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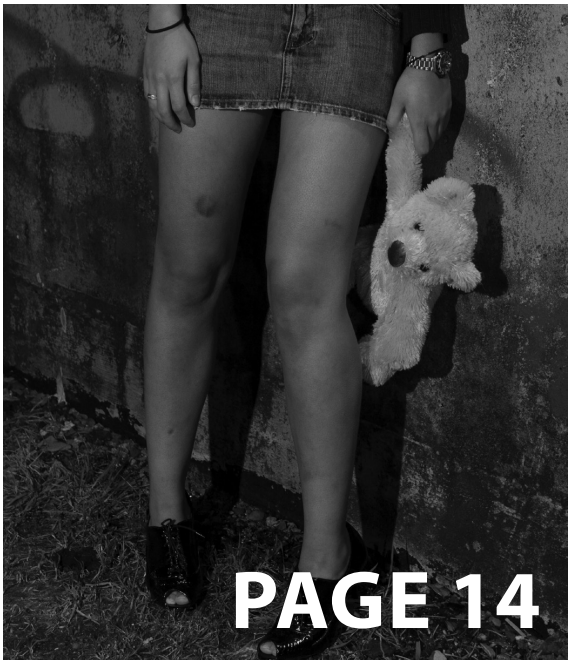
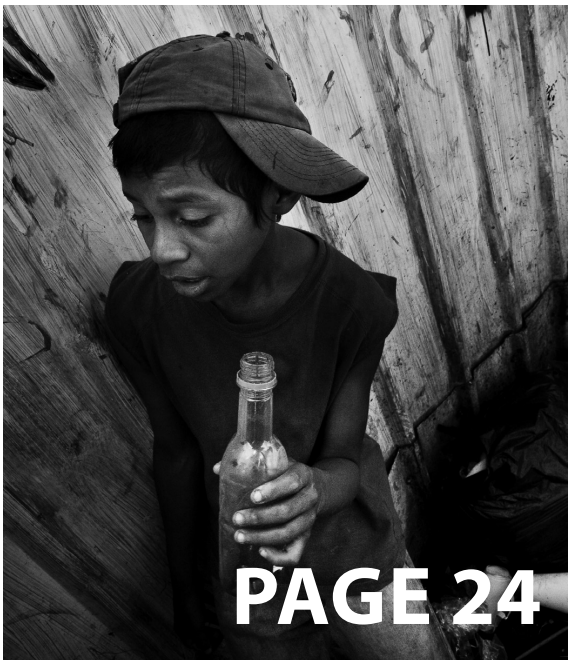
Inside

FEATURES





Editor's note

Welcome to The Children's Right to Speak.

As you may or may not know, *Speak* is Journalists for Human Rights' annual magazine. Each year it's run by a different chapter and focuses on a different subject. This year it's run by us, JHR UBC and focused on children's rights. I'm Joe Rayment, the editor.

This magazine has kept me up nights worrying. Writing about human rights is a precarious balance — it's so easy to simplify situations, condescend your subjects or misinterpret the issues. And I can't say I don't still worry; I don't think it's a subject that it's possible to be completely comfortable with. What I can say is that we tried, and that's important. That's the most important thing we can do at a magazine like *Speak*, in my opinion, is to face the uncomfortable issues and try to understand.

It's telling that so many of our stories ended up looking at education. Especially in the area of children's rights, it's important. A good education can teach a child to navigate a world that throws a lot of curve balls. In the case of Ekalavya Nyasa, the community-run school Vanita Bijur looks at in "A glimmer of hope in a dark age," education can open up options to the children of Puné, India. With help from the school, the students have a better chance of being able to choose where they go in life.

"Power, tricks and red boots" deals with the issue coming from a different direction — the education on prostitution in the 1980s allowed for rigid morals to dehumanize the people involved. It pushed prostitution out of most of Vancouver and into one, very dangerous, location on the downtown east side. Worse, it allowed for a situation where prostitutes could disappear and the public would turn a blind eye. Yasuko Thanh's memoir about working Vancouver's streets as a 15 year old plays against an education that doesn't try to understand; Vancouver's sex trade is made up of people who don't conform so easily to the good-and-evil narrative.

Both of these stories have human faces. Both, in their very different approaches, are valuable because they are honest attempts to understand the situations they explore. Once we stop trying to understand, because we think we have nothing left to learn or fear that what we find will only drag us into conflict, it sucks the life out of the situation. And that's when it becomes easy to ignore tragedies or suffering. That's the value in a project like *Speak*. That's why we're here.

Joe Rayment
Editor-in-chief

the children's right to
speak

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We would also like to thank the University of British Columbia's Arts Undergraduate Society for their financial support, without which our magazine would not have been possible.

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Contributors

VINITA BIJUR ("A glimmer of hope in a dark age") is a third-year student at the University of Guelph. She is currently working toward a bachelor of arts and science with double minors in zoology and women's studies. She has volunteered with the University of Guelph chapter of Journalists for Human Rights since the beginning of the school year. She harbours journalistic aspirations and hopes to save the whales with a wave of her pen.

JODIE MARTINSON ("A Lost Boy finds his way") is a master's of journalism student at the University of British Columbia and a documentary filmmaker. Her undergraduate studies focused on the environment and international development. She is on the hunt for compelling stories about environment, health, and development issues that she can tell through video and radio documentary, and finds numerous other worthwhile diversions along her way.

KAREN MOXLEY ("Camping for literacy") grew up in small-town Ontario. She spends her time writing, running marathons, and saving the planet — one flattened pizza box at a time. Moxley has travelled extensively in South and Central America, and will be interning at The Times of India in Bangalore this summer.

KATE ALLEN ("A recipe for stateless children") is working toward her master's of journalism at the University of British Columbia. She is passionate about everything local, which ranges from the freshest fish in Vancouver all the way to home-spun legislative fiascos. She grew up in Toronto.

Former captain of the Canadian National Debate Team and Top 20 Under 20 finalist, **ANDREW RUSK** ("Maintaining the garden city") is a Millennium scholar at the University of Toronto pursuing an undergraduate degree in peace and conflict studies as well as writing and rhetoric. Rusk is also the domestic programs coordinator at Journalists for Human Rights, currently managing both the high school and speech and presentation program initiatives. Rusk blogs on current events at andrewrusk.wordpress.com.

YASUKO THANH ("Power, tricks and red boots") has lived in Germany, Mexico and various Central American countries. She currently resides in Victoria. Her fiction has been published in *Prairie Fire, Descant, Fireweed, The Fiddlehead,* and *PRISM international*, and has been anthologized and won numerous awards. In addition to fiction, her nonfiction has appeared in publications as diverse as *The Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Review, Island Parent Magazine*, and *subTerrain*. She is currently at work on a short story collection and preparing for her studies in the master of fine arts. She would like to get a grant to run a writing program for current and former sex workers at Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society (PEERS) and publish an anthology of their work.

JOANNA CHIU ("Pruning the family tree in China") is in honours history at the University of British Columbia. Next year she plans to write her thesis on gender history in modern China.

CYNTHIA KHOO ("Children's rights around the world") is a bachelor of arts candidate whose inner bookworm rejoiced when she enrolled in the English honours program at the University of British Columbia. Fulfilling the arts co-op option as well, she is currently working full time at the Canadian Space Agency in Saint-Hubert, Quebec. She hopes to turn further toward journalism — her original pursuit — in the future.

BRIAN PLATT ("Q&A with human rights activist Lauryn Oates") is studying history and philosophy at the University of British Columbia. He plans to do graduate studies in either journalism or teaching. Platt is currently working on an initiative to partner UBC with Kandahar University and create a support network between students in Canada and students in Afghanistan. He also fundraises for causes such as the Omid Orphanage Project, an organization he reports on in this year's *Speak*.

MARIKA MOTIWALLA ("Constructing child soldiers") is the president of the Queen's University's Journalists for Human Rights chapter. Motiwalla is acutely interested in the media and the role it plays with respect to human rights violations and human rights law.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD

BY CYNTHIA KHOO

UNITED KINGDOM:
Child Abuse Under-Reported in Developed Countries

British medical journal *The Lancet* recently published the findings of a study revealing higher than reported incidence levels of child abuse, neglect and maltreatment in highly developed countries. Up to 16 per cent of children each year are physically abused, up to 15 per cent neglected, and up to 10 per cent of girls and 5 per cent of boys are subject to serious sexual abuse. In spite of this, less than 1 in 10 of these cases have been reported.

UNITED STATES:
Child trafficking on Craigslist

Anti-human trafficking organization Not for Sale recently reported spiking numbers of ads by child traffickers on the popular classifieds website Craigslist. Traffickers use Craigslist's free ad service for its efficiency and effectiveness in advertising. In one case reported by Not For Sale, two Chicago women were using the service to sell girls as young as 14.

GUATEMALA:
Corruption in Foreign Adoption

On January 1, 2008, Guatemala closed its doors to American adoption agencies, citing a need to reform the system. The country is known for having the worst record of corruption in foreign adoption. In some cases, healthy infants lured or abducted from their biological parents later turn up in the process of being adopted by an American family.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE:
Child Slavery on Cocoa Plantations

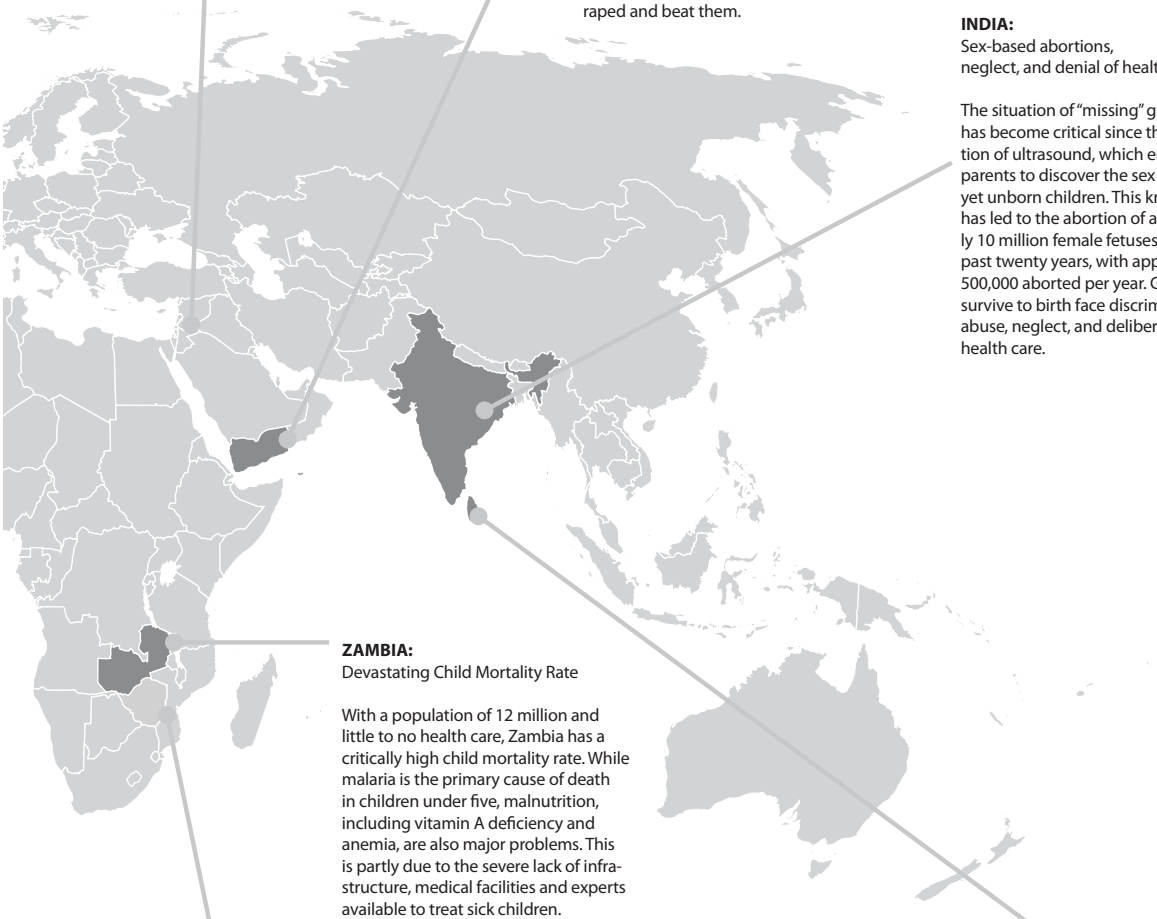
Côte d'Ivoire (the Ivory Coast) is the world's number one exporter of cocoa, producing approximately 40 per cent of the world's total, with children performing many of the dangerous tasks required for this production. Côte d'Ivoire denies this is an issue, despite reports that young children are forced to work up to 12-hour days under untenable working conditions.

GAZA:
Child casualties in the Gaza conflict

The day after a cease fire is declared in Gaza, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reports that one-third of the people killed (412) in conflict were children. While the exact figures are hard to pin down—journalists were barred from the conflict zone—the fact remains that toll on children was high.

YEMEN:
Child marriage and abuse

Yemen has long been notorious for its deeply rooted custom of child marriage, which is both a cause and an effect of devastating poverty in the region. Girls frequently end up in forced marriages after their families give or sell them to prospective husbands. In 2008, three Yemeni girls ran away from their adult husbands to demand—and were granted—a divorce. All three girls, like many other child brides, were forced into marriages with husbands who raped and beat them.



INDIA:
Sex-based abortions,
neglect, and denial of health care

The situation of "missing" girls in India has become critical since the introduction of ultrasound, which enables parents to discover the sex of their as yet unborn children. This knowledge has led to the abortion of approximately 10 million female fetuses over the past twenty years, with approximately 500,000 aborted per year. Girls who survive to birth face discrimination, abuse, neglect, and deliberately poor health care.

ZAMBIA:
Devastating Child Mortality Rate

With a population of 12 million and little to no health care, Zambia has a critically high child mortality rate. While malaria is the primary cause of death in children under five, malnutrition, including vitamin A deficiency and anemia, are also major problems. This is partly due to the severe lack of infrastructure, medical facilities and experts available to treat sick children.

ZIMBABWE:
Failure to address Human Trafficking

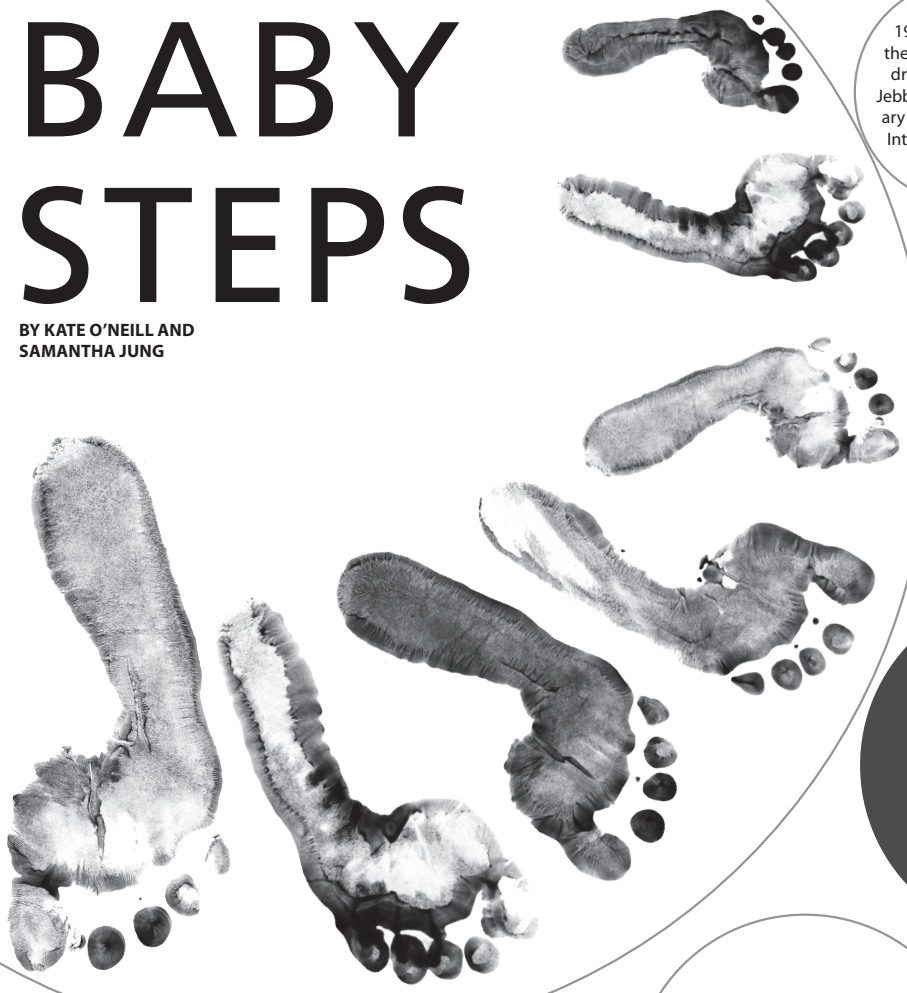
The exodus of people from Zimbabwe has led to an upsurge in human trafficking in the state. The government of Zimbabwe not adequately addressed the issue. Zimbabwe's existing laws do not ban all forms of trafficking and the protections that do exist are not enforced. In 2007, the government announced it was drafting more comprehensive legislation. That legislation has not yet been introduced in Parliament, however, and in the meantime trafficking cases go largely unprosecuted.

SRI LANKA:
Forced Recruitment
and Use of Child Soldiers

The militant nationalist organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam continues to break repeated promises to stop recruiting child soldiers, at times forcibly taking children from their families to perform military duties. Sri Lankan authorities have not only failed for many years to stop the practice or prosecute those who recruit child soldiers, but have also been implicated in helping the Karuna Faction, rivals of the Tigers, recruit child soldiers themselves.

BABY STEPS

BY KATE O'NEILL AND SAMANTHA JUNG



1923: Declaration of the Rights of the Child, drafted by Eglantyne Jebb in Geneva in February and adopted by the International Save the Children Union.

1924: Declaration adopted by League of Nations as the World Child Welfare Charter.

1959: Declaration of the Rights of the Child is updated and expanded from five to ten principles — this date, November 20, is now Universal Children's Day.

1983: Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) formed as the ad hoc NGO group responsible for drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This group is an information network that supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Today, CRIN has a membership of more than 2,000 organizations in over 150 countries.

1985: Children's Rights Council is co-founded by David L. Levy; it is a global, non-profit organization that focuses on children's advocacy, legislative reform, and access and visitation services.

1989: The United Nations replaces the Declaration of the Rights of the Child replaced with more extensive UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Canadian House of Commons votes unanimously to pass a non-binding resolution to end child poverty by 2000.

1990: Formation of the Canadian Children's Rights Council Inc. It monitors compliance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada as a member of CRIN.

1991: Canada ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child on December 13.

1993: Canada's national "Child's Day" is held November 20th each year as enacted in Bill C-371, otherwise known as the Child Day Act.

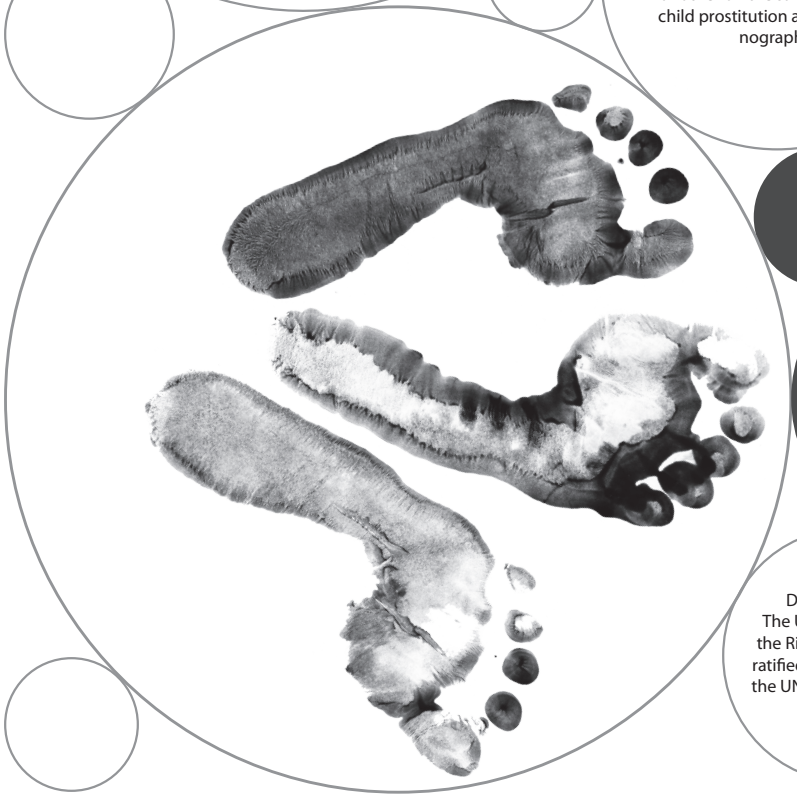
1995: The Government of Canada creates its first report on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. It states that "certain basic provisions and principles of the Convention, particularly those relating to nondiscrimination, the best interests of the child, and respect for the views of the child, have not always been adequately reflected in national legislation and policy-making."

1998: Canada forms the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access. The committee is to give fathers more rights in divorce and custody cases; the term FACT (Fathers Are Capable Too) is coined at this time. It is also to help decrease instances of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS).

1999: The UN General Assembly declares August 12 as International Youth Day. It was designed to promote awareness for the World Programme of Action for Youth. 2008's theme was "Youth and Climate Change: Time for Action."

May 2000: The UN General Assembly adopts two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and another on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

2003: The UN criticizes Canada for not incorporating the recommendations the government made in 1995 into law. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not specifically address children's rights and issues.



2003: Canada passes the Youth Criminal Justice Act to recognize the rights and freedoms of young people and to explore alternative punishments for youth other than incarceration, such as rehabilitation programs.

December 2008: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is ratified by all members of the UN except the US and Somalia.

Q&A

with human rights activist, Lauryn Oates

BY BRIAN PLATT

Lauryn Oates first learned about the plight of women in Afghanistan in 1996, when she was 14. By the time she turned 16, she was busy setting up the Vancouver chapter of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan.

Now 26, Lauryn is heavily involved in human rights, gender equity and access to education work in Afghanistan. She has been to the country a dozen times in the last five years. One of her current projects is the Omid Girls' Scholarship Fund, a fund-raising project to give university scholarships to girls at the Omid-e-Mirmun Orphanage. Omid means "hope" in Dari.

Q: *How did you get involved with the Omid Orphanage?*

A: The orphanage was started by the Ontario-based Afghan Women's Organization around 2002. Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan began funding it shortly after that. In 2007, I visited the orphanage myself for the first time after collecting donated goods from my family and friends for them…. I fell in love with the Omid girls, who are vibrant, intelligent, feisty, beautiful girls. I started spending time with them every time I visited Kabul.

Q: *What kind of impact do the donations have on the orphanage?*

A: A wide network of people in BC have become connected to these girls through their contributions, including getting their first book collection going, plastering their walls with maps and educational posters, providing an English-language tutor who comes to the orphanage every morning, and supplying the huge amount of toiletries they go through each month.

The girls write mounds of colourful, decorated letters full of love and appreciation for their Canadian friends, which I carry home with me…. They have a deep sense of connection to these people in a far away land who have decided to care about them.

Q: *How did most of these girls come to the orphanage?*

A: The 28 girls at the orphanage are ages 3-16 and come from all over Afghanistan. Each of them has a unique and often horrific story of how they ended up there. Not all the girls are "orphans"; both parents were killed in some cases. In other cases, the bread winner was killed and the mom could not afford to support the girl. Or the mother was killed and the father gave the girl away.

Other girls were left with relatives who did not want them, or were too poor to care for them. Others were sold, or in danger of being forcibly married in child marriages…. Many experienced abandonment, abuse, trauma and witnessed violent acts. Some of them are currently in hiding as they continue to be at risk of abduction by relatives.

Q: *How many orphanages does Kabul have?*

A: There are a few but not enough. Most orphanages are small and run by Afghans. Afghans do not adopt, so normally a child without parents is absorbed into the extended family…but when the social fabric of a country has been strained by war, extremism, opium, and poverty, lots of kids fall through the cracks. It's estimated that there may be at least 40,000 street kids in Kabul alone. Child labour is common, and the average marriage age for a girl is 15 years old…. It's a tough place to be a kid.

Q: *Why is this project important to you?*

A: Each year I get a few dozen requests for assistance from individuals ñ whether [it's] women in abusive marriages trying to escape, refugees wanting to come to Canada, girls trying to find support to study, or otherwise. Helping individuals one by one is time consuming and exhausting, and I eventually concluded my time was better invested in trying to change things at the policy level and through advocacy, hoping to reach a larger number of people through deeper change.

Q: *What are the challenges faced by the international community in helping in children in Afgahnistan? What can we do better?*

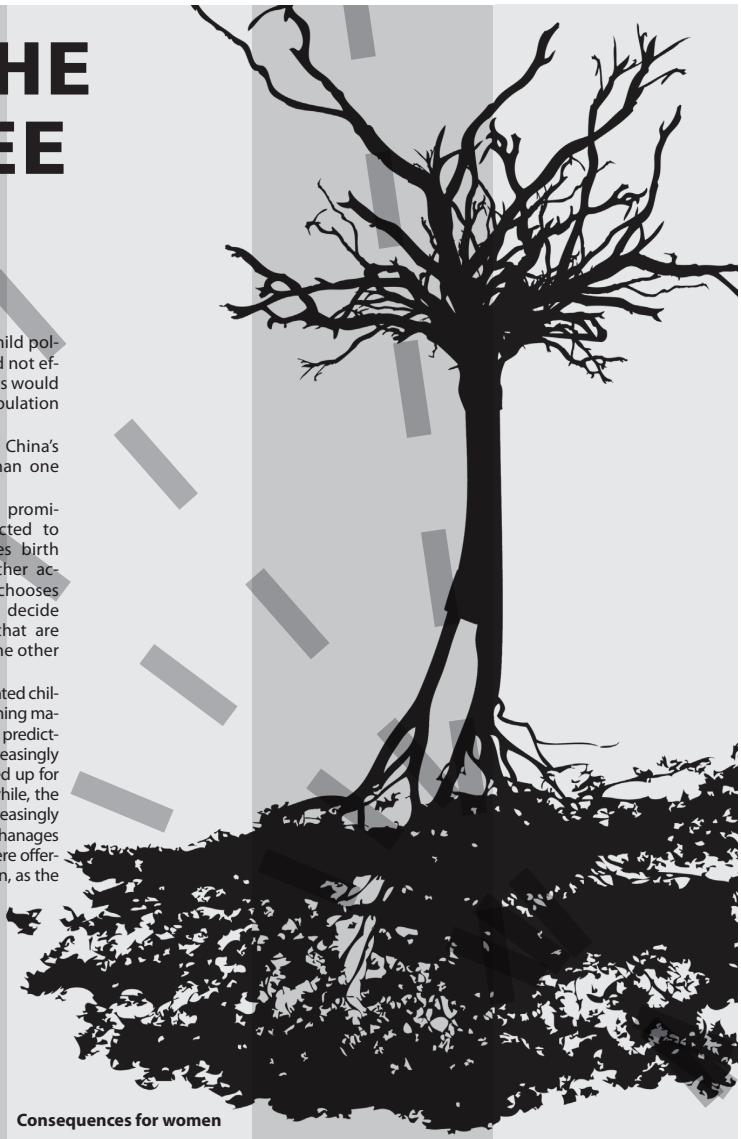
A: There needs to be more of a focus on quality of education, not just building schools…. Most of the country's teachers have no post-secondary education of any kind and many did not finish high school themselves. All the schools lack resources; the walls of classrooms are bare and science teachers are trying to teach science without any materials.

The international community needs to support an informal education sector through village libraries. Having libraries in communities can promote a reading culture, provide a space for adult literacy classes, and just get people interested in literacy.

Kids often don't get the opportunity to be kids in Afghanistan.…The police often are ignorant of laws protecting children and insensitive to their needs. Supporting the Afghan government to truly enforce the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Children is critical. Addressing child abuse, including sexual abuse, is also important. Very few programs exist, though the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit has started research on violence in families, which should provide some starting places for the international community to get to work. S

PRUNING THE FAMILY TREE IN CHINA

BY JOANNA CHIU



When the Chinese government initiated the one-child policy in 1979 to control population growth, they did not effectively address how parents' preferences for boys would harm girls and women. The country's female population has been dealing with the consequences ever since.

The policy, which affects approximately 35 per cent of China's population, restricts urban couples to having no more than one child.

The preference for boys is due to several factors, prominent among which is that boys are traditionally expected to support their parents later in life. When a mother gives birth to a girl, the family is then faced with the choice of either accepting a daughter or trying again. When a family chooses the latter option, things become complicated. If they decide to violate the policy they can face fines and penalties that are unacceptably high, especially for poorer families. Some of the other options are unsavory, such as simply abandoning the girls.

As a result of this policy, there has been an upswing in unwanted children who are abandoned or sent to orphanages. The overwhelming majority of these children are female. Other consequences were less predictable. Males now so outnumber females that it's becoming increasingly difficult for them to find mates. As a result, a market has opened up for human traffickers to sell women into forced marriages. Meanwhile, the girls that have flooded the country's orphanages are being increasingly adopted by foreign families. As this trend has grown, some orphanages engaged with human traffickers to purchase children. Others were offering to buy children from willing families—again, female children, as the boys likely came from human traffickers.

Information on Adoption

The Chinese government loosened its adoption laws in 1992 to address the number of orphans waiting to be adopted.

In 1996, the government established the China Centre of Adoption Affairs to maintain a stable adoption process.

Chinese adoptions have been on a downward trend in recent years in both Canada and the US.

Between 2004 and 2007, Canadians adopted more than 3,200 children from China. In the same period, Americans adopted nearly 27,000 children from China.

Almost all adopted children are female. In 2006, the Adoption Council of Canada reported that Canadians adopted 556 girls from China compared with 39 boys.

The one-child policy

Urban families can only have one child.

Rural families can have two children if the firstborn is female.

Fines for illegal births vary based on the offending parents' income.

Use of sex-determination technology and sex-selective abortions is illegal, but these procedures continue to take place on a wide scale.

Couples in rural areas frequently find ways to transgress the two-child policy rules.
Insertion of the IUD (intrauterine device) is the most popular contraceptive procedure.

Consequences for women

Women who refuse sterilization or abortions have been imprisoned.

Officials under pressure to meet birth quotas have forced pregnant women to have abortions and undergo sterilization.

The population of China is now so weighted toward males that it's encouraged a market for forced marriages. Between 1990 and 1998, for example, authorities rescued 64,000 trafficked women from forced marriages.

Chinese police freed more than 42,000 kidnapped women from 2001 to 2003.

General statistics

China's birthrate has declined from 5.8 children per woman in the 1970s to 1.8 children per woman in 2007.

Currently, there are 117 males born in China for every 100 females. The average ratio approximately is 105 males to 100 females.

As of the last national survey in 2005, there were 573,000 orphans in China.

69,000 of those orphans are reportedly staying in orphanages, while the others live with relatives.

The Orphans

The majority of the children in orphanages tend to be girls.

Contraception and the use of gender-selective abortions has lowered the number of female orphans in recent years as demand for international adoptions has gone up.

In 2008, an ABC news investigation found that some orphanages were offering approximately $385 for children. A foreign couple would pay a fee of $3,850 if they adopted the children.

A recipe for stateless children

A change in Canadian immigration law could leave children without a nationality

BY KATE ALLEN

Imagine two fictional children. Lily is a child in China. She's adopted from China by a Canadian couple when she's two, one of the 1,450 adopted children who will be brought to Canada this year. The Canadian government grants her citizenship at the moment of adoption. She grows up in Ottawa, goes to a Canadian university and marries a Canadian man who was born in Taiwan. The couple conceives and, on a two-week business trip to Germany, Lily gives birth to a boy.

Ahmed is born in Lebanon. His father travels to Canada, stays for three years, becomes a naturalized Canadian and passes his Canadian citizenship to his son. Ahmed stays in Beirut his entire life, joins the military and marries a Lebanese woman. The couple conceives and Ahmed's wife gives birth to a girl.

Which child is a Canadian citizen?

Before April, the answer is both are citizens. After April, the answer is neither. Amendments to the Citizenship Act that take effect this spring state that children born or adopted abroad to Canadians who were themselves born or adopted abroad will not be eligible for citizenship in Canada. This law has some citizens fuming.

"The changes effectively create two classes of citizenship, with a lower class that has no right to pass on their Canadian citizenship to their children," the Canadian Council for Refugees wrote in statement released on their website.

They and other critics say that the law discriminates against adopted children and the children of expatriates. Supporters, however, say the changes will protect the value of Canadian citizenship. The debate has sent lawmakers scurrying back to tinker with the bill, but a larger question remains: who deserves to be a Canadian citizen?

"There's huge pressure on the government to make sure that citizenship and the rights of citizenship are only enjoyed by individuals who have a substantial connection to the country," said Donald Galloway, an immigration law professor at the University of Victoria.

Much of that pressure began in July 2006 when conflict broke out between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Canada sent boats and planes to remove citizens from the line of fire. It ended up airlifting 14,000 people, at a cost of $94 million to taxpayers.

The National Post reported later that year that 7,000 of the evacuees may have returned to Lebanon within a month.

"There was some consternation about people who have dual citizenship and live outside the country ... being able to be evacuated from warzones just by showing their passport," Galloway said.

According to the United Nations, acquiring a nationality is a fundamental right due to every child. Deciding on which country newborns become citizens of can be subject to different restrictions, however, depending on where they are born. Ireland, for example, recently joined the rest of the European Union in dictating that children must be born to Irish parents, and not just born on Irish soil, to obtain Irish citizenship.

Canada has comparatively relaxed rules. Before the April amendments take effect, children born abroad to at least one Canadian parent are citizens. They will remain citizens for life provided they register before the age of 28 and spend at least one year in Canada or show a substantial connection to the country. Any child born on Canadian soil is a Canadian.

Though Canada's extra-wide welcome gate is a source of pride for many, the Lebanon conflict showed how it could become a burden. Galloway believes the recent amendments to the Citizenship Act were an attempt at a quick fix to this tension. He believes the new legislation has swung too far in the other direction.

Janet Dench, the director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, says the changes put adoptive and expatriate families on the lower rung of a two-tier citizenship system.

"It is very insulting and damaging to [these children] to say you're not really properly Canadian at some level." She also worries about greater injustices. "Our concern is the minority situations where we would end up with a stateless child."

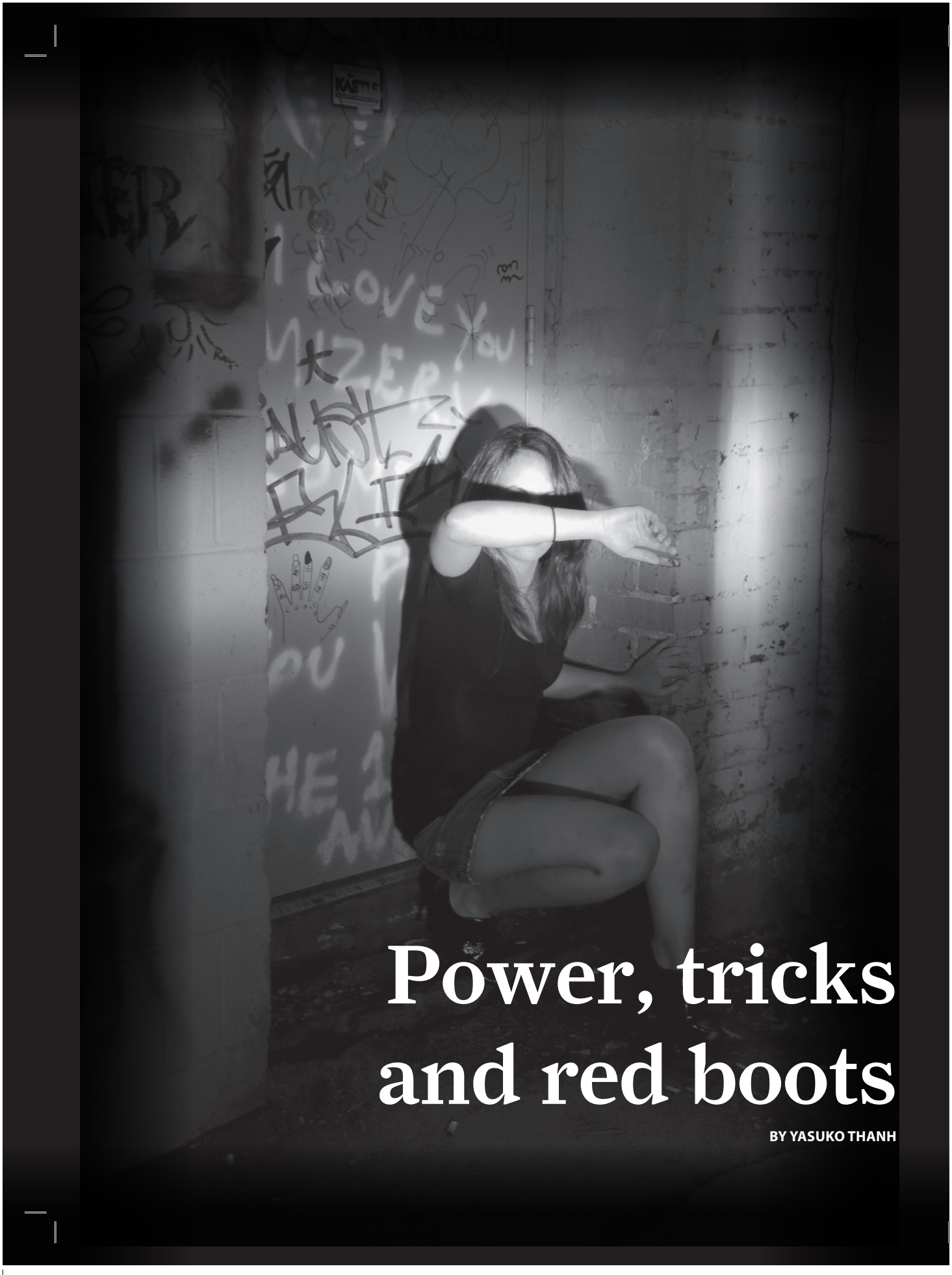
Returning to Lily's hypothetical situation, for example, her child would not be entitled to Canadian citizenship because Lily was born abroad, nor would the child be entitled to German citizenship because neither Lily nor her husband are German.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada say no child of a Canadian will ever become stateless because the country has signed an international treaty that prohibits us from implementing rules that will lead to statelessness. Dench says it's not enough.

"The convention is weak. What Canada has done is taken the lowest possible option that Canada has allowed. They're obviously trying to scrape the bottom of the barrel in terms of compliance.

"I think that people are only beginning to realize the implications, including the government itself." S

According to the United Nations, acquiring a nationality is a fundamental right due to every child. Deciding on which country newborns become citizens of can be subject to different restrictions, however, depending on where they are born.



Power, tricks and red boots

BY YASUKO THANH

Working the streets at 15

A memoir

BY YASUKO THANH
PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY JORGE AMIGO

I throw all of my money onto Jesse Diamond's lap, his Hugo Boss pants. It's called "a trap," this wad of cash shaped like the ball of my foot and damp from hiding in my shoe, under my right insole. His skin smells of sandalwood. He leans over my legs and pushes open the passenger door, my pimp-boyfriend, in the IROC-Z sports car I bought him.

Let me tell you about the way Jesse Diamond bought me tennis bracelets from Peoples Jewellers. Let me tell you about how he bought me Fredelle shoes and how I wore outfits to work worth more than most people spend on rent in a year. Let me tell you about how Jesse Diamond gave me Sunday to Tuesday off — took me dancing at places like The Mansion. Let me tell you about how power — like aggression or blood — flows downhill. Let me tell you how I never worked the streets as a "bourgeois" prostitute, so I always had the power to treat men badly.

Not everyone is like this, like Jesse and me. I am one of the lucky ones. I can count on my fingers the times he's beaten me, but I've lost count of how many times he's cried on my shoulder or with his head in my lap.

His body is muscular, yet not overly: he's no weight lifter or steroid monkey. He has a chiselled physique that comes to him naturally, whether he goes to the gym or not. He has a kinetic intelligence; he moves through the world with the grace of a dancer on the stage. His limbs are perfectly proportioned. His body makes me think of men more developed than I would prefer, attracted as I am to rail-thin forms like Mick Jagger or Prince, almost pre-pubescent, girl-like in their way.

His skin is the colour of fudge-flavoured caramel squares. I have never seen anyone, not even on TV, with such beautiful hues. His hair, for instance, is black as a cave and streaked with filaments of silver. Sometimes I braid it into tiny squares that spike like electrical wires from his head. I pull on each one. "Loves me, loves me not."

Later, I will make my way to Chang's corner store and buy condoms at a dollar apiece. I'll buy a Hot Shot to slip into my waistband, a Gold Rush scratch-and-win and a McCain's breakfast pocket, because I don't like to waste time at work by eating a sit-down restaurant meal like other girls. My five-inch heels will tap the pavement like a bedtime staccato.

Power, like blood. My pimp's power, my power. I paid him to love me. The tricks paid me, and I paid him. I'm a junkyard dog that never mistreats her owner. None of us, tricks, hos, and pimps alike, ever got what we were looking for. We fed each other lies and called it "The Game."

On the track, at work, men yelled out of their car windows: "C'mon baby, suck my cock," and when I wouldn't do it for free, they threw pennies.

Photo illustration

One night, a girl, who's now dead — some said she overdosed, others said her man killed her — she and I picked up the pennies like shrapnel from the sidewalk, our painted fingernails scraping red. We waited for those men in a big gold Lincoln to come back around the block. When they were near, we flung the pennies and hailstormed the car. Then we ran and hid in the middle of a group of girls because we'd chipped the paint and those men were out for blood.

Pennies were nothing, curses were nothing. Only Jesse Diamond had the power to hurt me. Other men were nothing, and nothing can't hurt you.

Still, it bothered me that street nurses handed me condoms with pity in their eyes on nights when the rain was blowing sideways past umbrellas, getting clothes wet. It bothered me that tricks asked why I was on the street and told me what I should be doing instead: studying for college or finding a good husband, even as they were watching me undress. It bothered me to lie to people who might have become my friends, those who didn't know I "worked," and say I was studying business administration by correspondence.

To tell them I was a prostitute would mean that look, the one I couldn't control and that had nothing to do with me. Some prostitute from the movies, maybe: The Self-Loathing Prostitute, Heart-of-Gold Prostitute, Hard, Soulless Prostitute, Downtrodden Poverty-Motivated Prostitute, The Junkie or The Slut.

A decade later, a philosophy paper spreads in front of me.

I write on the topic of paternalism for a university class. In attempting a balanced approach, I include the opinion of the moral majority, which goes something like this: prostitution is an exploitive business, licentious. It is reprehensible, for the harm it causes to the community and for how it degrades human dignity. These are not morally neutral workers, many feel, providing morally neutral services. Perhaps they're right.

I worked the streets for six years. I started at 15. Fifteen years, seven months and a handful of days. I knew I was going to turn a trick that night, but not really.

I worked the streets for six years. I started at 15. Fifteen years, seven months and a handful of days. I knew I was going to turn a trick that night, but not really.

It was more just something to do, to stand out there in a pair of red boots in front of the doorway of a closed-down flower shop, walking back and forth. Word was that last week a Vancouver working girl had her breast cut off and thrown into the Fraser River by a trick with feathered blond hair that picked her up in a brown Camaro. But I was not thinking of this. I was walking back and forth in those red pigskin boots with five-inch heels, not thinking about what could happen except maybe how long I could sport this footwear before getting blisters.

Power pushed away the fears. This 15-year-old runaway would start to take care of herself: pay for a motel room, buy ice

Photo illustration

Photo illustration

cream at 24-hour gas station while the meter of a taxi climbed. She didn't have to worry about the cost. After work she could take two bites from the dessert and leave the rest to melt decadently on the bathroom counter for the maids to clean up. This welfare-kid runaway, this private school-scholarship dropout, this social-service case file could take care of herself.

Various studies have looked at why adolescents start selling sex. When I was working, I often felt that social services and the legal system had driven me to it. I had been denied Independent Living — welfare for youth under eighteen. I had also been jailed for shoplifting and could no longer maintain my career as a "booster"—my stint making money by selling stolen property wasn't overly lucrative, but it still paid the bills. I had seen friends arrested and forced by police to violently choke up whatever drugs — acid or hash — they had stashed in their mouths.

The sex workers I saw wore fur coats and red pig skin boots. Dina, a 28-year-old prostitute, was paying her son's way through a Shawnigan Lake boarding school. Dina, in those boots, always walked as if she knew exactly where she was going. She bought me my fist pair of stilettos with a $50 bill and said of the currency, "Honey, you'll be seeing lots more." She wasn't lying.

Money is the trade-off for the conflicts you experience with the law, abusive customers and pimps. A common refrain among sex workers is "I'll square-up when I've banked something, as soon as I get ahead." The possibility of earning $1000 in one shift makes every night an opportunity to get ahead, but there's some truth in the saying that honest money lasts longer. Easy come, easy go; fast money burns. I only knew one pimp who ever saved his money. I knew more who got shot.

Girls, I felt, whether we gave our money to pimps or not, held the true power. Without us, the pimps were nothing. And the tricks, well, they'd always be around. I held the deep conviction that when the world ended, like cockroaches, us girls would survive.

I spent much of my career in the sex trade in Vancouver, a city that has been criticized for using a crime-control model of prevention. Toronto uses more of a social safety net model. Studies show that youth become entrenched in a lifestyle they might not otherwise have chosen when they pick up skills and attitudes in student-teacher type relationships, like the one I had with Dina and her red boots.

Researchers in the department of sociology at the Universities of Victoria and Toronto looked at 390 youth (34 per cent female) living in shelters, hostels and on the street. The researchers found that criminalizing young prostitutes is often more effective at making them feel like criminals than changing the social structures that made the sex trade a logical means of survival. The same study found that the Vancouver group

The possibility of earning $1,000 in one shift makes every night an opportunity to get ahead, but honest money lasts longer.

Living the 21st floor of the Century Plaza Hotel in downtown Vancouver. I was about sixteen. *Yasuko Thanh*

> He drove a rusted work truck. It smelled like oil, not wisdom.

had spent more time on the streets than youth in Toronto and, therefore, have more time to become "embedded" in street life.

I could have told them that. If I spent less time on the streets, I would have had less opportunity to become engaged in street life. Had I received Independent Living and had I been able to find an apartment with the help of a social worker, I often wonder, what direction would I have gone? Would I have gone back to school? The street, with its freedom, might have lost some of its lustre.

Subcultures — especially those of the street — provide a haven for youth who can, within the subculture, ca vanquish their rebellious behaviour. It requires less energy to rebel in these cultures, so more energy can be spent on the development of a mature identity. The trick is to not get so caught up in the web that you can't get out. I think Independent Living would have given me the sense of autonomy that I needed and eventually found on the street.

Survival sex is defined as selling sex to "meet subsistence needs." Runaway adolescents sometimes resort this when they need to support themselves; running away is a powerful risk factor that pushes adolescent females into the sex trade. Resourcefulness is doing what you have to in order to survive.

Studies have shown that children who run away need to recover quickly after the experience in order to be deterred from entering into the street trade. The question is: what is the best way to help them recover? A crime-control-oriented model?

A study on sexually exploited youth in British Columbia by the McCreary Centre Society found that 80 per cent of the youth who had been involved in prostitution in British Columbia had also been involved in government care.

I wanted a stable support system, but not one that forced me back into a life that I knew could no longer be mine. What may have started as "survival sex" turned into many other things for me, not the least of which was a way to make a prosperous living and stay out of a group home with all of its accompanying rules. I was free to do as I pleased at a time when my peers were complaining about Grade 10 calculus and curfews.

One night I caught a double with the Dina, the woman with the red boots. I was looking for lessons and likened myself to Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha on some kind of a search.

He drove a rusted work truck. It smelled like oil, not wisdom.

"Does anyone have a Kleenex?" I remember Dina asking. It had begun to rain and her mascara was running.

The man pulled a roll of toilet paper out of his back pocket. It was smeared with grease fingerprints.

"You never know when you might need this in the bush." He was silent as we stared at him blankly. He looked down, suddenly sheepish. Dina put her hand on his thigh. She laughed for him until his shoulders relaxed. She was an expert at making people feel at ease.

"You know what girls, I better go have a shower first," he said suddenly.

We convinced him instead to take a shower at the trick hotel. He smoked on the way, flicking the ashes of his cigarette

My first condo, age 17, Fairview Slopes, Vancouver. *Yasuko Thanh*

into the front pocket of his shirt instead of an ashtray. I looked out the window. At night, the whole city of Vancouver looked printed on Xerox paper: grainy, flat, insubstantial.

"What did you girls do before you started up in this business?" I remember him asking.

"Worked at White Spot," Dina answered.

"White Spot's a nice restaurant," he said. "The wife and I had our wedding reception there." We asked questions as if we didn't hate him and, deep down, I sensed, even then, that all men weren't the true enemy. We couldn't see him as completely human though, not if we wanted to rob him blind at the first chance we got.

We got to the hotel and ascended the stairs past graffiti, fist holes in the walls and two poinsettias.

"Welcome to the Hastings Hilton," Dina said. "The room isn't great, but we're the main attraction."

Excusing ourselves to the washroom, we put the $240 he had given us under the insoles of our shoes. There was a sink and a shower. Fresh towels and washcloths hung on the rod. As dirty as this place was, it always had clean linens. We grabbed a washcloth and Dina wrapped a cake of soap in it, ran it under the tap until it got frothy.

"I've got rent to pay." Soapsuds dripped out from between Dina's fingers. Her fingers were thin, dark, like ebony chopsticks. She turned off the water. "I want to make six tonight."

"Me too," I lied. "I'm gonna try and make seven." Truth was, Jesse Diamond had never yet set a quota for me. My job performance had everything to do with pride and a personal work ethic. Sleeping with other men was as ordinary as peeling potatoes. I liked to do it well, not because Jesse Diamond demanded it, but because if you're going to do something, you might as well do it right.

"If you spend more, you can get more," Dina informed the date when we were back in the room. He sat naked on the bed, had flipped on the TV. She switched it off. "We'll explain to you your options. Like a menu at a restaurant. And the sooner we can take care of finances, the sooner we can have fun."

He finally gave us each another hundred dollars, after hemming and hawing and calling us "mercenaries" under his breath as he dug through his wallet.

We folded our shirts up toward our chin until our bras were exposed. We pulled out our breasts and Dina sort of took off her spandex pants — just one leg, not the other. What she peeled off one leg, she wrapped around the opposite knee, making it into what looked like a legwarmer. I hiked up my miniskirt to my waist. We kept our shoes on. Rarely did we ever completely remove our clothing. Sometimes not even our coats.

Dina had covered his penis with soapsuds, only touching it through the washcloth, and was mechanically putting a condom on his half-erection.

"Don't light a cigarette," she ordered him, kneeling back on her heels, semi-naked, her thighs open, breathing heavily through a wrinkled nose. "Listen. It's your money," I remember her saying. "If you want to spend your time smoking."

He looked at her, puzzled. "But I just gave you another—"

"—oh, come on. That gets you ten minutes. Now chop-chop." Dina swayed like a spinning top, trying to plant her lips on his cock. "Lie back." She bobbed up and down.

Chop-chop? I raised my eyebrows. Dina was drunk.

"C'mon, Michelle, let's go. He's not even trying." She never used my real name around a client. Dina was swerving on the edge of the bed, pulling her spandex back on, her eyes hazily focused on the door. I waited for the man's inevitable explosion.

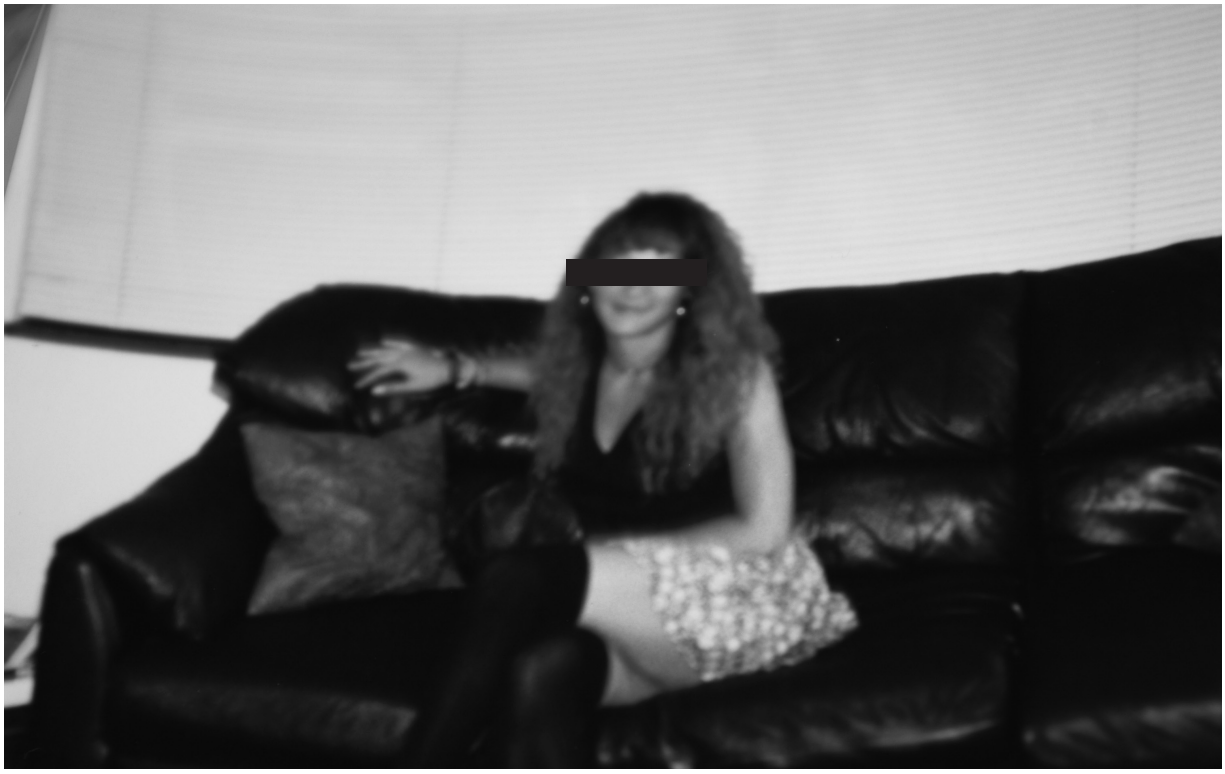
Earlier, I had watched Dina down five white wines she ordered take-out in cardboard coffee cups from the Korner Kitchen. Now, she was drunk, dangerous as a junkyard dog.

I tried to calm him down, telling him to feel sorry for Dina. "She just lost a baby, miscarried last week," I whispered.

I appeased him by saying little things about how unloved we, as prostitutes, felt in general and how when a man seemed neither interested or stimulated it became even worse. Lies. My tactic in these situations was always the same: talk fast and keep talking. Pump their egos. Make it so walking away will make them feel big, bigger than killing you.

The truth was Dina was still pregnant, three months, and since she'd found out, she'd been drinking at work. She told me in the cab back to the track that she'd had five abortions; she couldn't have another one. She puckered her lips. "I know," I sighed.

Dina sighed, too, and patted her belly. For the moment she appeared content. I told her I was going home.



Getting ready to go out for the night. My new leather couch, age 17 or 18. *Yasuko Thanh*

"That's right," Dina smirked. "It's past one. What will my brother think?"

Despite her disrespectful tone, I took it for the compliment it was. Jesse Diamond let me go home early if I wanted, even before the bar rush, any night of the week.

"Sunday dinner?" I asked her.

"Not this week. Buzz's car payment."

I often think back to the day I was released from a juvenile detention facility after a four-month stint. I'd been working just a few months before getting arrested. When I got out it was April. The seagulls were screeching and the grass was so moist I rolled in it. I looked ridiculous in satin, the clothes I'd been busted in: all I had to my name. I walked down the street with my stiletto heels swinging from my fingertips and the sidewalk cooling the soles of my feet. The world was mine. My legs, I said, had the power to move me here or there, any fences are only in my mind. I still believe it.

I believe in prostitution as a legitimate career choice. When I paid for Coffee Crisps with $50 bills, I was sure it was not society's place to determine what I chose to do, though now I wonder if what is freely chosen rests in bad judgement. I could see the real estate guides on the magazine rack by the pantyhose display, advertising undeveloped property. I'd never enquired about any of them at a Century 21 or Realty World, though I'd earned the money to buy some of these properties five times over. Fern-moist places with names like Slocan, the Kettle Valley or New Denver. West Vancouver was where most prostitutes I knew wanted to end up — West Van, the British Properties or Shaughnessy. Yet few girls retired; most just ended up somewhere — married to a trick maybe, or in retail, or behind an insurance desk.

I didn't want to settle down though. I imagined adventure: travelling the world—sleeping my way around it; or the pioneer life; or buying a 30-foot sailboat suitable for offshore cruising. All three were the same to me. I could choose a different one every day.

More concerning for me than youth in the trade is the stigma around the trade. Data I found from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics indicates that 86 prostitutes were murdered in Canada from 1992 through 1998.

In his study, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution in Canada," Simon Fraser University professor John Lowman constructs a profile of sex worker murders in British Columbia and argues that what the media and grassroots groups did in the 1980s to get rid of prostitutes contributed to a sharp increase in their murders. He describes how campaigns to remove street prostitution from certain areas of the city contributed to a social milieu in which violence against prostitutes could flourish.

During the mid-'80s, right when I was entering the sex trade, working in both Victoria and Vancouver, I remember being chased from sidewalks with a garden hose while nearby men and women marched with placards. I hid behind dumpsters and waited for the mobs to clear. I was overwhelmed by a profound feeling of puzzlement. How could people be so sure about the merits of what I did without knowing anything about me?

> It's not possible for someone at a dinner party to say "I am a prostitute" in the same way they can say "I am a librarian" or "I am a philosopher."

As a result of their campaigns, many prostitutes were forced to ply their trade in more dangerous and secluded areas of the city. Lowman's study concludes that the stigmatization of prostitutes is one of the main obstacles to creating safer working conditions for them. The stigma creates the kind of environment in which 60 women can go missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and no one blinks an eye.

It's not possible for someone at a dinner party to say "I am a prostitute" in the same way they can say "I am a librarian" or "I am a philosopher." Most of my friends, especially the closest, still have no idea about my past. A variety of religious and moral values, coupled with beliefs about human sexuality, have helped to construct our response to sex workers. At its core, the taboo of prostitution represents a debate about sexual rights and freedoms: who should be having it, under what circumstances and why?

It's a continuing taboo that impacts the development of identity and ego among youth in the sex trade. I have thought a great deal about what it means to be selling your body at a time when your beliefs about what it is to be good and what it is to moral are still forming.

As far as social services went, a religious group from a denomination I don't remember offered free meals after they sang the song "Satan Loves Tattoos." And then there were the Streetlight Ministry workers with their matching blue jackets and thermoses of hot chocolate. Young sex workers need services that empower them without the undertones of a moral crusade orchestrated to save them.

I expected people were basically good at heart, and they were, but on their own terms. The prejudice broke my heart. Something in people's eyes — sometimes it took the form of hate. More often, it was pity.

Youth involved in the sex trade will often perceive themselves to be in a position of power over their customers and pimps — in a sort of game to gain control. Typically, I can say that I felt in control. Part of me is still aghast when feminist ideology casts me in the role of the victim. I try to believe that moral reactions to the sex trade reveal more about a society's morality than the morality of a sex worker. Or maybe, part of me is still not ready to look at the full picture.

It was a seductive society, when I was inside. We were in control. We had our own culture. We had our own nightclubs, owned by people like us. Square people went to them too, but they were our clubs. We had our own restaurants, where the owner knew your man was a somebody and made a point of coming to the table and personally welcoming you.—saying "hello." The rules were different. We had our own after-hours clubs, like The Mansion in Vancouver's upper crust West End—and I felt pride when we pulled up in Jesse Diamond's black IROC-Z, alongside the Jaguars and Mercedes and Porches that were already in the stone driveway. I saw working girls in their evening gowns (we never wore our work clothes there) and I looked at the neighbourhood and knew we were surrounded by doctors and lawyers and publishers. When I saw them peeking out of their windows, I got this feeling, like pride or power, that I was witness to and part of all this—pride in the fact that we belonged to something that set us apart. S

Two youth dig through trash in Managua's garbage dump. For some of the children in the city, this offers their only chance to earn money to eat, or to buy glue.

Glue

The Huelepegas of Managua

PHOTO ESSAY BY TREVOR SNAPP

"At first I felt great sniffing glue. I felt I could do anything; now I feel nothing." Sergio has been addicted to glue for more than half of his 20 years. He is one of thousands of glue-sniffing youth, called Huelepegas, who live in the streets of Managua, Nicaragua's capital city. "The good thing about the glue is that it distracts you. I was always beaten by my stepfather, and it helped me get through that."

Glue sniffing is common among street children in Central America, many of whom have fled abuse at home. Glue is the only affordable escape from constant and brutal violence at the hands of police, shopkeepers and gangs. It also empowers the children, initially at least, in the face of their new reality on the street. Though most of the children realize that the glue's neurotoxins kill brain cells and damage internal organs, in the streets and markets of Managua it's worth the risk.

Ignored, mistreated and constantly harassed, the only protection the children have is each other. They live together in focos — abandoned houses or alleys — where they play, fight and share whatever food they have. Ostracized by society, they turn to pega, or glue, as a way to escape their reality. Without a family, these children cease to exist in the eyes of society.

A Huelepega urinates on a wall in Managua. The stencil on the wall reads, "Look, sons of a thousand whores, do not urinate, shit or leave trash here. Got it, you sons of whores?" Because they often steal food or money to buy glue, these children are considered by many Nicaraguans to be delinquents and criminals. The main reason they cite for wanting to quit glue is to gain some respect from the public. "When we're on the street, everybody looks at us and thinks we are going to rob them and that we are putas," says Dorven, 12. Local business owners contract private police who intimidate and beat the children, either for minor offenses or for no reason at all.

A Huelepega encounters a group of school children in Managua.

"When we're on the street everybody looks at us and thinks we are going to rob them and that we are putas."

—Dorven, 12

Manuel leans against a wall in the alley where he sleeps. He holds a bottle of glue. The night before someone had poured oil all over the alley to keep Manuel and his friends away.

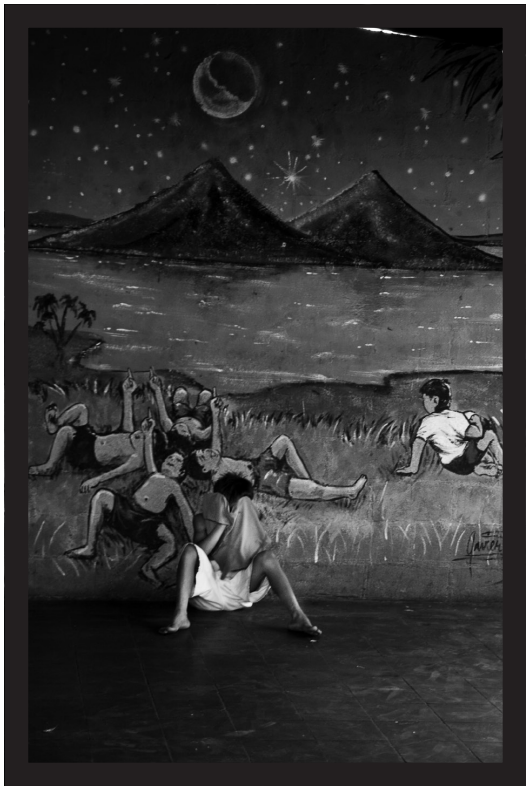
A child wakes up and starts sniffing glue in an empty house where he sleeps.

A Huelepega sniffs glue out of a plastic bottle in a market. The street children living in the market are abused by shopkeepers and their hired security guards. But living there also gives them the chance to steal food, as well as money for glue..

"At first I felt great sniffing glue. I felt I could do anything; now I feel nothing."
—Sergio

A woman who sells glue to street children in front of her house. A large problem for Huelepegas is that glue is readily available.

Hope for the future



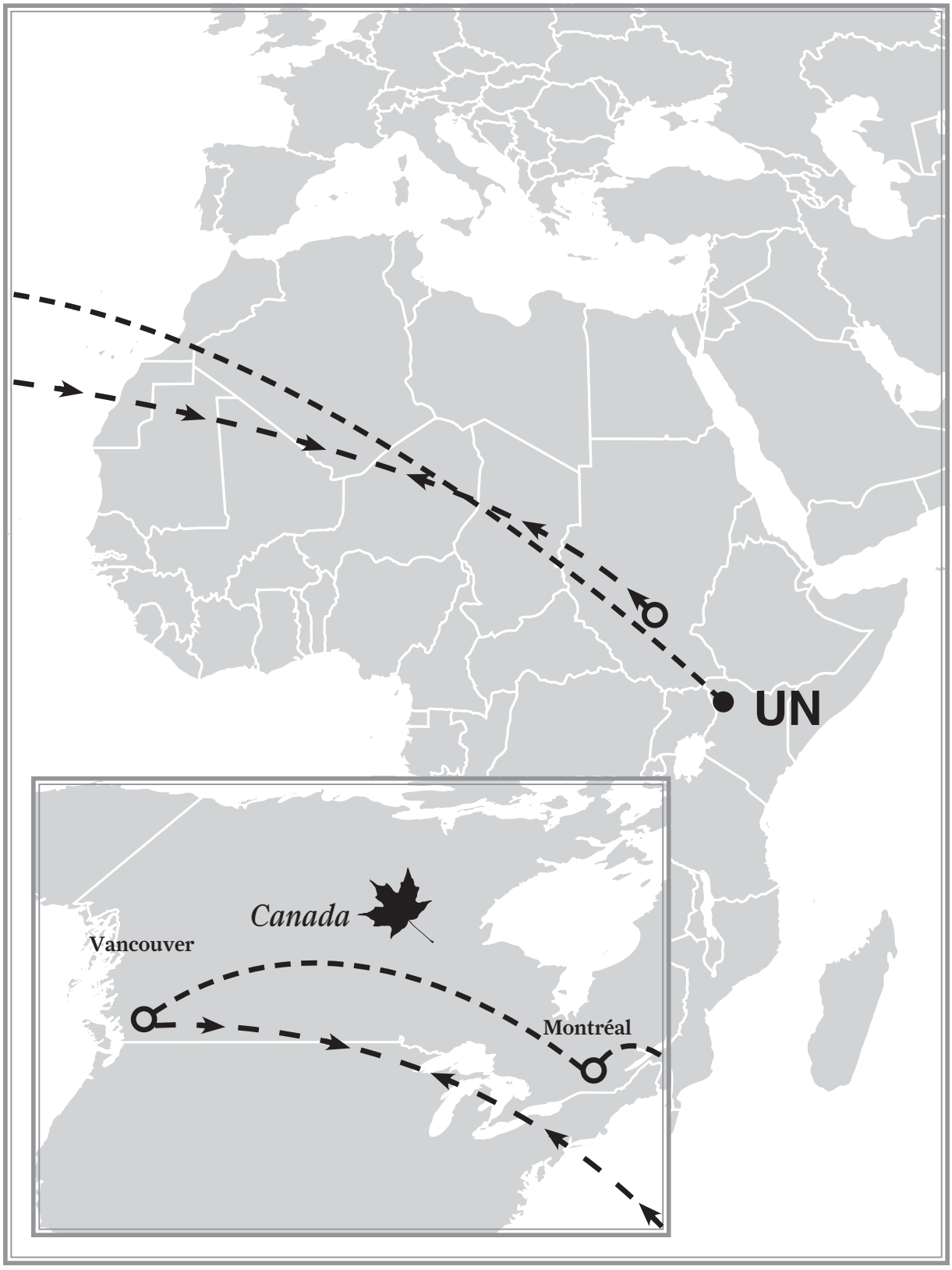
RIGHT A Huelepega sits in the "Filter House" run by the NGO Los Quinchos. Located near Managua's Mercado Oriental, the Filter House assists street children and teenagers. Here they can wash themselves, eat, receive treatment for wounds or illnesses, play, and participate in sports or cultural activities. Every day, educators walk through the streets to offer the children assistance and to convince them to leave street life, a very difficult task. On average, about 30 children live in the Filter House. They are immediately registered in schools.

After three months they go to live with a long-term community of former street children. But many children can't turn away from the glue and return to the street after a month.

ABOVE: A young Huelepega sits on the edge of her bed at Yahoska. The Yahoska Project takes in young and teenage girls in the San Marcos house. Their past is marked by violence and abandonment.

They all go to public school, where they participate in lectures about social problems and women and girl's rights.


A Lost Boy's path
Sudan
Ethiopia
ABC
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Uganda
Kenya


UN
Canada
Vancouver
Montréal

A Lost Boy finds his purpose

BY JODIE MARTINSON

William Pioth was 32 years old when he went back to visit for the first time in 2008. After the long flight from Vancouver, he landed in Sudan. Soon he was driving down a bumpy, dusty road toward the villages he had left, last time on foot, at age 9.

William went to meet the village chief. The chief had the translator ready. Wearing a button-down shirt and pants from a mall in Burnaby, British Columbia, he didn't look like he could speak the local language. But when William responded in perfect Dinka, he caught the attention of a woman in the corner, one of the chief's wives.

William had a surprise for the chief and his wife. He had waited a long time for this moment. He was going to make it last.

He asked the chief about the village, about the chief's family, then about one of the chief's sons. The son was one of many young boys who had fled from the village during Sudan's civil war in the 1980s. Trekking across Sudan looking for safety, a journalist called them the Lost Boys and the name stuck.

As William asked questions about the chief's lost son, the chief's wife crept closer and closer, fixated on William. William wondered if she guessed the secret he had come to share.

He decided he had toyed with them long enough. "I do not believe your son is dead," William announced. The chief waited for proof. William took a deep breath and stole a glance at the woman. "I don't believe he is dead because I am your son! I am Kolong!" he said, proclaiming his birth name. William's mother leapt up and tears flowed down her cheeks. Villagers came running to see the commotion.

The celebration continued as parents lined up to look at the photographs William had brought of other Lost Boys from the village of Panlang. They prayed that William would tell them their sons, too, were alive and successful in North America — not dead as they had always believed.

The making of a Lost Boy

In 1983, when William was seven, civil war broke out for a second time in Sudan. The roots of this war extend far before William was born. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the British-administered Sudan was divided into two distinct regions: the mostly Arab and Muslim north and the mostly black and Christian south. Then, in 1947, the British merged the two regions and gave administrative power to the northerners. By the time Sudan became independent in 1956, the seeds of enduring conflict had been sown.

The first civil war broke out in 1955 and lasted until the brokering of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972. The agreement aimed to integrate southern guerrilla fighters into the army and granted some political autonomy to the south.

For the next decade, the northern-dominated government repeatedly violated the agreement. In 1983, when the southerners

> The boys aimed for Ethiopia, but with no roads to follow and no maps or navigation tools to guide them, they traced squiggles and circles across southern Sudan.

finally reached a breaking point, the second civil war began — a war that would greatly impact William and tens of thousands of boys like him.

During the war, the government army attacked southern villages. Troops slaughtered mothers and fathers, raped daughters or took them as slaves and killed south Sudanese boys who looked old enough to be threatening.

In William's village, like many others, his parents faced a choice: keep their boys at home, or send them on a long trek to safety. Both options were fraught with the risk of death.

William and 300 boys from his tribe would be among the first in a long stream of boys who left south Sudan for refugee camps throughout the 1980s.

The boys aimed for Ethiopia, but with no roads to follow and no maps or navigation tools to guide them, they traced squiggles and circles across southern Sudan. They walked from sunrise to evening. And they became each other's family — a family of reluctantly nomadic brothers.

"At the beginning, it was too emotional," William said. "We thought our lives [were] going to end up like that.... Most of the Canadian children don't understand that part ... of struggling on your own since you were nine years old to find where you're going to sleep later on, what you are going to eat, and live day by day.... We adapted and we were always prepared to die at any time."

One of the biggest threats were the lions. Some lions would stand in the middle of their path, daring the boys to come closer. The boys learned their best protection from the lions was each other. Backed up by the caravan of Lost Boys, some of the bravest boys would challenge the lions, scaring them off with their arms raised and feet stomping.

The boys finally made it to Ethiopia after about three months of walking. In relative safety, the boys set up makeshift schools using pieces of cardboard and charcoal for writing.

In the following years, more Lost Boys would join them. Some of the boys were tending cows away from their villages only to return to find their homes ransacked and their families dead. Others were child soldiers in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the southern Sudanese rebel group, who managed to escape the conflict.

Gestures toward peace

Hope for conflict-affected children in Sudan grew as the war waged on. John Garang de Mabior, the former leader of SPLA, told a group of his child soldiers to put down their weapons. He sent them and English-speaking fighters to teach the Lost Boys in Ethiopia. The boys took school seriously. Garang told them that when the war ended so many would be dead that it would be up to these Lost Boys to rebuild their country.

"[He] told us that we would be the new leaders," William said. "We would build our classrooms everywhere we would go."

Leadership came naturally to William. By age 12 he was a school captain responsible for a group of about 3,400 younger boys. His English was good, so he was also put in charge

of distributing the food and water brought by humanitarian groups to the other school captains.

Meanwhile, international attention on child welfare was growing. In 1989, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international agreement to protect children. Sudan signed on in 1990.

Among the many provisions in the convention that had been consistently violated with respect to the Lost Boys were the right to: be cared for by and maintain a relationship with his or her own parents; be free from discrimination, including ethnic discrimination; access health care services, including nutrition; be protected from all forms of violence and abuse; and life.

Despite codifying some of the infringements of rights going on in Sudan, the convention did little to address the problems faced by Sudanese children. According to a report published by the World Organization Against Torture in 2002, the government and SPLA continued "to engage in brutal and systematic violence against children" after signing the convention.

Moreover, little was done to help the Lost Boys reconnect with their parents. Instead, in 1991, just one year after Sudan signed the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Lost Boys were forced to go on the move again.

In 1991, war broke out in Ethiopia. The Lost Boys, whose numbers had swelled, were given just twenty-four hours to vacate the country. For another four months, the boys walked all day. William said the Red Cross would drive out to them in the desert and distribute water and small amounts of food every few weeks. When that food would run out, the boys foraged from trees and bushes.

Those lost along the way

Thousands of boys died travelling to Kenya. Some were killed by animals such as alligators and lions. Others died of hunger and fatigue or from eating poisonous plants. Still others were shot. "That was the most difficult time," William said of the walk to Kenya.

One day, the boys came to a flooded river. The shorter boys struggled to cross and many were washed away. Those who reached safety were attacked. The boys scattered, against their better judgment. They knew their strength lay in numbers. Many drowned and many were lost to bullets. "I think that [day] is the most sad memory," William said simply.

Another long journey

William and a diminished family of Lost Boys eventually made it to the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya. At the camp, William attended high school and was noticed for his basketball skills. He was offered a scholarship to a Kenyan high school and competed in tournaments that took him as far away as Uganda.

The boys scattered, against their better judgment. They knew their strength lay in numbers.

Eventually he got a job with the UN doing social work in the refugee camp and was given the opportunity to move to Canada. A Canadian government lawyer came from the Nairobi embassy to Kakuma and arranged for him to move to Vancouver in the late 1990s.

"Canada is very cold," William remembers him saying. "The only place that you can survive is Vancouver."

"I know how to survive," William assured him.

He flew into the heat of Montreal's summer. While the Canadians were running around the airport in shorts and sandals, William was hit by the coldest air he had ever felt. He later learned it was air conditioning.

He was too cold to answer any of the questions at customs. He could only make a single appeal. "Please," he remembers saying. "Help me out. Whatever you have ... a blanket, a jacket...."

William continued to Vancouver, where it took him about six months to get settled in completely. It didn't take him long, however, to start making his mark on his new home.

Like many of the Lost Boys, William is determined to make his life count. He's spearheading a long list of projects that would rival the resumes of the best do-gooders around. Children are his main priority. "I failed as a child to get [all of the brothers I lost safely] here...I don't expect any other children to have to face the same things.

"Human rights are very important. I grew up in a refugee camp and I worked with the UN as a social worker, so I understand ... how kids should be treated."

He's started a homework club for children of Sudanese immigrants living around Vancouver. The club meets every Saturday in a church basement. William partners struggling kids with Sudanese students at the University of British Columbia. He describes the children in the program as academic orphans. Their parents simply don't know enough English, math or science to be able to help their kids. In fact, the kids teach their parents, helping them translate and calculate their bills. In this way, William's program helps bridge the gap between parent and child.

The 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement brought a rocky peace to southern Sudan. With the window of peace open in his region, the timing was right for William to fulfill what he and the other Lost Boys had been tasked with so long ago — rebuilding south Sudan.

In January 2008, William returned home to his village of Panlang with the funds and expertise to install a hand pump. Thousands of inhabitants of Panlang and those from the surrounding region have since enjoyed clean, safe water for the first time in their lives.

He's now fundraising to build a clinic in Panlang that will focus its services on women and children. Currently, people must walk two days to the nearest clinic — a trek that is unmanageable for the sick, pregnant and elderly. The clinic will also train women to be childbirth assistants and offer HIV and birth control education.

William left Vancouver for Sudan to start the construction at the end of January 2009. Some of the top contributors to the project are the other "boys," as he calls them: other Lost Boys of Sudan, his brothers. After what they have been through, he knows he can count on them: "We always support each other." S

THANK-YOU!

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE UBC ARTS UNDERGRADUATE SOCIETY FOR THEIR SUPPORT, WITHOUT WHICH THIS MAGAZINE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.

the children's right to speak

ARTS UNDERGRADUATE SOCIETY AUS

A glimmer of hope in a dark age

Ekalavya Nyasa

BY VINITA BIJUR

The classroom is abuzz with energy and excitement. Students laugh loudly and make grinding sounds as they move their chairs across the floor. At the front of the class, the English teacher, Kalpana Chandavarkar, writes sentences with common grammatical structures and her class dutifully copies them down. Their bright eyes watch as she gives her daily lesson.

It was the most haphazard classroom I had ever been in. The desks were small and many, cramped into a square room with windows that lacked blinds. The midday sun streamed onto the floor, illuminating Chandavarkar as she asked her grade 9 and 10 students to bring forward the composition paragraphs she assigned the previous week.

I settled myself comfortably in a chair at the side of the classroom and watched. Ekalavya Nyasa is a school for sex worker's children in the city of Puné, India. The organization focuses its efforts on educating and providing a safe community space for children who are constantly exposed to the horrors of prostitution and poverty. Ekalavya was started by a social worker, Renu Gavaskar, who was moved by the plight of these children and wanted to provide an opportunity for them to lead better lives. She now runs Ekalavya using donations from the locals and multinational technology companies.

A young boy approaches me shyly with his notebook in hand. He has an open face and long lashes that frame his brown eyes. As I take his notebook from him and begin reading his work, he introduces himself as Omkar. He tells me he is 12 years old and likes going to school. He is extremely curious about Canada — its geography, its progress and even its traffic and cleanliness. He tells me he wants to learn English and asks me to correct his speech, which is occasionally speckled with Hindi or Marathi words.

Renu — or Renutai, as staff and students affectionately call her — made this all happen. Seated in her office, a cozy place that facilitates many easy conversations with Ekalavya's volunteers and children, she apologizes for the mess.

"It's not always like this," she says.

As she settles herself down comfortably for a long chat, she tells me, partially paraphrasing Gandhi: "We have to start with those who are most disadvantaged; we must go to the last person, the person who has nothing, especially because we are privileged, and have everything we could ask for. The disparity between the haves and have-nots is too great, and so, the haves also bear a responsibility toward the have-nots. Street workers are at the lowest rung of society's hierarchical ladder. As a result, so are their children."

With these words, she looks into my eyes and says, "This

is a reality of life; you have to accept it.... It's a process without a result."

Part of the concern is that without an organization like Ekalavya these children will be pulled into the sex trade that surrounds them, either by choice or against their will. The National Crime Records Bureau of India identified a significant increase in the trafficking of girls in recent years. The report states that "35 cases of 'buying of girls' and 123 cases of 'selling of girls' for prostitution were reported in the country during 2006 against 28 and 50 such cases respectively in 2005." While this shows a numerically significant increase in sex trafficking among girls, it hardly represents the total number of girls actually involved. A separate report put out by the Indian government's Ministry of Women and Child Development put the number of female children in the sex industry at 300,000-500,000, "by conservative estimates." Putting a number to India's sex trade, though, is no easy task.

Nalini Andrade, a social worker with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Justice and Care, sheds some light on the issue. In her research, Andrade discovered that the number of cases reported each year is really a big question mark. This is because there are various NGOs working separately on different sex trafficking issues. When the government attempts to compile the information it often results in incomplete reports with data missing from several parts of the country. This only compounds a problem that is already difficult to categorize and pin down in terms of numbers.

A media backlash has ensued as a result of the Indian government's lack of action to resolve the issue. Reports accuse the government of a do-nothing attitude. National publications such as *The Times of India* newspaper and *Tehelka* magazine paint India as a hub for sex tourism. Profits from the tourism industry, they argue, have incentivized Indian ministers and politicians to turn a blind eye to the enormous crime of selling children into a life of sexual slavery and abuse.

Tania Spilchen, the founder of One! International Poverty Relief Fund, remains optimistic about the role the Indian government can play in eradicating abuses against children.

"The good news is that there is awareness, and it is growing," Spilchen says.

Spilchen, who has been teaching in the slums of Mumbai for eight years now, is betting on an initiative launched by *The Times of India* called "Teach India." The program, which stands in contrast to government policies, is aimed at educating underprivileged children by encouraging upper– and middle–class citizens to become volunteer teachers.

Spilchen believes the initiative has had the profound effect of placing greater responsibility on the country's upper class to help the impoverished. It also places an emphasis on education, which is an important piece in fighting child prostitution. There is a dire need for sex education in particular. This, Spilchen says, is a must if trafficking and prostitution are to be properly addressed.

Andrade agrees. "Sex is a big taboo in India. First there is denial of the problem, misconceptions on the issue, and then finding solutions."

The government hasn't been wholly unresponsive. In 1986, it amended the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA), which was a drastic improvement over previous legislation that existed for curbing prostitution.

The previous legislation "was horrifying," Andrade wrote in an email. "It held that these girls who were engaged in prostitution were criminals ... So the new ITPA now says they are victims and hold the traffickers, pimps, brothel owners as the criminals. This is a very important move and does signify that the government is showing sensitivity to the subject."

And yet, despite the government's gradual attempt at changing things for the better, adults and children — mainly women and girls — continue to sell their bodies to survive.

According to Renu, girls and women forced into prostitution choose not to leave it for two reasons: to maintain their livelihood and because they believe society will not accept them as anything else. Women, especially poor, uneducated women, have "no power to make decisions," Renu said. They want freedom and economic independence, which ties them to prostitution; they believe that at least through prostitution they can support themselves without having to depend on anyone else.

When the government attempts to compile the information it often results in incomplete reports with data missing from several parts of the country. This only compounds a problem that is already difficult to categorize and pin down in terms of numbers.

Kathy Ward is a professor of sociology and women's studies at the Southern Illinois University and founder of Nari Jibon an NGO that works with disenfranchised women in Bangladesh. During her excursions to Bangladesh, where she worked with sex workers, Ward noticed a general lack of acceptance of female prostitutes in society. She cites overarching patriarchy for the perpetuation of prostitution. Coupled with this, she found that the NGOs that were there to help women seemed to want nothing to do with sex workers.

Ward thinks this hesitance could have something to do with a "gag rule" around prostitution introduced by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Bush administration. The rule requires that American NGOs work toward minimizing AIDS by condemning prostitutes and not assisting groups associated with prostitution. If an NGO refuses to comply, USAID withdraws its financial support from that organization. As a result, many NGOs have had to redefine how they operate in order to ensure continued support from USAID.

Ward provides almost all of the funding for her organization so she's free to continue to work with women in the sex trade, but not all NGOs can be so lucky.

Another factor complicating the issues is superstition. One commonly held belief that pervades Indian society is that having sex with a virgin will cure a man of venereal

DEFINITIONS

TAI
The title givent to an older sister in the Indian language Marathi

EKALAVYA
A noble character in Indian mythology

NYASA
"Placing" or "fixing" in Sanskrit

disease. This practice has devastating consequences for the girls forced to "cure" men of their ailments. Grassroots organizations such as Ekalavya are attempting to eradicate these beliefs and are working toward providing an alternative future for disenfranchised children.

Omkar is one such child. Although not the child of a sex worker, Omkar lives in the poor neighbourhood close to the school with his parents and sibling. His father is an alcoholic who does not earn much. Omkar has lived in these conditions most his life. Now, thanks to people like Renu and places like Ekalavya Nyasa, he'll get an education that will give him a better chance of escaping the poverty that surrounds him.

When I spoke with Omkar during my visit to the school, he told me about a recent documentary he watched with his classmates. The film depicted the re-development of Japan after nuclear bombs destroyed two of their biggest cities. It made quite an impression on him. After explaining the gist of the documentary, he began drawing a comparison between the Indian and Japanese economies and pointed out the differences between the two countries in terms of development and success. He concluded by stating that the primary cause of India's stunted development is its ever-growing population. As I listened to him speak, I realized that he was not discouraged by India's troubles; he was attempting to uncover and understand his country's biggest problems so that he could have a hand in fixing them.

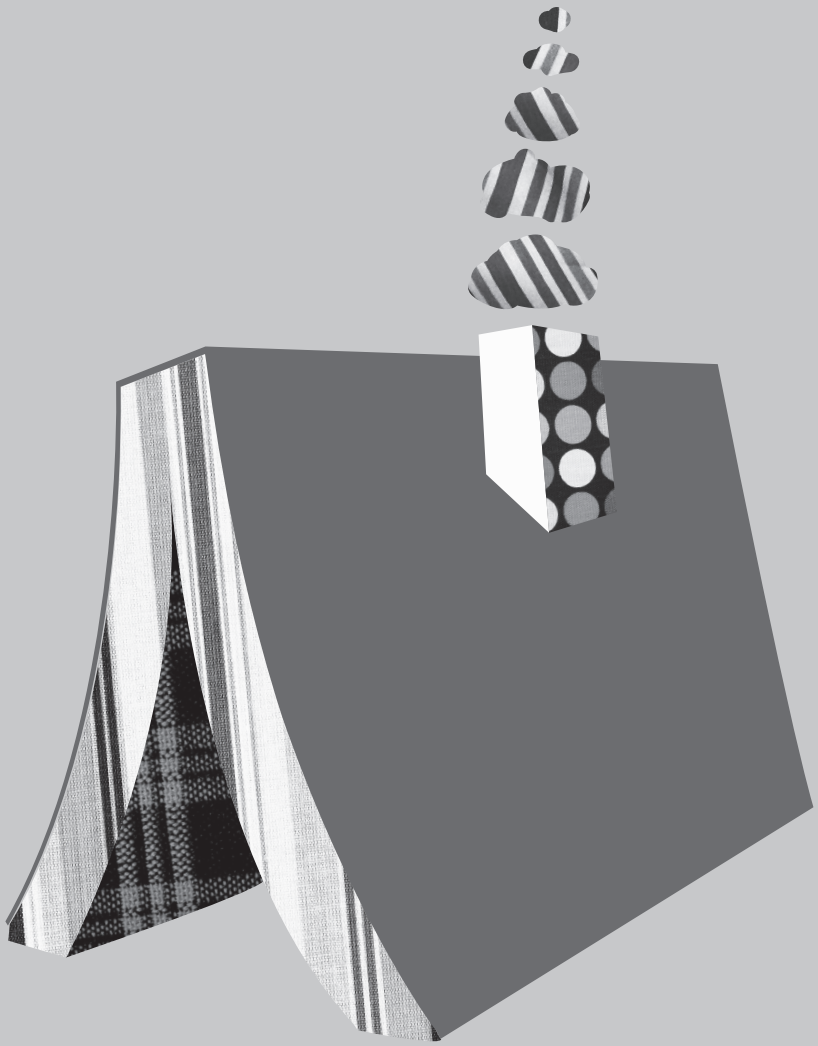
One commonly held belief that pervades Indian society is that having sex with a virgin will cure a man of venereal disease.

Kalpana Chandavarkar is a part-time English teacher at Ekalavya Nyasa. "[The students] are very eager to learn, very enthusiastic. They make an effort in whatever they do." Although the classes at Ekalavya are not structured — most of the teachers are volunteers who come in at odd times — the children are ready to learn whenever the teachers are willing to teach. With Chandavarkar, they merely want to practice enough English to get by.

Renu has a larger vision for her school-cum-community centre. She wishes to add grades 11 and 12 to the existing elementary and high school. Her long-term plans include a "mobile school" that will travel to distant areas, extending the reach of Ekalavya. She also envisions a boarding school with a capacity for 50 students. However, these are distant plans that will require more funding and even more volunteers — both of which are scarce.

Renu sees her female students as being more vulnerable to the forces of the sex trade than boys. There is a strong possibility that a street worker's daughter will resort to the same kind of work. Sons are more likely to become pimps than prostitutes. The fact that prostitution has become a family business showcases the true importance of the work undertaken by Renu and other volunteers at Ekalavya Nyasa.

The roots of prostitution lie in a complex web of poverty, patriarchy, corruption and ignorance. But, there is always hope: in children like Omkar, who are ready to acknowledge and shoulder difficult responsibilities; in women like Kalpana Chandavarkar, who will help these children become tomorrow's leaders, and in Renu, who envisions an alternative future. S



CAMPING FOR LITERACY

BY KAREN MOXLEY

A tent the size of a small cabin seemed starkly out of place in the quiet, carpeted entrance of the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Irving K. Barber library. Still, the tent remained there for ten days in January, home to two students determined overcome the 24-hour fluorescent light and all-night security guards in order to raise money for children's libraries in India.

"Books provide ideas," said Avneet Johal, one of the two student squatters. "When you read a book, you can travel as far as you want. You don't need anything apart from words on a piece of paper."

In co-operation with DREAM — a student–led organization established in 2006 at Queen's University — and under the Los Angeles–based charity Room to Read, this ten-day library stakeout is called Live-In for Literacy.

Literacy live-ins were held throughout January at universities across Canada, including Memorial University, University of Toronto, Concordia, McMaster, Queen's, Laurentian and UBC. The campaign aimed to raise $40,000 to build nine libraries in India.

Avneet Johal and Seiya Hayashi are the two UBC students who spent ten days eating, sleeping, showering and studying in the library.

"This project is about giving people in the developing world the opportunity and the resources to create something sustainable for themselves," Johal said.

The writing on the wall

The words "everyone has the right to education" were enshrined in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since that day, education has been a state obligation under international law. It is a key factor in people achieving their personal goals. It also ensures that people are equipped to defend and promote the rights and freedoms of themselves and others.

While the Indian government made significant improvements in literacy rates and access to education, many people, especially women and children, are left behind each year.

The 2002 All India Education Survey found that 35 million 6–14 year-olds did not attend school. A full 50 per cent of 6–18 year-olds did not go to school. Fifty-three per cent of girls aged 5–9 were illiterate. And of the girls who did make it into school, half dropped out by the time they were 12.

Access to libraries is important to these children who otherwise might not have access to reading materials provided in schools. Libraries can empower children by giving them free access to learning materials that lets them see beyond their immediate lives.

"In some cases, not a single book is available to children to encourage independent learning, intellectual curiosity and a lifelong passion for reading. Even when children have acquired the skills to read, many children do not have access to books to practice and enjoy these skills," said Room to Read representative Sonia Torres.

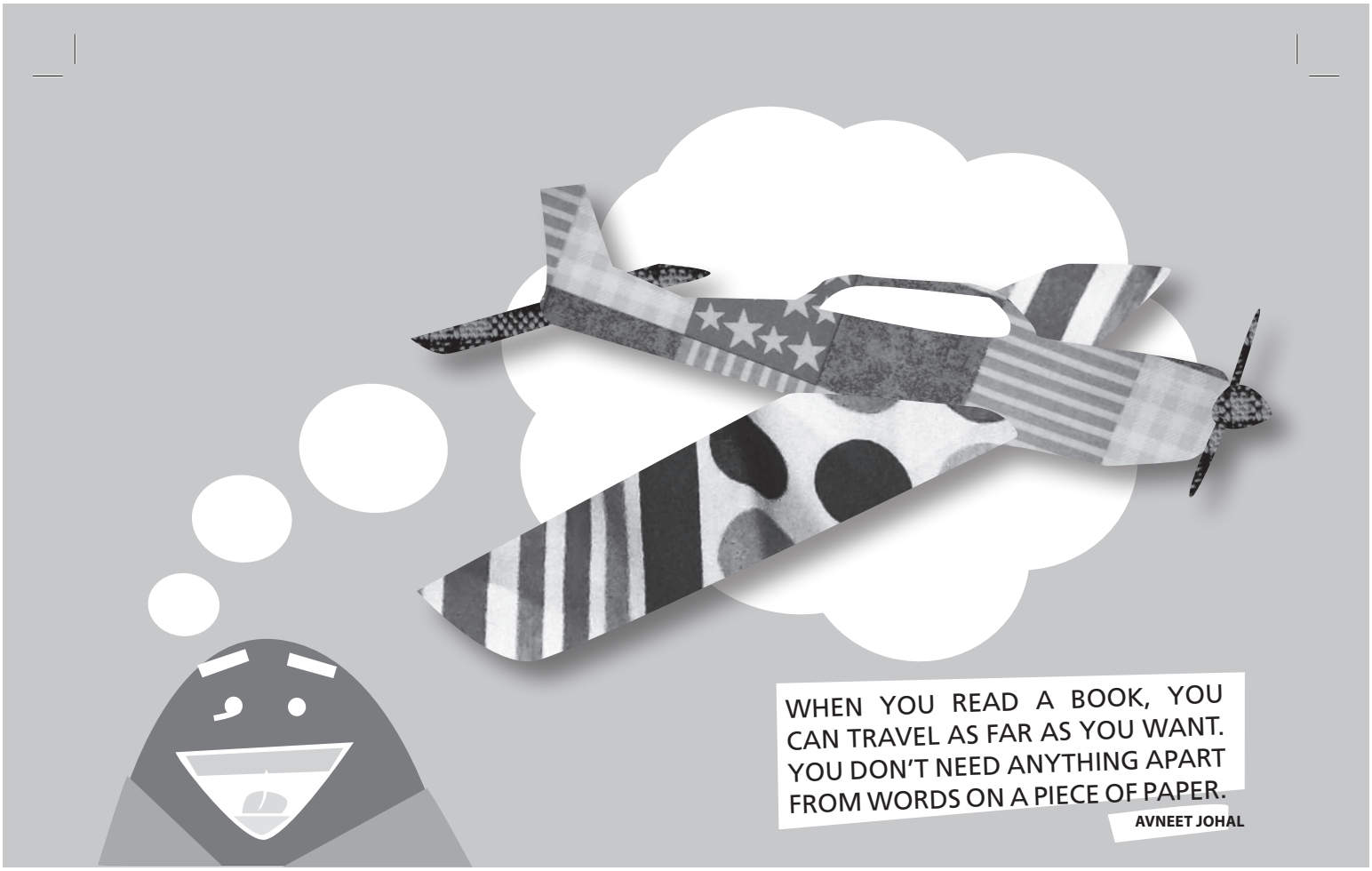
These trends continue into adulthood and affect a disproportionate amount of women. In the 2001 Indian Census, for example, only 47.8 per cent of women over the age of 15 could read and write compared to 73.4 per cent for males.

Dream big

The Toronto subway sparked the idea for the Live-in for Literacy event.

"I saw a sign on the subway in Toronto that said 'build a school in the developing world for $5,000.' I told my friend Alvin about it, and he said, 'Let's do it!'" recalls Joanna Sue, DREAM co-founder.

Sue, along with Alvin Shin, staged the first live-in at Queen's University in 2006. DREAM, which stands for Discover the Reality of Educating all Minds, teamed up with Room to Read to establish libraries, schools and computer labs in the developing world. Sue, now a graduate student at



Queen's, says DREAM is very much aligned with Room to Read's mandate.

"World change begins with educating children," Sue said. "Education is a means to change your current status. It's a mechanism through which people can help themselves out of poverty."

Room to Read encourages literacy development from a grassroots perspective. The charity builds schools and libraries and also works with local writers and publishers to fund the creation and development of new, local-language books. According to Torres, by the end of 2009 the organization will have established over 3,000 libraries in India and published over 70 local-language books.

"The first step toward the lifelong gift of education is putting a book in the hands of a child," Torres said. "Room to Read believes that literacy is a right and that every child has the right to an education. With an education, the possibilities for a child in the developing world are endless."

DREAM now operates the annual Live-In for Literacy event at universities across the country to raise money for literacy in the developing world.

Day in the life of a library-dweller

Back at the UBC library, Johal and Hayashi have to abide by the live-in's strict rules. They have to remain in the library 24/7 and only have five minutes out of each hour to leave their "campsite" for bathroom or other breaks.

"It's not easy missing classes and living in a roped-off area for 10 days," said John MacDonald, DREAM co-chair and a past library camper. "But it's a lot easier than the lives of the children we're helping; they don't have a library to read in, let alone live in. So with the help of Room to Read and all of Canada, we're building them nine."

Johal and Hayashi find sleeping on the ground one of the toughest things about library camping. Yet, there's lots of room to lounge in inside their massive, blue, 10–person tent. It has two entrances, one for each of the campers. Inside, their blue-tinted world is littered with sleeping bags, clothes and books.

As for meals, campfires are not permitted in the library, so the classic camping menu of hotdogs and s'mores is out. Instead, Johal and Hayashi rely on friends and "perfect strangers" to bring them food.

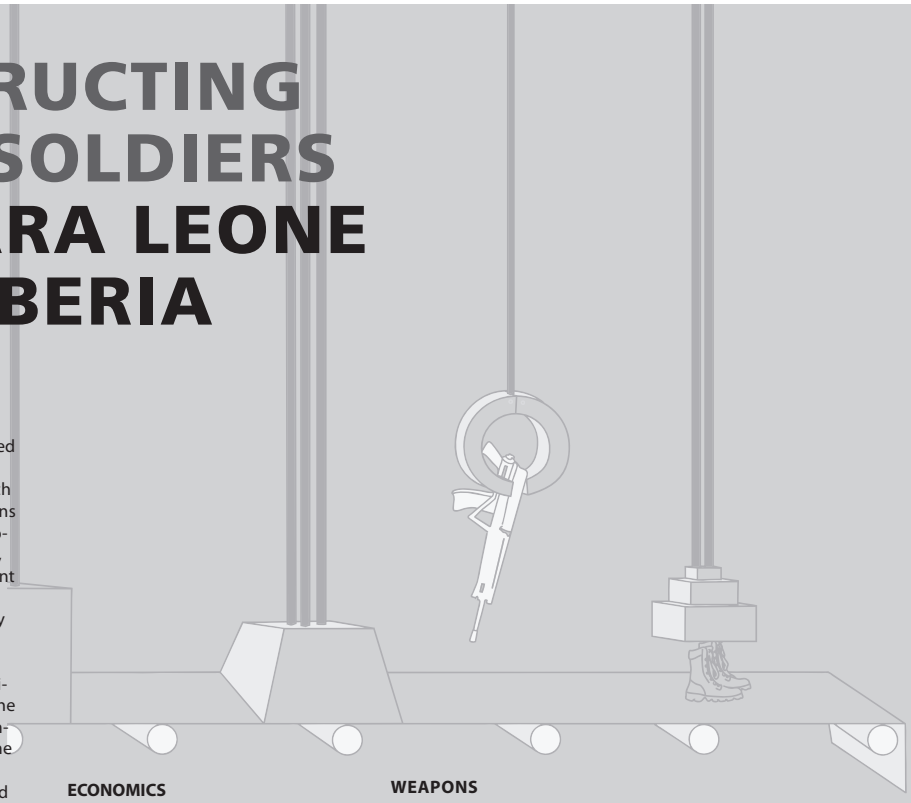
Peanut butter and jam sandwiches, subs, pizza and coffee are just some of the goodies being dropped off to the hungry campers. More importantly, students and staff have been emptying their pockets for the cause as they pass.

The boys will miss an entire week of school during their fundraising, but aren't concerned about falling behind. "My professors have been really supportive," Hayashi said, "and we're living in a Learning Centre, so I think I may actually end up ahead in some of my classes."

This year's live-ins raised $24,000, enough to build five children's libraries in India. The libraries will be filled with children's books written both in English and local languages. S

CONSTRUCTING CHILD SOLDIERS IN SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA

BY MARIKA MOTIWALLA



Liberia and its neighbour, Sierra Leone, both used child soldiers in armed conflict during their civil wars.

Civil war plagued Liberia for much of the last 25 years. In 1989, tensions culminated into a full-fledged revolutionary war led by Charles Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Fighting continued until 1995 when a peace treaty was signed and Taylor was elected president. However, the violence resumed four years later when anti-government groups broke out in the north. Taylor was accused by neighbouring countries of supporting the rebellion in Sierra Leone. Conflict ended in 2003 when Taylor stepped down and went into exile.

The civil war in Sierra Leone, which lasted from 1991-2002, was fought for economic reasons. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel movement led by Foday Sankoh (with the alleged support of Charles Taylor), took Sierra Leone by surprise in order to control the country's diamond supply. Although conflict has now ended, the country is still considered fragile.

Child soldiers come into play in conflicts such as these as the result of a complex set of factors. The obvious instigators in Sierra Leone and Liberia were the warring parties, but general instability in the region meant the children were already vulnerable to exploitive forces. Even without the regional wars, the children were at risk of entering illicit trades such as prostitution to provide a stable means of support.

From a military commander's perspective, child soldiers are attractive because they are perceived to be more obedient than adults, easy to manipulate and unquestioning of orders.

To eliminate the use of child soldiers we need to create effective deterrents to the people who would use them. For a more effective and lasting solution, however, we also need to address the economic and social conditions that make children vulnerable to these people who would use them.

ECONOMICS

• Poor economic conditions left many children without opportunities or options, ultimately driving them into the clutches of the military as they lacked any other means of subsistence or protection.

• Youth felt excluded from mainstream society and lost faith in the state's capacity to respond to and deal with their expectations.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

• Prior to the outbreak of violent conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia, parents and children were separated for various reasons; this left children without protection and they either voluntary joined armies to seek that protection from rebel armies or were coerced into soldiering because they had no other choices.

• Children became entrenched in exploitative networks such as the "wardship" (or foster case) system that often placed children into homes with poor domestic conditions.

• Thousands of children were abducted in village raids in the provinces by the RUF and similar numbers were "conscripted" into the civil forces.

WEAPONS

•The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region was a major factor in the recruiting child soldiers for violent conflicts. With the weapons, which require little training to operate, it becomes easy to efficiently arm a high number of children.

• Since the flow of weapons across borders and into Sierra Leone was so widespread and lucrative, the RUF were able arm children and transform them into disposable and cheap killing machines.

MOTIVATION

• Combat roles for child soldiers aren't restricted to combat on the front lines. Other tasks included spy missions, recruiting other child soldiers, and acting as human shields.

• In Sierra Leone, unit commanders would inject the younger boys with cocaine or slip gunpowder (which acts as a stimulant) into their food before going into battle.

• These acts, while blatant violations of children's rights, are extremely hard to monitor or deter.

The global number of child soldiers has grown significantly in the last two decades despite a series of protocols designed to curb this trend.

This number will continue to increase until international and local governments adopt broader easures to combat issues that include protecting a child's right to a stable means of survival.






Regent Park,






Toronto

Maintaining the Garden City

Canada's oldest social housing project creates obstacles for the youth of Toronto's inner city

BY ANDREW RUSK

The eastbound ride on the 506 Carlton streetcar is the best introduction to urban planning I could ever ask for. I get on at St. George, south of the posh griminess that is the University of Toronto (UofT), ride past the ultra-modern research buildings and office towers at University Avenue and begin to creep into Cabbagetown, a slightly rundown neighbourhood recently reclaimed by the city's hipsters. Each has a distinct style directly connected to when they were settled and with what purpose, all within fifteen minutes of each other. When I get to Parliament I take a right and then a left onto Gerrard and the storefronts are replaced by a grey commonality. Welcome to Regent Park.

Regent Park was built between 1948 and 1959 as part of a wave of public housing that emerged after the Second World War. Inspired by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement in the UK, the development aimed to create a social-housing complex in a park-like setting. The city tore up roads that previously ran through the east Toronto neighbourhood in favour of a series of walkways and parks. Today, Dundas Street, which divides the region into North and South, is the only road in the development.

Construction began in 1948 with the construction of three- and six-story townhouse complexes, with the first residents consisting of Toronto's working poor. Twenty per cent of residents were previous homeowners. When construction of the southern section began in the late 1950s, the selection of tenants focused more on their income levels. As a result, the residents of Regent Park South were in considerably rougher financial shape than the earlier residents.

Today, the development consists of 2083 social-housing units spread across 69 acres. Few families there earn more than $18,000 per year: less than one-third of national average. The neighbourhood is stigmatized, there are few businesses, few employment opportunities and not enough schools. While in the 1940s, developing the area into a garden city was seen as a revolutionary way to transform Toronto's slums into a vibrant community; those same efforts have helped create a situation that throws up barriers to its residents' — particularly its young students — long-term success. For all their good intentions, Regent

For all their good intentions, Regent Park's original planners have worsened the problems they sought to address.

Park's original planners have worsened the problems they sought to address. Today, community members and outside groups are left with the challenge of revitalizing the neighbourhood without repeating past mistakes.

Thirty-five per cent of Regent Park's population is comprised of school-aged children (5–19), compared to 17.5 per cent for the City of Toronto average. In spite of this, there is only one school in the development that serves kids past Grade 6. Nelson Mandela Park Public School is a composite school of 500 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8. Seventy per cent of the school's students speak a primary language other than English at home, a situation that, when combined with the realities of the inner city, creates a unique set of challenges for educators.

Regent Park/Duke of York Junior Public School (junior kindergarten to grade 6) also serves Regent Park South.

"When you work with kids in the inner city you need particular understanding about what their lives at home and their lives on the street are like," comments Deborah Gladstone, a teacher at Nelson Mandela. "It is important to reach out to the community so that students are interested and willing to contribute."

Nelson Mandela Park is a designated model school by the Toronto District School Board. What that means is that the board provides the school with the tools, resources and opportunities to support the diverse needs of its students. It allows a social worker and psychologist to work at the school full time, English language and vocational instruction for immigrant parents, and clubs that provide students with a wide variety of opportunities, from producing a school paper, podcasting or joining the debate team.

The neighbourhood's park setting, which cuts off any traffic that would pass through, means gang violence can go about fairly undeterred after dark. On December 23, 2007, there was a shooting steps from Nelson Mandela's playground, further complicating the issues the school faces.

"Parents often worry about the safety of children walking home alone, even if it is a short distance," says Giorgio Traini, a UofT student who's worked in the area. "Many students can't participate in activities after school." For students who are allowed to participate, parents or older students are often required to walk them home afterward.

Traini was part of a program created by the Centre for Community Partnerships, a department at the university focused on connecting academic courses with projects in the community. At Nelson Mandela, UofT students assist by tutoring individual students, helping with teacher prep, or, in Traini's case, coaching an afterschool debate club. These programs offer educators extra assistance with courses and help target high student-teacher ratios. A coordinator at the school monitors the initiative, all of which is made possible as a result of the Model Schools Program.

The neighbourhood's park setting means gang violence can go about fairly undeterred after dark. On December 23, 2007, there was a shooting steps from Nelson Mandela's playground.

Once students graduate from Nelson Mandela Park they face another set of problems. "There is not a neighbourhood high school," Gladstone says. "Kids are required to leave the community. It is a difficult transition."

The Regent Park Community Health Centre founded the Pathways to Education Program in 2001 to address this problem. The program helps ease the transition to secondary and post-secondary education. It provides tutors four nights a week in five subject, mentors who give career advice, support and counselling for parents and students, and a scholarship of up to $4000 for those who participate. As of June 2008, Pathways claims to have reduced the drop-out rate in Regent Park from 56 per cent to 10 per cent and increased participation in post-secondary programs from 20 per cent to 80 per cent.

While social programming has assisted at-risk youth, more long-term solutions lie in changing the foundation of Regent Park itself. In 2002, Toronto Community Housing recognized this by launching the Regent Park Revitalization project, which over a 12-year period plans to transform the Park into 5,115 mixed-income units (compared to the 2083 currently on site), creating a community that reflects a typical Toronto neighbourhood. The development will reopen all the original streets in the area while also creating additional streets to open up traffic. They're also integrating additional storefronts in the neighbourhood, which will provide residents with more services within walking distance.

Planning for the second phase (of six) is accelerating in 2009. It could do a lot for the neighbourhood, but there is some resentment from residents. Some will need to relocate when their buildings are being redeveloped. This will impact youth in particular, many of whom were born in the park.

"Kids see Regent Park differently — for them it is home and while they have quite open eyes about the poverty and violence and the day-to-day difficulties, they talk about it matter-of-factly without a lot of laden language," Gladstone points out. "Many students feel nostalgic already about the old neighbourhood. They worry it won't be home. "

Phase one, which was originally scheduled to finish in 2008, has already been delayed two years. This only worsens apprehension. The question also lingers as to whether rebuilding the area will ameliorate its problems. One of the main struggles youth face is transitioning between elementary and high schools, which takes them out of the neighbourhood for classes. There are currently no provisions in the revitalization plan to address this.

A region restricted by its architecture, Regent Park raises obstacles for youth trying to develop and integrate into the greater community. Amidst these struggles, however, Gladstone offers a suggestion to look beyond the stigma too often associated with the community: "At the end of the day, kids at Regent Park remain just that: kids." S

To free the children, education is key

Craig Kielburger's been fighting for children since he was a child himself

BY KATIE HYSLOP

Twelve-year-old Craig Kielburger was looking for the newspaper funnies when he came across an article about Iqbal Masih, a human rights activist and former slave from Pakistan.

"When he was four years old he was sold into slavery to weave carpets. He escaped when he was 10 and he started travelling first in Pakistan, and then quite literally around the world, speaking out against child labour," Kielburger said. "And he was killed at the age of 12."

Inspired by Masih's work, Kielburger brought the story to his Grade 7 class and asked who wanted to help him in putting an end to child labour. Eleven classmates put up their hands, and the precursor to Free the Children was born.

The group led talks on child labour at local schools and was often asked by students if they had ever seen child labour first-hand. The question came so often that Kielburger was determined to backpack through Asia to see child exploitation for himself.

"I managed to convince my parents. It took about eight months for them to say yes and with a chaperone, [I] went travelling through India, and Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Thailand, and Nepal, documenting the lives of these kids, just with a hand-held video camera, and taking photos and capturing their stories and bringing them back to kids here." Part-way through his trek, Kielburger turned 13.

When the budding child's rights activist returned to Canada, the media took interest in his story and Free the Children took off.

"There are always groups appealing to college campuses or university campuses. There are very few that would help if you were a middle school student or an elementary school student or a high school student and wanted to do more than just raise money—wanted to really get socially involved in issues and wanted to have a youth-led series of campaigns."

Flash forward 14 years and Free the Children has built 500 primary schools, created 27,000 microcredit cooperatives for women, and begun clean water and medical programs for over half a million people in 45 countries.

Free the Children has 1.2 million members, with chapters in over 3,200 North American schools. Educating children on this continent is just as important to Kielburger as helping impoverished kids overseas.

"It's part of our mandate to have two levels; one is freeing children in North America from the idea that they're too young to make a difference, powerless to influence change," he said. "And the other is freeing kids overseas from child labour, poverty, exploitation."

Kielburger and his teams work to educate children in the west about becoming global citizens, conscious of the clothes they buy, books they read, music they listen to and politicians they will one day vote for.

Free the Children also aims to educate kids in developing countries, working with communities to ensure their needs are met in a sustainable fashion so they can take over the projects begun by the organization.

Fourteen years is a long time to devote yourself to one project. Kielburger, now 26, is still passionate about his work, but there are other things he'd like to accomplish.

He's currently working on his masters in business administration and would like to get his PhD in peace and conflict studies.

"I know this type of work is what I want to be doing; I don't know [in] what capacity," he said. "Truth [is], I always wanted to be a university professor."

It's hard to get completely away from Free the Children, however. All of the 11 other students who helped start the project are still working in the field. "Everyone stayed involved in human rights in some way, or social justice," he said, adding a couple is still involved with the organization. "Once you got the bug, once you got bitten, it never went away."

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