

## Street Children

The tragedy and challenge of the world's millions of modern-day Oliver Twists is repeated in the heartbreaking stories of these street children. The reasons that brought them to the street vary, but the abuses they are daily subjected to are very similar. Their common fate brought them together and made strong bonds among



Children from Kivuli

them. The street is not an option; it is a desperate escape from an unbearable situation. They didn't mind recounting their life dramas and being photographed, but, as they were recalling their stories, sadness was evident on their faces.

**Kevin Lomnyek**, 14, is a Maasai from Tanzania. He left home when he was 11. He and his two sisters were starving at home, after his parents lost their jobs and he ran away. In the street, he met some older children who were harsh with him. In the beginning, they beat him to steal his little money to buy cigarettes.

**Clinton Malova**, 14, is an orphan. His parents died of Aids in 2008. He and his younger brother went to live with their uncle. They were given little food. One day, they were denied food completely. They went to the street. He is in the streets out of despair, because he was forced to go there.

**David Curia**, 10, is the second oldest of seven brothers. The mother died and his father remarried. The stepmother was always beating him so cruelly that he ran away. His experience on the streets has been very tough. He has already been arrested, made to work and released during the night. He confesses that often he goes to sleep with an empty stomach. Now things have improved because he is going to the rescue Centre where he can get breakfast and lunch.

**Kevin Chirwa**, 13, does not have a father any more, for his father died. His mother sells illegal beer for a living. He has seven siblings that live on the street in Kawangare, a dumping place. He has never gone to school; he is a catholic and prays for his mother, who is very sick. He would like to be able to go to school and to become an electrician.

**Bakari Banda**, 12, was twice caught by the police for stealing. His father died of malaria in 1995. His mother sells muratina (local beer) for a living but what she earns is not enough to keep the family. Bakari would like to learn how to read. When he grows up he wants to be a mechanic.

**Selimu Malata**, 10, has a mother who is often violent to her sons. His father died long ago, while his mother, unemployed, sells salad in order to pay the rent of the shack where they live. Selimu is often beaten by other street children. He is afraid of danger; he fears the police and fears unemployment. He hates being bullied. He regrets not to be able to go to school. He wants to be a carpenter. He is a mature boy.

## Kivuli Centre

The Kivuli Centre is a shelter for street children, a place where missionaries help the people living in the slums, help children who have never gone to school, help those who have nothing to eat and help talented young boys to find jobs. The Centre can hold up to 50 children, at the moment



Young man sniffing glue

there are 48. These are children with various problems but particularly those arriving from off the street. The phenomenon of street children is complex: it depends on a multitude of factors such as the absence of parents, who may have died of Aids, or the abuses suffered when parents remarry since these children are no longer allowed to stay in the new family.

**Peter**, a volunteer at the Centre remembers: *"When I was 3-4 years old, I was living on the street with other children, some of whom were sniffing glue, others using drugs to escape their condition or to forget home. One day I met Nicholas and Mike who told us to go to the Kivuli Centre. There, we were about 150 boys. We stayed there for 4 years then some children decided to go away because they didn't want to stop using drugs. I and other children decided instead to remain there. Today I meet so many street children and I say to them: 'Why not come with us to the Kivuli Centre'. What helps me to work well with children is to make clear that I do not give out money. I am a friend who wants to share life with them. This means accepting them as they are and embracing them even when they are dirty. Street children have their own lifestyle, their way of protecting each other, of eating, of finding money. They know how to survive; they are very intelligent and independent. If I want to help a street child I explain what Kivuli Centre is and I say: 'If you are interested you can come and stay or if you are not, we shall remain friends as long as you wish'".*

**Nicholas Othieno**, an educator at the Centre says: *"In this school, there are about 100 children from the Kivuli Centre. They are clever boys. When we do the exams the majority score excellent marks, which is very encouraging for them. They come from the street where they did not have many opportunities, had no way to study, no rules. Now in a class they are more disciplined, they are talented and motivated and can always do better. Surely they will become responsible citizens. Now they are happy."*

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