

Street Work and COVID-19

Guidance for Street Workers during the pandemic

Developed by StreetInvest with input from Regional Coordinating Partners, Street Work partners and Global Trainers from across the Global Alliance for Street Work. As at 30/03/2020 - We recognise that this is a fluid situation that is evolving rapidly and will work to update this guidance whenever it is required.

Making trustworthy adults accessible to street-connected children is more important now than ever. Street Work is essential for many children and young people on the street who otherwise have no one to turn to. It is clearly vital that Street Workers and Street Work organisations carefully balance the need to prioritise public health and compliance with local regulations with that to provide essential support to children and young people who are further isolated and at risk as a result of the pandemic.

Lockdowns are increasing across the world and we are monitoring the extent to which Street Work can take place. StreetInvest considers Street Work to be an **essential support service** and that Street Workers **must** have permission to continue working as far as is safely possible, in order to reach children who rely on the street to survive. *See the following page for advocacy messaging regarding making this demand of authorities in your area.*

Practical Street Work Guidance

Due to the latest widespread regulations on compulsory social distancing and/or lockdown, conducting Street Work should only take place with the knowledge and approval of relevant local authorities. This will also ensure you have the local intelligence and links to duty bearers needed to keep you, colleagues and children and young people safe.

Where Street Workers work alongside 'Street Champions' or peer supporters from the street-connected community they have a responsibility to ensure that these young people are informed of these guidelines so they do not put themselves or others at risk.

Your health matters: If you have a health vulnerability or caring responsibility for someone who does, you should not be doing Street Work unless discussed with a medical professional.

Where street work is being delivered, StreetInvest recommends strongly that Street Workers:

- Work only on a **1-to-1** or 2-to-1 basis
- **Suspend all work with groups** including sports, focus groups, training or events with children and young people, regardless of whether these have been officially banned by authorities
- Follow **local public health guidance** for social distancing and good hygiene
- Maintain a distance of **at least two metres** between themselves and children they are supporting and encourage children to keep a similar distance between each other
- **Avoid physical contact** – no fist bumps, handshakes or touching
- Carry soap and/or hand sanitiser and **wash hands regularly**
- Sanitise and disinfect spaces regularly, with focus on all 'touch points' such as phones, computers etc.
- If work on the street is not possible, try to **maintain regular contact with children** and young people via phone or appropriate messenger service such as WhatsApp. Safeguarding measures regarding phone and social media contact with children should be safely reviewed and monitored where needed to support staff to stay in touch with children
- Ensure they conduct a risk assessment and use this to inform an ongoing dynamic risk assessment in the moment. If at any time Street Workers feel it is not safe to continue – withdraw.

Messaging for Children & Young People

- **Messaging to children and young people should be clear – STAY SAFE.** The most important messages are those of social distance and good hygiene - these are the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Of course, staying safe is likely to be easier said than done for many of the children you support. If there are barriers to children's safety and their ability to comply with emergency measures in your area (for example curfews or lockdowns), **capture this information, offer reassurance and provide support to find safety** if you can. Gathering information on the barriers to safety will help you advise authorities on how they should fulfil their duty to protect these children (see below).
- Ensure your messaging is **based on the latest health advice and social distancing requirements for your area** and the latest WHO guidance (link in *Useful Resources* section below) and any new measures or regulations that have been introduced. **You may be the only source of reliable information for these children.**
- There is a lot of helpful guidance online for how to talk to children about COVID-19. The following principles have been adapted from guidance by UNICEF for **talking to children about the virus:**
 1. Listen first – what are their concerns and questions?
 2. Stick to the facts – make sure you know them!
 3. Be part of the solution – what can you do to help?
 4. Be mindful - stay calm and confident.
 5. Act on advice – monitor for updates to official guidance.
- Remember - as Street Workers, **you are experts** in how best to listen to, support and reassure street-connected children during a crisis – it is something you did every day even before the pandemic.

Advocacy Messaging for Stakeholders

Street workers and street work organisations play a critical role in advocating for street-connected children and making their needs and voices heard by policy makers, duty bearers and authorities. During the COVID 19 crisis, that advocacy role is more important than ever. Street work organisations should request to collaborate on government responses and provide any relevant data and expertise to help ensure street-connected children are protected.

StreetInvest strongly recommends targeting policy makers, duty bearers, police, communities and all those impacting on the lives and safety of street-connected children during this time with the following headline messages, which can of course be adapted to local context.

Message 1: Street Work is Essential

- Street Work **must** be recognised as an essential service and Street Workers must be permitted, and supported, to safely reach children on the street who are likely to be without any support during this crisis
- Street Workers, with whom street-connected children have relationships of trust, are **best placed to offer community-level responses to keep them safe**, and are **already playing a critical role**, by:
 - being known and trusted faces on the street
 - having knowledge of and access to groups who are disconnected from the wider community
 - Educating children on risks, social distancing and good hygiene and combating misinformation
 - distributing soap, handwashing facilities and other supplies to the hardest to reach, who may not trust intervention by adults they do not know
 - using their trusted relationships with children to learn more about the issues affecting them, other children at risk in the community and the realities of their lives in the time of COVID-19, to inform responses to protect them, including advising the authorities.

Message 2: COVID-19 responses must not cause further harm to street-connected children

- Street-connected children are particularly vulnerable during the pandemic and are likely to be negatively affected by the government's public health response
- The introduction of new regulations such as lockdowns and curfews can unfairly criminalise children who have nowhere to go, and lead to overcrowding in prisons and detention centres – a major risk factor for the spread of COVID-19
- Where authorities are providing shelter off the street, for example in schools or other facilities, children should not be 'rounded up' by force, but given the option of shelter if they need it in order to stay safe.
- Both emergency and existing shelters **MUST**:
 1. Allow for social distancing measures the same as are being enforced for the rest of the population – this means children must be able to maintain at least 2 metres distance and be supported to do so
 2. Provide adequate soap, water and hygiene facilities for children and guidance on how to use them effectively
 3. Ensure children are adequately supervised and supported and proper safeguarding measures are in place
 4. Allow for contact with Street Workers and other trusted adults (maintaining social distance)
 5. Consider children's pre-existing health needs including those who depend on alcohol or other substances, and provide access to medicine
 6. Provide access to adequate food
- Even where shelters are provided, **street-level responses are still required** as there will still be street-connected children and communities on the street. They **MUST** be given access to information, support and hygiene supplies where they are, on the street.

Overleaf, you will find a template advocacy letter which can be adapted for relevant policy makers, duty bearers and authorities responsible for protecting children during the pandemic.

Useful resources

- All of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s up to date information and guidance on COVID-19, including useful mythbusters, posters and resources: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- StreetInvest's blog on the impact of COVID-19 and Street Work: <https://www.streetinvest.org/blog/covid-19-streets>
- CSC's briefing on street-connected children's rights and COVID 19: <https://www.streetchildren.org/news-and-updates/covid-19-and-street-connected-childrens-rights/> (please note this is the first in a series, so more will follow)
- A resource from the UK Youth Work sector for supporting youth on the street during COVID-19, some of which may be useful in your setting, and which helped inform the practical guidance: www.youthworksupport.co.uk.
- A briefing paper from IDS on recommendations for COVID-19 responses in informal settlements: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15185/SSHAP_COVID-19_Key_Considerations_Informal_Settlements_final.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

Thank you to all those in the Global Alliance for Street Work who have contributed to this document, including Glad's House, MFCS, CINI, CoDWelA and the StreetInvest Peer Network.

For more information or to feedback on this document, or to recommend other useful resources, please contact Siân Wynne, Director of Programmes on sian.wynne@streetinvest.org.

TEMPLATE ADVOCACY LETTER – copy and paste on to your letterhead

[Address]

[Date]

Re: Covid-19 and street children

Dear [Name of Police Chief/Equivalent local duty bearer or authority]

We are writing to you as Street Workers directly supporting street children at this time of national crisis.

The steps the Government is taking to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus are necessary to save lives and ensure that everyone in our country is safe. We are increasingly concerned however that street children are particularly at risk and further, that they may be negatively affected by the Government's public health response. We write to you here to request that we work together to ensure that street children are kept safe and able to access essential services.

We know that Covid-19 spreads rapidly between people and we also know that street and slum populations will be the most severely impacted because they have very limited access to water, sanitation and health services. However, [name of police, government authorities] are rounding street children up and putting them in [detention centres, jails] because of Covid-19. But in contained and crowded spaces everyone is at a greater risk of contracting and spreading Covid-19. A safer and more efficient approach would be to make water, soap and food available to street children immediately, and to educate communities on social distancing. [This is just one example, which you could change based on what is happening locally and what the most important issue is for SCC there]

We want to work with you to beat this virus. We understand how best to support street children where they are and we want to scale up Street Work, alleviating pressure on Government staff [police, civil servants, health care workers], supporting the national effort to keep street children and the rest of our population safe. We have been running information sessions with street children, educating them about the importance of hygiene and staying clean, explaining the importance of social distancing and delivering soap, hand sanitisers and food. [Can be amended to reflect what you are doing] But supplies and our reach are limited and we know that we need to work together to beat Covid-19. We ask that you work with us to:

- Keep Street Workers on the streets and scale up the numbers of Street Workers
- Help us to make hygiene services more readily available to street populations
- Help us to keep food and essential services running on the streets
- Ensure that where options exist to provide children who need it with shelter off the streets, these do not put street children at further risk of infection or harm.

We request a video conference meeting to discuss these suggestions with you and plan how together we can keep street children and our entire population safe during this national emergency.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[CEO / Chair's Name of NGO]

[Phone number, email address]

On behalf of [List Names and Logos of all NGOs signing letter]