



STANDARD
OPERATING
PROCEDURES

Street Outreach

About Retrak

Across the world, there are hundreds of thousands of children living on the streets. Every day they suffer hunger, poverty, abuse and violence. Retrak is a charity which reaches out to these vulnerable children to provide them with the food, medicine, clothing, hygiene and shelter which they desperately need. Beyond this, Retrak works hard to tackle the reasons why children end up on the streets - this means helping families to heal rifts, enabling children to complete their education or gain a vocational qualification and providing children and parents with the means to earn a sustainable income. This long-term approach helps to make sure that children never have to go back to living on the street, and it works; to date more than three-quarters of the children helped by Retrak have chosen to go home, and remain home with their families.

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A. Introduction

Children on the streets

Understanding children who are living and working on the streets¹ is essential to providing interventions that will enable them to gain the most from their lives. These children should not be invisible; they are not commodities to be exploited and abused. Every child is unique and has the right to protection, to learn, grow and develop and to be happy and healthy. They should be listened to and encouraged to speak and act. Most importantly these children have a right to be children, to be safe, to laugh, play and explore the world and to dream about their future.

Every child on the streets has their own reason for being there. Retrak's research shows that the majority are pushed to street life by a combination of factors such as poverty, emotional and physical abuse, HIV/AIDS, neglect and family breakdown.

Life on the streets is extremely hard and fraught with dangers. Without the protection of their family or community, children have to earn money by scavenging through rubbish or carrying bags in markets or stations. Children sleep on dusty roads, in abandoned buildings or even in sewers and drains. They are forced to eat scraps of discarded food and live with disease and addiction because they are denied medical treatment. They are vulnerable to abuse (physically, sexually and emotionally) and often endure wrongful imprisonment. Children on the streets are branded as thieves and worthless criminals and as a result are marginalised and discriminated against.

Yet street life also holds the attraction of freedom and independence. Children who have lived and worked on the streets are often very resilient; many find innovative ways of surviving, build up strong peer networks and quickly develop the skills and behaviour to protect themselves and survive. Even when offered a chance to move away from



¹ In this document Retrak is using the phrase 'children on the streets' to refer to children who live and sleep on the street, or participate in street life for most of the day (see section D for definitions of key terms). We acknowledge that many terms linked to children on the streets have different meanings in different locations and for different stakeholders.

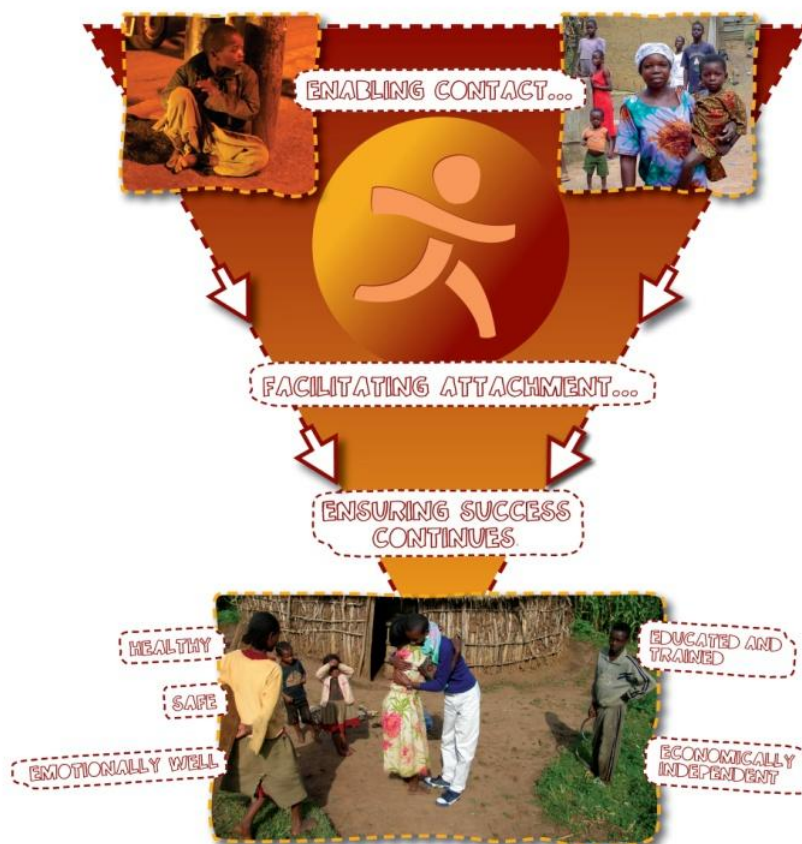
street life, many children return to the street which has become their home, support and protection. They are pulled to the freedom of the streets and struggle to adapt to the routine and responsibility of family life.

Whilst Retrak respects this choice, we firmly believe that no child should be forced to live on the streets simply because there is no alternative. Retrak’s programmes offer children real alternatives to life on the streets.

Retrak’s Model

Retrak’s Model² aims to successfully return children to safe homes in families and communities, where each child feels a sense of belonging through a secure attachment to caring adults. This might be with their own biological family, or in foster care, or in supported independent living. Their journeys are often long, and the destination will be influenced by each child’s and family’s starting point, and as a result makes each route unique. Retrak also recognises that these journeys can often be prolonged and irregular, therefore requiring a long-term and flexible commitment on our part.

For **children**, the journey with Retrak begins through outreach while they are still on the streets. Retrak goes to their spaces on the street to build trusting relationships. The next step is to help them to overcome any barriers to (re)forming an attachment with a caring adult. This involves actively dealing with past



² Retrak (2011), *Retrak’s model: journeying together*, Manchester, Retrak

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experiences, identifying strengths and resources and exploring future choices. There are many ways to do this, and often a combination of play, health care, education and counselling is most effective. New attachments may come through family reintegration, foster care or independently with support in a community. The key to any placement is that the child is able to form a strong sense of belonging in a family or community setting where they are safe and protected. The journey does not stop here, Retrak ensures success continues through follow-up contact and reviews of their situation; ensuring that every child and care-giver will be able to keep moving forward without Retrak's support.

Success depends equally on **families and communities** also coming on a journey. This begins by making contact through home visits and community activities. Retrak traces relatives but also actively recruits and trains foster carers and community mentors who can come alongside children who do not have relatives able to act as their care-givers. Retrak works alongside each care-giver, through training and resourcing, so that they can build healthier environments that nurture and support children. Retrak ensures success continues through follow-up and care for each child, their siblings, care-givers and the whole household, as well as involving the wider community to provide support.

No child's journey happens in isolation. In order to give each child and family the best chance for success, Retrak is working with key **national and international stakeholders** to create an enabling and positive environment. Building upon international frameworks, such as the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,³ Retrak aims to ensure that the needs of children on the streets are on the agenda so that adequate support is given to them and their families and communities, and that future generations of children are not drawn to the streets.

Retrak's SOPs

Retrak has developed its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in order to:

- Ensure all children, families and communities within Retrak's projects receive the same quality standard of care;
- Capture the way Retrak works in an easy reference document, useful to Retrak's projects and partners, including in the design of new interventions;
- Influence the wider street practitioner community and improve the quality of care available to all children.

Each set of SOPs has been developed by a team of practitioners from within Retrak's projects, who together have many years of experience of working alongside children on the streets and their families. Each set of SOPs draws on relevant international policy and research in relevant fields.

Retrak's SOPs aim to provide a simple reference document containing detailed, step-by-step explanations on how to undertake a programme, in order to ensure a quality of care for the children and family involved. They are a guiding document, including principles which are universally applicable. The step-by-step

³ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Resolution 44/25 (20 November 1989) New York, United Nations; UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, A/Res/64/142 (24 February 2010) New York, United Nations

explanations should be contextualised for each location, situation and individual child and family, whilst ensuring they remain in line with the principles.

We hope that those working directly with children on the streets, as well as policy makers and donors, will find these SOPs a useful tool.

Retrak's SOPs include:

- Guiding principles: to provide an overarching framework for the activities
- Definitions of key terms
- Key steps, including:
 - Aims
 - Activities
 - Outcomes
 - Good practice principles
 - Tools
- Tools, including links to case management and monitoring documents and further information on specific activities

While every SOPs outlines the key steps which form the basis of a standard route through a programme, it should be recognised that since each child and family is unique the actual implementation of these programmes require staff to be flexible and to make adjustments based on the needs and desires of the individuals involved. Common variations on the key steps outlined are included, both within each step and at the end of the section.



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B. Outreach

Retrak has placed a central importance on outreach to children on the streets since it began as Tigers FC in Kampala almost 20 years ago. At that time the creation of a football club was an easy way to gather children together in order to get to know them and build trusting relationships.

Since then Retrak in Uganda has developed a range of outreach activities, still including football, along with meals, medical clinics, HIV peer education and street visits. In Ethiopia, the large numbers of children led to a focus on street visits and specifically targeting the area of Addis Ababa where many children were known to hang out. Work in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi has also emphasised the importance of reaching children whilst they are on the streets in a way that is appropriate to that context. In all these countries outreach activities provide a means to build positive relationships with children, with the aim of enabling them to be safer on the streets and creating ways in to



further services. Whilst Retrak respects children's choice to be on the street, we firmly believe that no child should be forced to live on the streets simply because there is no alternative. We know that outreach is vital in opening up new choices for children on the streets.

Through projects and partners, Retrak's outreach workers meet with around 3,000 children on the streets of Africa each year. The majority of these children have voluntarily gone on to receive further services at the transitional centres.

Retrak's model emphasises that every child's journey is unique and can be long, irregular and complex. Every child we work with has experienced a range of challenges in their lives, including one or more broken relationships both at home and on the streets. These experiences mean that many children have learnt that adults cannot be trusted or relied on. For many, the street has become their home and their peers on the streets have become their family.

This understanding of these children's background and experiences necessitates a specific approach to outreach if it is to succeed in building trusting relationships with children on the streets which enable them to be safer on the streets and open up further services to them. This approach must reflect:

- A recognition of **children’s experiences of broken relationships** and their tendency not to trust adults. This means that outreach workers must ensure that children feel valued and offer them a consistent, non-judgemental and reliable relationship with a caring adult. Achieving this requires a lot of patience and time, meaning that outreach is rarely a quick fix activity.
- An understanding of **the importance of street life and peer relationships to children**. Outreach activities must be designed to respect the people, spaces, schedule and activities that are part of a child’s daily life on the streets. Children must be recognised as independent social actors who cannot be forced into change, but need to be given time and choices.

This approach, together with the principles outlined below, is central to effective outreach. Children must be at the centre of outreach; able to actively participate in flexible activities which aim first and foremost to build mutually trusting and respectful relationships. Outreach relies on warm and engaging workers, who are skilled in listening and reflection, and who genuinely respect and care for the children they work with. This empowers children and allows them to freely move forward to make positive choices about their future.



C. Guiding Principles

Retrak has experienced the importance of basing SOPs on clear principles which provide the foundations on which our approach is built and link directly to good practice. Principles guide our work and create a basis to return to when there is a need to make difficult decisions and judgement calls.

There is no international guidance on outreach work with homeless children, but a broad review of relevant literature does highlight some clear principles. In particular, Retrak draws on child rights and attachment theory, which are central to Retrak's model of work, as well as learning from international youth work theory and practice and research into outreach with other hard to reach population groups.

The principles presented are closely linked and in some cases overlap. They build on and reinforce each other and should not be treated as separate elements.

Following a rights-based approach

As set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children are entitled to certain rights, this includes children on the streets.⁴ These children are not problems to be solved or helpless victims who can do nothing for themselves; they are active agents in their own lives. They bring their own strengths and capabilities which they can use and develop if they are given the chance to participate and for their voice to be heard.⁵ Children have the right to chose a life on the streets, and for many it is a better option than staying at home; but every child also has the right to a positive alternative and should not be forced to stay on the streets because that alternative does not exist or cannot be accessed.

Outreach work must be child centred, with the power balance tipped in their favour. Any child-adult relationship naturally has power in the adults' hands, but to value a child's own agency means allowing them to set the agenda and to engage voluntarily.⁶ It also means an acknowledgement of the strengths each child brings, and an aim to support them to develop themselves and to assist them to make their own

Retrak's guiding principles for outreach

1. Following a rights-based approach
2. Understanding each child and his/her situation
3. Building relationships
4. Being flexible
5. Building in reflection
6. Ensuring staff care and protection

⁴ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, op cit

⁵ Connolly, JA & LE Joly (2012) 'Outreach with street-involved youth: A quantitative and qualitative review of the literature', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32, pp524-534; McEvoy, D, S Morgan, S McCreedy, J Bennett and P Heany (2013) 'Working with Street-Connected Children: A Training Model for Street Work Practice', *Practice: Social Work in Action*, 25(4), pp233-250; UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Rights of the child: a holistic approach to the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children Working and/or Living on the Streets*, A/HRC/16/L.13 (18 March 2011) New York, United Nations

⁶ Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond (2010) 'Building Relationships through Effective Interpersonal Engagement-A Training Model for Youth workers' *Youth Studies Ireland*, 5(2) pp25-38;

decisions for the future.⁷ Working in this way leads to children feeling empowered and gaining self-worth: without this there will be no long-term change.⁸

Understanding each child and his/her situation

An integral part of the rights-based approach is respecting each child and cultivating an appreciation of their situation. We must begin by trying to understand where they are at: their issues and interests, their potential and aspirations.⁹ Moving forward will only be possible if we start from where they are.

Empathy and curiosity are key tools for an outreach worker. By taking time to talk to and interact with children, outreach workers will come to understand their individual experiences and choices, as well as their culture and society, and how it differs from that of other children or homeless groups.¹⁰ Curiosity and empathy are non-judgemental, they are based on a genuine wish to understand the child's experiences, thoughts, feelings and perspectives, setting aside assumptions and solutions.¹¹ When a child feels fully understood and accepted s/he will feel empowered and will be more likely to engage.¹²

Building relationships

Building trusting relationships is essential, and at the heart of effective outreach work.¹³ At the beginning of reaching out to children it is all that we have to offer, but it can become the gate to further interaction.¹⁴

Every child has the right to and the need for a trustworthy adult in their lives and yet the experience of most children on the streets will be a series of broken and possibly abusive relationships with adults, often the very adults who should have been their main carers.¹⁵ These broken attachments mean that outreach workers have to offer something different in a consistent manner in order to overcome past negative experiences, all of which can take a long time.¹⁶ Outreach workers must model positive attachment being reliable and showing that they are thinking about and understanding the child.¹⁷ They must be warm and engaging, being there isn't enough; they must listen non-judgmentally, value and care for the child and

⁷ Davies, B (2010) 'What do we mean by youth work?' in J Batsleer and D Bernard (Eds) *What is Youth Work?*, Exeter, Learning Matters Ltd; McEvoy, D et al, op cit

⁸ Connolly, JA & LE Joly, op cit; Kidd, SA, S Miner, D Walker & L Davidson (2007) 'Stories of working with homeless youth: On being "mind-boggling"', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, pp16–34.

⁹ Davies, B, op cit; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith (2005) *Informal Education: Conversation, Democracy and Learning*, 3rd Ed, Nottingham, Education Heretics

¹⁰ Connolly, JA & LE Joly, op cit; Kidd, SA et al, op cit

¹¹ Golding, KS & DA Hughes (2012) *Creating Loving Attachments: parenting with PACE to nurture confidence and security in the troubled child*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers; Kidd, SA et al op cit

¹² Golding, KS & DA Hughes, et al; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit

¹³ Connolly, JA & LE Joly, op cit; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit; Kidd, SA et al op cit; McEvoy, D et al, op cit

¹⁴ Crimmens, D, F Factor, T Jeffs, J Pitts, C Pugh, J Spence & P Turner (2004) *Reaching Socially Excluded Young People: a national study of street-based youth work*, Leicester, National Youth Agency

¹⁵ Ford, CL, WC Miller, M Smurzynski & PA Leone (2007) 'Key components of a theory-guided HIV prevention outreach model: Pre-outreach preparation, community assessment, and a network of key informants', *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 19(2), pp173–186; McEvoy, D et al, op cit; Retrak, op cit

¹⁶ Kidd, SA et al, op cit

¹⁷ Retrak, op cit; Safe Families Safe Children (2011) *Breaking the cycle of violence – building a future for the most excluded*, Safe Families Safe Children coalition

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respect the child's strengths, skills and choices.¹⁸ Relationships must be built within clear parameters, to protect the child and outreach worker, and avoid raising expectations or making false promises.

Trust takes a long time to develop, especially given the past betrayals and current dangers. Trust must be earned through showing reliability and respect, and maintaining confidentiality. When trust-worthiness is demonstrated it is a big draw to children and provides security for them to openly communicate, develop hope and engage further.¹⁹

Being flexible

The focus on child participation and beginning from where the child is at means that outreach work must be flexible. It is important that outreach workers are able to respond to each child's situation and needs, and have the flexibility to deal with the unexpected.²⁰ Adapting methods and goals "requires the worker to develop and utilize a considerable degree of versatility—being able to flexibly draw from a repertoire of skills and tools that suit the [child] and their situation."²¹

Building in reflection

Since outreach work is about building relationships with and being flexible and responsive to a diversity of children, building in time for reflection is key. The unpredictable nature of outreach work means no one will get it right all of the time.²² What is important is developing the skills of self-reflection and self-awareness in order to keep learning and maintaining responsiveness. Outreach workers should be raising questions about what they do before, during and after every activity.²³ Even with heavy workloads, it is important to allow time for adequate planning and familiarisation with the context and characteristics before work begins, as well as to have the space to reflect on activities afterwards and share and process experiences with a network of fellow workers and 'critical friends'.²⁴



¹⁸ Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith, op cit; Kidd, SA et al, op cit; Safe Families Safe Children, op cit

¹⁹ Connolly, JA & LE Joly, op cit; Davies, B, op cit; Kidd, SA et al, op cit

²⁰ Crimmens, D et al, op cit; Connolly, JA & LE Joly, op cit; McEvoy, D et al, op cit

²¹ Kidd, SA et al, op cit, p18

²² Davies, B, op cit

²³ Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith, op cit

²⁴ Davies, B, op cit; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit; Jeffs, T, and MK Smith, op cit; Kidd, SA et al, op cit; McEvoy, D et al, op cit

Ensuring staff care and protection

At its heart outreach work is about people: children and outreach workers. The central role of relationship building means outreach workers invest themselves heavily in the work: their time, energy, care, compassion and trust.²⁵ Maintaining patience and perseverance can be hard. Outreach workers need to be supported to be realistic about the challenges of outreach work and the change in children, which can take time and cannot be forced. Support from co-workers, as part of reflection and sharing, can serve this purpose and should be accompanied by good supervision from line managers.²⁶ This support includes helping outreach workers to establish boundaries, so they are able to step away from their work when necessary.²⁷ Staff care also extends to an awareness of and assessment of the risks of working on the streets, along with appropriate health and safety procedures, contingency plans and exit strategies.²⁸

Woven through these six principles is the importance of outreach workers. If child-centred relationship building is to be at the heart of outreach work, then recruiting, equipping and caring for outreach workers is essential. Outreach workers must have certain knowledge, skills and behaviour.²⁹ These include:

Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the importance of attachment theory to relationship building with children on the streets • Understanding the principles of child participation, child protection, best interests of the child, non-discrimination and multi-disciplinary teamwork covering the holistic needs of the child. • Understanding the culture on the streets in outreach locations and how to adapt to this culture
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to listen to children’s views and opinions and understand the significance children are attaching to the events in their past and their hopes for the future • Being able to adapt to the language and behaviour of the streets
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an open attitude and being non-judgemental of the circumstances that are found on the streets and the information that children give • Offering appropriate care and attention to children • Respecting street children’s skills and strengths • Being patient and having the persistence to overcome challenges, even when it take time to see change • Ensuring appearance and body language builds trust and engages children

²⁵ Ford, CL et al, op cit; Henry, P, S Morgan & M Hammond, op cit; Kidd, SA et al, op cit

²⁶ Kidd, SA et al, op cit

²⁷ Crimmens, D et al, op cit

²⁸ McEvoy, D et al, op cit

²⁹ This report by an outreach worker in Tanzania offers a personal insight into the combination of knowledge, skills and behaviour that are needed: Elias, F (2009) *Think Piece: The passion of Street Work*, Arusha, Mkombozi

D. Key terms

Many of the concepts used within this document are still debated and often used in different ways. The following list contains Retrak's working definitions for the key terms within this SOP in order to ensure clarity of communication.

Key concepts

- **Attachment:** A bond or tie between an individual and an attachment figure...based on the need for safety, security and protection.³⁰
- **Alternative care:** Care of children in a family environment, but not with their parents or legal caregivers, including: kinship care, foster care, family-like care, supervised independent living.³¹

People and institutions

- **Children on the streets:** Children and young people (under the age of 18 years) who live and sleep on the street (including roads, markets, stations and other open spaces), or participate in street life for most of the day. Often they do not have homes to go to because their family ties are not fully functional. The streets are their home, their school and their work place.
- **Family:** Relatives of a child, including both immediate family (mother, father, step-parents, siblings, grandparents) and extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins and clan/village members).
- **Community:** Individual or groups of people and institutions (formal and informal) in the location around a child. Such institutions include: government organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community based organisations (CBOs), faith based organisations (FBOs), and health and education institutions.
- **Stakeholders:** Any person or institution which has a role to play or an interest in the life of the child, including: family, community, governmental and non-governmental organisations, community based organisations (CBOs), faith based organisations (FBOs), and education and health facilities; all of whom could potentially work together with Retrak.

Interventions

- **Outreach:** Activities designed to connect with children living and working on the streets and build mutually trusting and respectful relationships between outreach workers with the aim of enabling them to be safer on the streets and creating ways into wider services.
- **Overnight shelter:** A safe place where children can sleep overnight to gain shelter and protection from life on the streets. It should offer a warm reception, a meal, simple bedding, a place to wash and a latrine.
- **Drop-in centre:** A centre which is open to children still living on the streets or in process of moving away from street life.

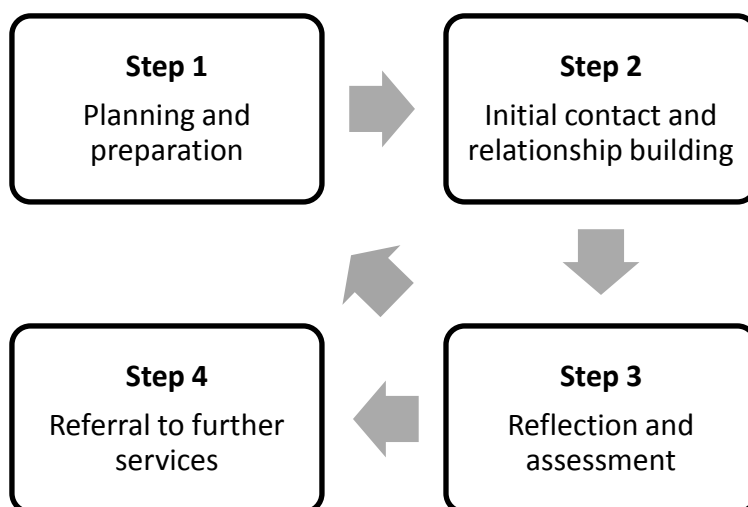
³⁰ Prior, V and D Glaser (2006), *Understanding attachment and attachment disorders: theory, evidence, and practice*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

³¹ UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, op cit, paragraphs 26 to 29

E. Key steps

The aim of outreach is to get to know children on the streets and begin to build trusting relationships between outreach workers and children. The purpose of building these relationships is to enable children to be safer on the streets and open up further services which could lead them to a safe and real alternative to life on the street.

The process of outreach is broken down into these key steps, each of which has a definite aim and outcome and often multiple activities within. These steps are explored in more depth in the following sections.



Timeframe

Retrak is passionate that every child should be allowed to progress through our programmes in a way that is appropriate for them, without strict time limitations. Therefore it is hard to give precise timeframes for the activities that are outlined in this SOP. Retrak's experience suggests that some children will move forward with Retrak after one contact on the streets, for others it may take months or even years. Retrak aims to invite children into transitional care as quickly as possible and for their stay to be less than 6 months. However, this length of stay must balance the risks on the streets and risks of long-term institutional care.

Step 1. Planning and preparation



To plan and prepare for an outreach activity in order to achieve outreach purpose, target specific children on the streets and ensure the safety of all participants.

Effective outreach must start from where the children are at and must be flexible. This requires good planning and solid understanding of context and environment in which outreach will happen.

Initial planning should determine:

- Purpose of the outreach activity
- Target group
- Available outreach workers, time and resources
- Risks and ways to mitigate them (see more on safety below)

It is then important to consider factors related to people, process and context.

1.1. People factors

Match activities and people: Outreach workers are the key to effective outreach activities since relationship building is the main goal. Therefore recruiting capable outreach workers, in line with the knowledge, skills and behaviours above (p11) is essential. As outreach workers become more experienced activities can be planned to build on the relationships they have already built, so that there is continuity with the children which will promote trust and respect. The need for an outreach worker to follow-up on a certain child or group of children may influence the choice of activity.

Safety: It should be recognised that when outreach workers enter into children's domains on the street it can be hazardous, especially if their intentions are misunderstood by the children or if other conflicts occur during an outreach activity. Therefore outreach activities should always be undertaken by two outreach workers together, and they should avoid putting themselves in risky situations or remove themselves as soon as possible if a situation becomes more risky. Outreach workers should ensure they:

- Carry IDs and letters of permission from police or appropriate local authorities (see more below)
- Establish an emergency code: if a worker feels threatened this can be communicated easily without further inflaming a situation or damaging the relationship with the children. For instance, staff could make eye contact, tap the other staff member on the arm, verbally say "we have to go". This can be done subtly so that the children are not offended.
- Have an emergency contact to call for assistance: this could include both a member of staff as well as emergency services. If public medical or security assistance is unreliable it may be necessary to contract a private body.
- Have a means of communications: mobile phone with emergency numbers already entered.
- Have pre-arranged schedule and transportation: this is especially important at night time and if public transport shuts down before an outreach activity is likely to be finished. Staff should check in with their supervisor or a colleague at the agreed start and finish of activities.

- Do not carry any valuables: this can put them at risk of thieves.
- Dress in a manner which will help them connect with children and not make themselves a target for unwanted attention. When working directly on or around roads and highways, high-visibility jackets should be worn.

1.2. Process factors

Type of activity: There is a huge variety in the type of activities which can be used during outreach (see step 2). The activity chosen should match both the interests and needs of the target group of children and the skills of the outreach worker.

Location: It is also important to have a good understanding of where children congregate and which groups of children prefer which areas. For instance, in Addis Ababa it is known that most children living full-time on the streets stay around the bus station and main market area. But locations often change, depending on the weather or events such as police round-ups. It is the children themselves who are the best guides to locating other children in need. Section 1.4 outlines a suggested way of mapping street locations with children.

Timing: Outreach activities should happen regularly (perhaps once or twice a week) in order to establish ongoing relationships, show reliability and to keep up-to-date with children on the streets who are always on the move. Activities should also be planned to take place at a time which is convenient, appealing and safe for children. If the aim is to target children living on the streets full-time then some activities should be held during the late evening and night time. In busy cities it is much easier to find these children once most people are at home and they are more visible setting up their places to sleep for the night or waking up in the early mornings.

1.3. Context factors

Local situation: As well as the locations where children congregate changing, the local situation may also vary depending on seasons and weather, political events, festivals or holidays, school vacations, security threats, disease outbreaks etc. Outreach workers should have up-to-date information on the local situation in order to make the best decision about type of activity, timing and location. The more often outreach activities are undertaken the easier it will be to assess these variations.

Stigma and privacy: Since outreach activities often take place in public spaces there is a need to be sensitive to the possible level of privacy and to any stigma and prejudice related to the activity or target group. Outreach workers should plan activities so that confidential conversations are possible and so that children's involvement does not lead to negative consequences.

Involving local authorities: Engaging with police or city/local councils is an opportunity to build partnerships and raise awareness of the needs of children on the streets. However, as with all outreach activities caution must be exercised to ensure children are not placed at greater risk. Where appropriate, agreements should be signed with relevant local authorities so that they are informed of activities on the streets and permission is obtained. Activities should be explained clearly to the authorities including timing, location, staff involved and the purpose. Letters of introduction and permission should be obtained for staff to carry during activities. Where appropriate, local authorities can also be involved in

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identifying needs of children and providing security during activities. Feedback should be given on the outcome of activities and to alert them to any issues which they should address, such as public health needs around safe water or disease outbreaks. Consideration should also be given to informal local leaders, such as market or gang leaders, who may need to be engaged as well.

Once outreach workers have agreed on what activities will take place, by whom, in what location and at what time, this information should be shared with their manager, other workers and local authorities, for the safety of the staff and children involved. However, within the framework of these plans, outreach worker must be flexible as what happens on the streets is always unpredictable.

1.4. Suggested planning tools

To aid planning it is important to have an up-to-date understanding of where children are sleeping and hanging out and other issues they are facing. Whilst a lot of information on where children can be found can be obtained through observation, it is also good practice to involve children who are or have recently been on the streets themselves, as well as other stakeholders involved on the streets. The children and other adults on the streets will have a unique understanding of the situation and what the risks and needs are.

One possible way of doing this is through participatory **street mapping**. The exercise begins with the outreach worker explaining to the children the kind of exercise they are going to do and its purpose. The children should be told that Retrak is keen to get to know more children on the streets and to see how they can be assisted. It should be explained that it is difficult for a person who does not live on the street to locate their peers and that they are therefore requested to help the outreach worker make contact with their friends by providing information that is as clear and as detailed as possible.

Pencils or pens and paper are given to the children to draw areas that they used to frequent most while on the streets. Children, in groups or individually, draw pictures and/or plot a map of specific places which they used to frequent and are requested to explain what they have drawn. When drawing maps it can be helpful to start by marking a spot to represent where they are at the moment (usually the drop-in centre) and to encourage them to draw the map from there.

It is important to engage with the children as they make their maps and to gently ask questions about the places they are marking. Some areas will be secret places or places which are controlled by local gangs. It is important that outreach workers are aware of any risks and also that they do not damage the trust they are building with children by entering places to which they have not been invited. The children may be able to facilitate introductions to key stakeholders, such as market supervisors or local leaders, who may need to be engaged with before entering an area.

When the children's maps and drawings are compared with each other, the places mentioned are tallied and those that appear most frequently are considered priority areas for the outreach workers in the forthcoming activities. Local maps can be used to compare with the children's drawings in order to aid the outreach worker in planning routes to follow.

The drawings should be stored in a file for future reference.

OUTCOME

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Activities are carefully and appropriately planned to enhance effective relationship building, ensure correct targeting of children, and minimise risks to outreach workers' safety.

- Beginning with clear planning helps to achieve the purpose of the activity, whilst still allowing flexibility to respond to children as they are met.
- Outreach workers should conduct the activities in groups of 2 or more, and put other measures in place to safeguard their personal security.
- Wherever possible use the local knowledge of the children who stay in target areas to help you understand the local situation. Ask permission to enter or for the children themselves to accompany you to what may be risky or secret areas.
- Involving local authorities when planning outreach activities improves safety of workers on the streets and provides an opportunity to educate local authority personnel who may also be interacting with children on the streets. But consideration must be given to doing no harm and upholding the best interests of the children: formal engagement with local authorities may not always be appropriate.

Step 2. Initial contact and relationship building



To make initial contact with children and to begin building trusting relationships which allows staff to:

- Improve children's safety on the streets;
- Identify highly vulnerable children in need of urgent assistance; and
- Begin to offer further services which could lead them to an alternative to street life.

All outreach activities should create an opportunity to build relationships with children, to identify highly vulnerable children and to begin to empower each child to think about life beyond their current circumstances on the streets. In addition, depending on the nature of the activity, they are also a chance to provide education, health information or life skills which help children to be safer on the streets.

Sections 2.1 to 2.4 provide general guidance for outreach activities, sections 2.5 to 2.8 outline some specific activities which can be used for outreach.

2.1. Relationship building

It is important to remember that children on the streets have probably experienced a lot of negativity and several broken relationships from adults. Therefore, it is vital to slowly build a trusting relationship if outreach workers want to assist children to move forward with their lives. It is important that outreach workers show interest in the children, engage them in non-threatening activities and are consistent in their attitude and actions. Honesty and transparency are essential; outreach workers must not make false promises to the children nor bribe them with food, money, or other material things. Gaining a child's trust in order to help them move forward will likely take several interactions over a length of time.

Workers: Outreach workers must, at all times, follow child protection guidelines and keep in mind the principles of best interests of the child and do no harm. Outreach workers should always go out in pairs, and in general, it is better for male outreach workers to only approach boys and, due to their greater vulnerability, for female workers to approach girls. A female outreach worker may approach both boys and girls, but every situation should be assessed separately. In some cases, if the appropriate worker is not available, it may be necessary to refer a child to a trusted and appropriate centre, local authorities or the police where they can receive care; but this should only be done where a prior assessment and agreement has been made. Outreach workers should not allow other people (such as visitors, donors or journalists) to accompany them, so that children can feel that the outreach workers' true focus is on them (where there are requests, with good reason, for visitors to accompany workers on the streets, this should be done separately and not classed as an outreach activity, and be carefully managed to minimise risks).

Respect: The child must feel valued by the outreach worker. Therefore everything should be done with respect for the child at all times, regardless of their circumstances, and the focus must be on relationship building and opening up future opportunities to move away from street life, not on getting information from the child.

Engagement: Children should be met in their 'space', where they congregate for work or to sleep.

Relationship building should begin with friendly, informal introductions and conversations. The goal is to have fun and break down barriers. If a child is recognisably from a specific ethnic group greeting her/him in her/his own language may instantly bring a connection. Playing games (this is easier at night when the streets are less busy) and joining in with what children are doing, such as eating food, telling jokes or sitting together on the ground, will all help to gain a child's confidence so that future options away from the street can be explored. Mirroring the children's body language also helps to build rapport. If children are sitting on the ground, the staff member could also come down to their level, rather than speaking to them from a distance, towering above them or expecting them to move.

Listening: In the course of a conversation outreach workers must first listen to what the child is saying about her/himself so that they plan future support in line with the child's wishes. They should be listening for indications of whether the child wants to get off the street, wants to go back home to her/his family or likes being out on the street, and what s/he says s/he wants. Outreach workers may gently prompt the children to share further in order to understand more about their feelings and desires about their future life. On subsequent interactions the outreach worker can ask the same questions again to see if the child is consistent in their thoughts or if s/he has changed her/his mind.

Sharing: Outreach workers can also share about services on offer and about other children's experiences in order to help a child think through these options. This can be done indirectly so that the child takes the initiative. For instance, if a child has mentioned the desire to go home, an outreach worker may enquire if a child is saving money to help them get there. If the child says no, the question may prompt them to start saving money. This can be an encouragement for the child and helps the outreach worker to see that they are serious in their intentions.

Documentation: It is best not to take notes or fill in forms in front of children as this can feel threatening to the children and can affect the flow of a conversation and rapport building. Registering a group of children taking part in a joint activity, such as a football training session, may be more acceptable. This should be based on the outreach worker's judgement of the situation and children involved. For this reason, and to respect children's privacy rights, information on children participating in outreach activities will be limited. Notes kept for case management purposes should be deleted once a case is inactive for a given period (this should be locally determined in line with data protection laws and good practice). Monitoring data should not include personal information; ID numbers can be allocated to keep data anonymous.

2.2. Identifying highly vulnerable children for immediate referral

Outreach activities should provide a quick way to identify children who are at highest risk on the streets to be referred immediately for further care. These children should include those who are:

- New to the streets, especially those who are lost or have been recently separated from care-givers,
- Younger children, especially younger girls.
- Sick or disabled,
- Experiencing severe abuse,
- In immediate danger.

An effective referral system will require establishing good relationships with organisations able to deal with

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special needs of children. It is good practice to have MOUs with such partner organisations so that appropriate support can be made available as quickly as possible.

Determining the age of a child and length of time a child has spent on the streets can be difficult: the child may not know exactly or may initially provide misleading information. With experience, outreach workers will learn how to determine these factors just by looking at and talking with a child. Some key factors to observe in identifying young children and those new to the streets include:

- New clothes or school uniform or clothes mainly worn in rural areas,
- Cleanliness, especially of hands and feet,
- Lack of confidence or shy and humble attitude,
- Standing or sleeping away from other children,
- Interacting well with community members and only being on the fringes of groups of children.
- Appearing confused, afraid and lost, and with limited survival skills (for instance, when a child sits in one place all day without anything to eat and having no other way of finding food).

2.3. Maintaining safety

As mentioned above during planning, outreach workers should always work in pairs or more and should avoid putting themselves in dangerous situations or remove themselves as soon as possible if a situation becomes dangerous.

If outreach workers encounter conflict between children they should proceed with caution and try to assess the situation and the risks of intervening. Many times, children will settle down on their own, or it may be possible to de-escalate the situation by stepping in without taking sides. This action by an adult in children's conflict may be normal for some cultures, but caution should always be exercised. If it is not possible to intervene and children's lives could be at risk, then the police should be called. If any children are detained then an outreach worker, or other appropriate staff, should accompany them if possible.

2.4. Peer involvement

The involvement of peers in outreach activities can be very effective, but the safety of children and staff must always be carefully considered in planning peer activities. Those involved could be children who were formerly involved on the streets and who are now participating in services or children still on the streets but who are responsible or in positions of authority. Peers have a good understanding of the street culture and will usually be more readily accepted than an outreach worker. They are therefore able to build relationships more easily and quickly and can deliver or gather information more effectively. Their knowledge of the local situation may also mean they are able to mitigate potential risks within local communities or with authorities. Before involving children in peer activities they should be trained and assessed to ensure they will carry out activities in a way which is not harmful to them or to those they engage with on the streets.

When involving children in peer outreach activities they should be fully involved in planning the activity, including timing, location, type of activity. Their safety should also be ensured, in the same way as for outreach workers, and they should be accompanied by outreach workers. If there is an element of information sharing within the activity, the children should be clearly instructed upon the extent of

information they can pass on to other children, especially to avoid making false promises and raising expectations. They should be encouraged to ask the accompanying outreach worker for help if they feel they are not able to answer any questions.

2.5. Suggested activities

With all the above in mind, the outreach activities could be:

Street visits: A street visit involves moving around an area where children are known to hang out and to seek ways of engaging with them. Street visits can take place during the day or at night time, depending on the target group and local situation. It may be necessary in some locations to first approach the leaders or gatekeepers to seek permission to speak with others. Street visits provide a good opportunity to engage with children in their daily lives, to understand their situations and to encourage meaningful participation. During street visits the direction of the activity is much more in the hands of the children than in the following suggested activities.

Medical care: Medical activities in slum or street areas can include clinics, HIV/AIDS education and HIV voluntary counselling and testing, and health and hygiene education. Medical interventions should be authorised by the appropriate authority and should be carried out by qualified medical staff and education activities by trained medical educators. Medical staff should be accompanied by outreach workers who are free to focus on the children and relationship building. This requires a careful balance between getting to know children and identifying those most at risk, as well as to raising awareness of health issues and/or offering treatment to those in need. Although activities may mainly target children on the streets it is likely that the general community will get involved as they often gather when they see an activity underway. This requires advance planning for privacy, security for workers and equipment, and dealing with high numbers of potential beneficiaries. There should always be a means of referring cases on if it is not possible to deal with the case during the activity.

Sports: Football and other sports, both training sessions and matches, are a good way to attract children and provide a safe environment in which to get to know children. During the activity outreach workers should look for opportunities to interact with children individually, especially those who appear to be highly vulnerable and those who are keen to find out more about available services. Sports activities are a good way to encourage team building and help children to work together and look out for each other. They also offer an opportunity to hold group sessions during which children are encouraged to ask questions about outreach or services, or about another life-skills topic, such as drug abuse or HIV/AIDS. Peer involvement works well with sports activities. Starting the activity with a group of children who are already receiving services will attract other children to join in and will create an opportunity for them to interact with and talk to their peers about receiving further support. Sports activities generally need a large open area and so cannot be carried out on the streets. One strategy to alert children on the streets to the commencement of a sports activity is to ask children who have been trained in peer-to-peer outreach to lead a walk through a target locations (from step 1) and encourage other children to join in as they proceed to the football pitch or other open area where the activity will take place.

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Education: informal schooling can be carried out on the streets, and is a big pull since many children are out of school. Resources are available to hold groups lessons on the streets, for instance Retrak has used the Mobile School³² materials in Ethiopia. These should be carried out by appropriately trained teachers or outreach workers. As with other activities, opportunities should be created to talk to children individually so that the activity is a stepping stone to inviting the child to engage with programmes more fully.

Health and life-skills education: education on a variety of health or life-skills issues, including HIV/AIDS, can be carried out on the streets, both during the day and at night. Daytime activities could include artistic activities such as music, dance, puppetry, personal testimonies, and videos or use games like football, snakes and ladders, musical chairs or darts. It is important that there is always space to engage with children and build relationships alongside structured activities, and privacy when dealing with sensitive issues should be considered. This is another opportunity to involve peers, who should be fully trained in advance so that they are able to lead the activities appropriately and give information and answer questions confidently.

OUTCOME

Children have begun to build mutually trusting and respectful relationships with outreach workers. They have also gained some skills to keep them safer on the streets and are aware of the services on offer. Children who are highly vulnerable on the streets have been identified and referred for immediate services.

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

- Children should be met in their 'space' and engaged on their level.
- Outreach workers must be warm and engaging, being there isn't enough; they must listen non-judgmentally, value and care for the child and respect the child's strengths, skills and choices.
- One-on-one conversations between staff and children are essential in understanding each child's needs.
- Every child should be treated as a unique individual, a variety of activities delivered by several outreach workers will provide more opportunities for finding a connection and building meaningful relationships.
- The focus of an outreach activity must be on relationship building, not on getting information from the child or coercing them to do something.

³² For further information see www.mobileschool.org

Step 3. Reflection and assessment



To create the space for outreach workers to reflect on their experiences and gather information about children in order to assess their need for further services.

Reflection takes place on the streets during an activity and/or in a separate session after the activity has finished. Either way, it is important to reflect on the children who have been met and the relationships that have been built in order to plan for a way forward and eventually to work towards an assessment to allow a child to access further services.

2.6. Reflection

Since so much outreach work requires flexibility and the ability to respond to children and their needs as they are presented, outreach workers must build in time for reflection. Some reflection will happen during activities as children are met and listened to. This will determine what actions the outreach worker takes: how long to spend with a child, what questions to ask, what support to offer etc. Key to this is considering how to know when a trusting relationship has been established, in order to know when to move ahead. This can in part be judged by observing whether a child:

- Approaches the outreach worker first,
- Brings other children to meet the outreach worker,
- Shares extra information with the outreach worker,
- Responds positively to the outreach worker,
- Gives their real name or that of other children (this can often happen when they witness another child giving a false name),
- Begins to share their story or talk about their future aspirations.

Time for reflection should also be created after an activity has finished. This can help plan next steps for individual children as well as feeding back into step 1 to plan the next outreach activities. This might involve sharing experiences with fellow workers or with 'critical friends' (such as a mentor or more experienced worker from another organisation). Sharing with co-workers could be through formal sessions, such as child care reviews, or informally in everyday conversations. Journaling and writing about activities can be a good way to process experiences privately.

Outreach workers will hear a lot of difficult stories from the children they engage with. It is important that adequate support is provided to workers. Opportunities for reflective supervision will help outreach workers manage the demands of work which can be very emotionally charged. Such supervision is most effective when it combines dealing with tasks, as well as providing social and emotional support, within a positive working relationship.³³

³³ See section on reflection in guiding principles as well as supervision guidelines for social welfare workers, such as: Carpenter, J, C Webb, L Bostock & C Coomber (2012) *SCIE Research briefing 43: Effective supervision in social work and social care*, Social Care Institute for Excellence

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2.7. Assessment

Children most at risk will be offered access to further services immediately, including safe shelter. If the child is not initially interested in additional assistance they should be a priority for future outreach activities. For other children, ongoing interaction with the child will help outreach workers to know when further services are desired and in the child's best interests. Key criteria for making this decision include:

- The child expressing a strong desire to move off the streets and having a future plan, such as to return home, join school and/or start a business.
- The child demonstrating this desire by what they do, such as saving money or sharing details of home.
- Eligibility for services (this might include age, current situation etc)

It is ultimately the child's choice to participate in further services; a child is never forced to join.

Each shelter or transition centre should establish its own entry protocols, especially if space is limited, with priority given to those most at risk.

Assessments and decisions on admission should be made in consultation with all outreach workers and relevant staff in order to balance the needs of all children who may be eligible. Depending on the size of the outreach team this may need to be done in a formal child care review meeting. Child care reviews are particularly necessary where a range of activities are open to a child, such as at a drop-in centre, so that all staff are able to give their input.

The invitation to a child to join further activities should be done privately, emphasising that participation is voluntary, and then any necessary arrangements can be made to meet them or bring them to the centre.

OUTCOME

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

The outreach worker has made plans for progressing their work and their own skills development, and made appropriate assessments for children to access further services.

- It is important for outreach workers to keep developing the skills of self-reflection and self-awareness in order to keep learning and maintaining responsiveness. Outreach workers should be raising questions about what they do before, after and during every activity.
- No child should be forced to access services; it is their right to choose.
- Children most at risk should be targeted and offered services as soon as possible

Step 4. Referral to further services



To enable a child to transition from street life to care at a transitional centre

Referral or admission occurs when a child arrives at a centre following an invitation from an outreach worker on the streets (where drop-in centres have an open-door policy this point may be less clear, it could be when a child moves into a more formal and continuous programme of care). At this point the centre staff should all be notified of the new child's arrival. On arrival the child should be warmly welcomed, orientated to the centre and the programmes on offer, and introduced to staff and fellow children.

A one-to-one counselling session should be arranged as soon as possible with a social worker. This session should help the child settle into the centre, allow any immediate needs to be identified and provide a chance to obtain further background and baseline information on the child to help inform future care plans.

The child will then be able to participate in the services offered at the centre, which should aim to address every aspect of the child's well-being. The services may include shelter (including meals and hygiene facilities), counselling, basic education, health care, sports and play, and life-skills training.

The child's participation in these activities should be regularly reviewed by all the staff involved during child care review meetings.



Child feels warmly welcomed, understands the services on offer and has begun to get to know the staff and other children in a safe environment.



- **UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children:** Decision-making on [care options]... should be based on rigorous assessment, planning and review, through established structures and mechanisms, and carried out on a case-by-case basis, by suitably qualified professionals in a multidisciplinary team, wherever possible.³⁴
- Each child should be an active participant in working with the staff to determine their future care and plans
- All programmes and services offered to children must ensure that child protection principles are upheld and that children are safe-guarded against further risks and abuse
- Provision of services should aim to holistically meet all the needs of a child to enhance their normal growth and development

³⁴ UN General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, op cit, paragraph 56

F. Tools

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children: The records on children in care should be complete, up to date, confidential and secure.... This record should follow the child throughout the alternative care period and be consulted by duly authorized professionals responsible for his/her current care.³⁵

Each child at Retrak will have a personal file which contains copies of all records specific to the child's care at Retrak. These are kept in a locked cabinet and access is restricted to staff working directly with the children concerned. This file will be updated regularly.

Retrak has developed a toolkit to accompany its SOPs, the tools relevant to these SOPs are:

- Outreach tools:
 - Outreach notes
 - Admission assessment
- Tool 1. Child's personal profile, including:
 - 1.1 Personal information
 - 1.2 Family information
 - 1.3 Street life information
 - 1.4. Initial assessment and recommendation
- Tool 2. Retrak centre records
 - 2.1. Retrak centre overview
 - 2.2. Counselling session notes
 - 2.3. Education notes
 - 2.4. Other progress notes (general, sports, life-skills etc)
 - 2.5. Child care review record

Further guidance on street mapping is available:

- Whelan, M (2010) 'Detached youth work' in J Batsleer and D Bernard (Eds) *What is Youth Work?*, Exeter, Learning Matters Ltd
- Young, L & H Barrett (2001) 'Adapting visual methods: action research with Kampala street children', *Area* 33(2), pp141-152
- Ford, CL, WC Miller, M Smurzynski & PA Leone (2007) 'Key components of a theory-guided HIV prevention outreach model: Pre-outreach preparation, community assessment, and a network of key informants', *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 19(2), pp173-186

³⁵ UN General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, op cit, paragraph 109



No child forced to live on the street

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STREET CHILDREN
HOW CAN YOU HELP?