they have been socialised into the street life. When leaving the streets and coming to a centre, it is not just about learning some rules, it as about first de-socialise, to get rid of old habits and values, and then re-socialise, to learn new things (Bar-Yosef, 1968: 27-9, McHugh, 1966: 357-363). An example of this is the respondents answer to what was the most important they had learned in the centre, where almost all of them answered that they had learned how to live with other people without using physical violence. In the centre they had learn a new way to socialise with others. I believe that this it is important to remember that for the former street children it is not just about learning some new rules, it is re-socialising which many times is difficult.

6.3. To help the street children to change

Previous research and this study show that street children are active social agents. Many of them choose to go to the streets since it is believed to be either better than being at home or in a centre. If a centre offer them a place and they decide to go back to the streets, do they have the right to stay in the street? If they say that they prefer to be in the streets should we let them? My point of view is that no child should be living in the streets.

The street children have social agency, but they are at the same time making their decisions within structures that give them few choices. Due to their poverty, low age and drug use they cannot according to the theory about thin and thick agency and Schimmel’s (2006) view that in order to be able to choose freely one have to fully understand the consequences of one’s choice, be held accountable for the decisions
and it can therefore not be okay to say that it is up to the street children to decide (Klocker, 2007: 85-92, Schimmel, 2006: 220-2, 226).

With this said I do not believe that it is the right way, or even possible, to force any of the children off the streets. The change has to be made in cooperation with the street child. The centres and other adults can try to make the child want to change and give the best conditions, but it has to be done with the child, not for the child. Previous research has not focused so much on what can make street children leave the streets. This study found three important things; helping them focusing on the future, acknowledge what they have learned in the streets and having patience.

6.3.1. Focus on the future

All of the respondents believed that if the street child did not want to change it was not possible for anyone to make him or her change. On the question what made the former street children want to change almost all of them answered that they wanted a better future. They started to think forward about where they would be when they were grown up and how they would support for their future family. This made them realize that even if they liked the life they had in the street today they did not believe that it would give them the future they wanted.

This is interesting since previous research has shown, which is confirmed in this study, that the street is an instantaneous way to live where there is no possibility or meaning to plan for the future. These factors often make it difficult for the street children to adjust to a centre (Beasley, 2003: 121, Butler, 2009: 20-1, Rizzini & Butler 2003: 199). It is therefore noteworthy that this study shows that it is possible for street children to have a focus on the future. It is also important that according to this study this change in focus has to come before the actually alteration can be performed.

When the future becomes more important to the street children it may both become a pull factor towards a centre and make it easier for them to stay in the centre. Since the respondents did not believe that they could reach the future they desired if they stayed in the streets their wish for coming to a centre to study and change their lives became more important than what they experienced in the streets. With this focus on the future, it also became easier to stay in the centre even when it became difficult. One example of this is on page 46. When the former street child realize that he gave up
freedom today to have greater freedom in the future, as a grown up, it became worth to give up the freedom.

It is important that staff and others in contact with the street children help them to focus on the future in order to help them make an alteration. This focus is also important when difficulties arise in the centre. One way to make the street children focusing on the future is to ask them about where they think they will be in the future and what they want to be. In the centres they can also provide the former street children with university catalogues, go to different workplaces and university for a visit or have people who come and give lectures about how they alter their lives.

6.3.2. Acknowledge what the street children have learned

The change from the street to a life in a centre is often difficult and it often requires a re-socialisation from the way they were living in the street. I would however argue that how distinct the difference between the street life and the life in a centre is, depends on how the life in the street is understood. When asked if they had learned anything useful that can help in the future, all respondents answered no. The street was viewed as something solely negative. I thought this was interesting, since the street life also teaches street children things that in my view is useful, as how to take care of themselves and how to interact with different people (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003: 84, Webster, 2011: 435, Fahmi, 2007: 75-6, 114, 123).

By acknowledging these positive things the street children learn in the streets I think the re-socialisation process would be easier. Instead of having to get rid of everything they knew from before they would be able to save the good things and then continue building from there. I think that this would make the transformation from the street to the centre easier for the former street children.

Another way to acknowledge what the former street children have learned in the streets and to make the re-socialisation process easier is to treat them more like active agents then helpless victims. Today many of the centres try to re-socialise the street children to what I interpret as a western middle class idea about childhood, where the child should be innocent and taken care of (Beasley, 2003: 126, Niewenhuys, 2001: 543, Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003: 153). This approach takes away social agency from the children, and they are forced to go from capable street children who can take care of themselves to children with little power that are supported for. If the concept of what a child and childhood is would be changed, it could be possible for the former
street children to still be able to keep some social agency. This can be done in small things, by for example letting the former street children decide which activities they should engage in during summer break or how the cleaning schedule should be planned.

Another aspect that the former street children could be involved in is which rules should be applied in the centre. Rules in a centre are something both previous research and this study show is difficult for the street children to get used to. The respondents in this study believed that they couldn’t be too strict in the beginning since that can make the street child to run back to the street. At the same time, as one of the respondents explained, it can also be problematic if the rules are too soft in the long run since then the desired change might not happen. One way to make it easier for the former street children to adjust to the rules, and at the same time give them more social agency, is to let them be involved in creating the rules and the punishment if someone breaks the rule.

Another method to allow the former street children in a centre to be more independent may be to give them some small amount of money that they can decide how to spend. Giving them a small salary for jobs they perform in the centre or teach them to produce something that is possible to sell. Focusing on helping the street children to keep some of their social agency in the centre will, in my mind help the transformation from street life to a life in the centre. I also believe that it will help them in the future when they leave the centre, if they have kept some of this agency.

Another way the centres can help the street children in the transformation from street life is by counselling them. The respondents believed this to be a good way to get used to a new way to live. The counselling can be viewed as a sort of socialization and my recommendation is that centres focus more this than what the centres in this study seemed to do.

6.3.3. To have patience

To be aware that it is difficult for the street children to leave the street life and readjust to a life in the centre also creates awareness regarding the fact that it might take some tries before the street child is successful. One of the things the respondents believed was important is to be met with patience and let the former street children make mistakes on the way.
The common view that if a street child goes back into the streets the intervention is seen as a failure, also raises the question regarding whom the centre is there for? Even if a street child just stays in the centre for a couple of days or weeks, the child can still be helped by the centre by getting a pause from the street life. Even if the street child later runs back to the street, the centre can still have helped in some ways, and the intervention should therefore automatically not be viewed as failure.

6.4. Conclusions

The question for this thesis was; How can centres assist street children in leaving the street life? This study confirms the finding from previous research; the street children are active social agents. It is not possible to force the street children to leave the streets; the will has to come from the street child to make this alteration. The centre can however support the child in this transformation by helping the child to focus on the future and to offer things in the centre that is perceived to be better than what they have in the street. This study shows that such pull factors towards the centre can be education, to be treated like full human being and to be able to access a better future. I am arguing that these things are viewed as important since the street children are not able to access them in the street. They cannot attend school. Due to stigma they are not treated as full human beings by the society and it is difficult to create a better future when living in the streets. Education was believed to be one of the most important things to offer. It is however important to acknowledge that it can be difficult for a former street child to go to school after living in the streets, and the street children therefore needs support in this process.

To help the street child to be able to stay in the centre it is also important that the centre assists the street child in handling the pull factors towards the street; the drug addiction, their friends in the streets and the freedom in the streets. This can be done by offering a proper drug rehabilitation program and trying to help the child to get new friends. The temptation of freedom in the streets can be handled in two ways. The first thing the centre can do is to treat the former street child as an independent social agent whenever possible. The other thing the centre can do is to help the former street child to focus on the future and understand that by giving up some freedom in the present they will be able to access a greater freedom in the future. To help the street child to focus on the future is therefore important both when leaving the streets and when trying to stay in the centre. Another way for the centre to help the street in
the transformation from street life to a life in a centre is to have understanding of the re-socialisation process that occurs. By shifting the understanding of what the street has taught the street children and what kind of childhood that is recreated in the centre, it is possible to acknowledge and rebuild on the positive things the street children learned in the streets, which will make the re-socialisation process easier. Another method to ease this re-socialisation process is by treating the street child as an independent social agent whenever possible.

6.5. Future research
One of the findings in this thesis that have not been investigated that extensively before is the value of accessing education. The sample in this study were all living in a centre, this might have had an effect on the findings. It is possible that these centres have a strong focus on education and therefore only the former street children who want to gain an education will stay in the centre. It would therefore be worth to investigate this with street children who are presently living in the streets, to see if they have the same pull factors towards a centre.

It would also be interesting to do further research regarding what can make a street child leave the streets life with respect to gender. This study had a sample of 22 boys and only three girls. It would therefore be interesting to see if a larger sample of girls would give the same result, or if girls who have a more vulnerable situation in the street experience different push and pull factors.

To leave the streets by going to a centre is one way to leave the street life. It would be interesting to do more research regarding other ways for the street children to leave the street, for example how they best can be re united with their families.
7. References


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