

B2

Citizenship & Geography

Forced onto the streets

Background information

Why do children become street children?

There are numerous reasons why children might end up on the streets. These reasons are often a combination of large-scale economic causes and small-scale family situations. The biggest cause of children working on the streets is poverty, both at a national and at a local or family level. Street-working children may live with, and have good relations with their families.

However, children who run away to live, as well as work, on the streets are often there because of violence (physical, psychological and sexual) or neglect within the home. It is very important to realise that not all poor children become street-living children: there is usually an extra factor which tips the balance.

These factors include:

- Death of one or both parents
- Family break-ups
- Housing difficulties
- Lack of education
- Parental unemployment
- Peer influence
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on the family
- Displacement due to natural disasters e.g. the recent tsunami
- Man-made disasters e.g. war or evictions from slum settlements
- Rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation (linked to rural poverty)

In many cases there will be no single cause but rather a combination of factors which force a child to end up working and/or living on the streets. In different countries certain causes will be of greater importance than others. Each child has their own story to tell, as can be seen on the accompanying VFTS video/DVD.

“The main reason for being on the streets is to be totally free, freedom to go wherever we want, whenever we want. Nobody can tell us where to go.”

Street child – Cairo¹

“I left the house because my parents are dead. I am alone. I moved to live with my uncle, but his wife treated me badly. Therefore I came to the market. I am roaming and learning bad behaviour such as stealing and sniffing glue. Now I am confused. I don't have a future.”

Street child - Sudan²

“I am in the streets to earn money, to eat and to buy clothes. I send a little of my earnings back to my family in the village.”

Street child - Guinea³



CSC - Street children in Senegal



Footnotes: see page 76

Geography

How did they end up on the streets?



Key learning point:

- The different reasons why children end up on the streets.
- The biggest causes of children leaving home are poverty combined with violence in the home and/or family breakdown.



Sensitivity warning



Instructions

1. Handout activities

Students should watch the video and read 'How did they end up on the streets?' handout 1, either individually or as a class.

They can then recap by using handout 2 to think of all the reasons why children might end up on the streets. This can be done either as a class or homework activity.

2. Positive case study

Teachers may want to use the case study of Vijay, who features on the VFTS video/DVD, to show that sometimes street children can be reunited with their families. This is a 'rosy' story, which might help lift students' spirits if they are finding the subject matter overwhelming. But, if this case study is used, students should be informed that children such as Vijay are in the minority. Many street children would not want to return home. Many have had to leave home because of violence and abuse and to return may not be in their best interests.

Vijay, who is 10 years old, left his home in rural India because there was not enough money to feed all three children. He felt he was being a burden and decided to go to the city to earn some money to help his family's situation. He became one of the 200,000 street children in Calcutta: sleeping out in the open and forced to beg for food and make a few pennies from sweeping the trains. Meanwhile, his family had spent every spare penny they had looking for him. However, two years later he was reunited with his family thanks to the support of a project called New Hope in Calcutta.

(Railway Children, 2004)

Extension activity

More academically able students can be asked to use handout two as the basis of a 'problem tree,' looking at the causes behind the causes.



National Curriculum

3e) to explain how places are interdependent; 4b) identify, describe and explain physical and human processes and their impact on places and environments; 6f) population distribution and change including ii) the causes and effects of changes in the population of regions and countries including migration iii) the interrelationship between population and resources.

B2a Geography

How did they end up on the streets?

These are all real life stories of children who lived on the streets and were later helped by the Railway Children charity.



Life Story One: Harathi (aged 7 - India)

Harathi went to beg on the streets every day because her mother had AIDS and was too weak to work. The money she earned supported her and her mother. After she had earned enough money to do this she would go to the shelter to learn to read and write.

(Railway Children, 2004)



Life Story Two: Sara (aged 16 – UK)

Sara rang ASTRA (a local organisation) to say her relationship with her mother had broken down and she had been 'sofa surfing' between different friends houses for over 6 weeks. She had tried to return home on several occasions but her mother had become violent and thrown her out again.

(Railway Children, 2004)

Life Story Three: Rita (aged 7 - Bangladesh)

Rita was found crying near the stadium because she had no place to sleep. Her stepmother had not fed her at home so she had been forced to go to Dhaka (capital city of Bangladesh).

(Railway Children, 2002)

Geography

How did they end up on the streets?

Instructions: Use the stories you have just read and the video/DVD you have just seen to help you think of as many reasons as you can why children end up on the streets. Put the two most important reasons that you can think of in the boxes with the thicker lines.

B2b

Citizenship

Dear youth@...



Key learning points:

- Young people in the UK are also forced to go onto the streets.
- Help is available to young people who run away / are thinking about running away from home.



Sensitivity warning



Instructions

Give out handout and ask students to read and do tasks.



Answers (examples)

2. What problems is James facing?

1. His dad has lost his job and drinks a lot.
2. He is being verbally abused and threatened with physical abuse.
3. His mother isn't listening to how worried he is and does not appear to be taking any action.
4. James thinks it is his fault that his dad has lost his job.
5. He is only 13 so is too young to leave home and be able to support himself legally.
6. His friend doesn't sound that reliable and London is a long way from home.

3. What advice could you offer James?

- Try to speak to his mum about the issue again and make sure she realises how serious it is.
- Inform another trusted adult of his situation - other family members, friends, teachers at school, neighbours.
- Call a helpline



See further information section for specific helplines and organisations

Extension or homework activities

1. Ask the students to write a short play in pairs on:
 - a phone call to a helpline
 - a conversation with the mother that doesn't go well
 - a conversation with the mother that does go well
 - a conversation with another trusted adult outside of the family

Get a few pairs to act it out in front of the classroom. Follow up discussions can be had on how well the young person or adult concerned did in dealing with the situation.

2. Ask students to go on the internet to find out about a service that could help James. Give them some examples, such as ChildLine, Get Connected, Message Home or NSPCC Child Protection. (This activity is best done before task 3 so that students can give James really practical advice).



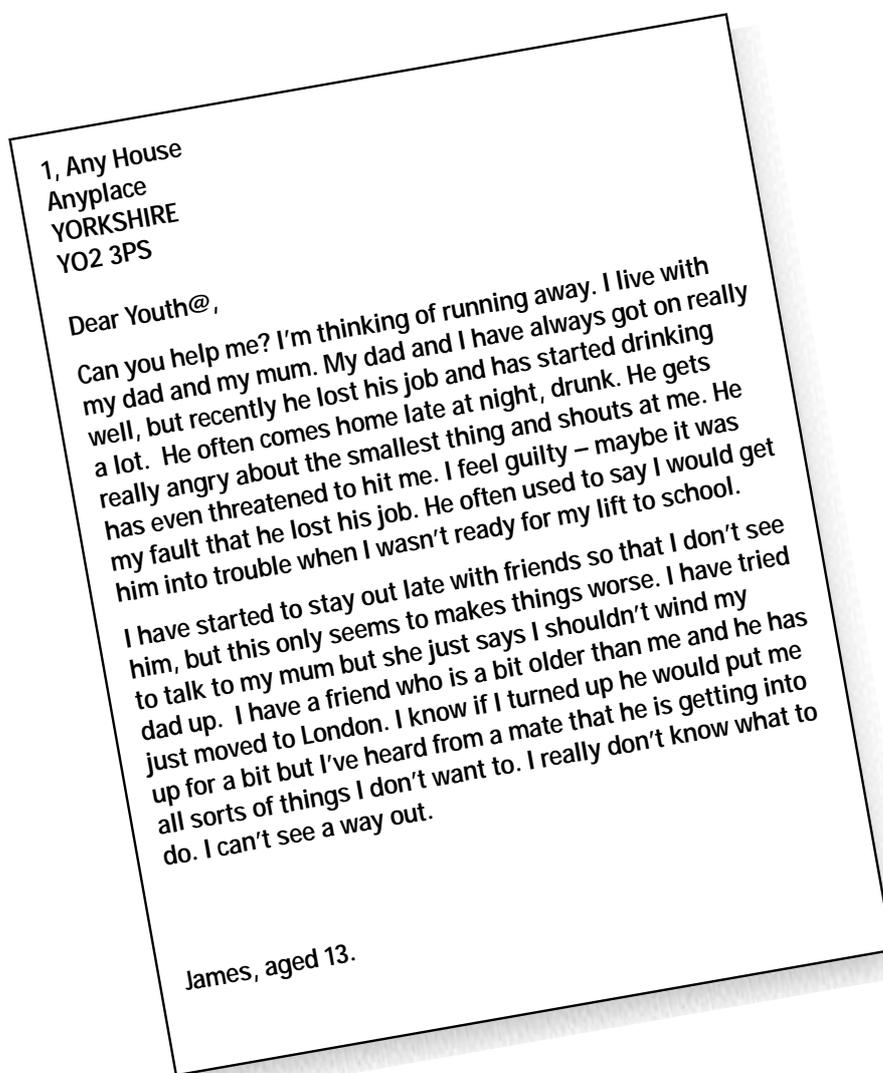
National Curriculum

1c) knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens; f) the work of community-based, national and international voluntary groups; 3a) use their imagination to consider other people's experiences.

Citizenship

Dear youth@...

1. Read the following letter that James has written to Youth@.



2. In pairs, discuss what problems James is facing and what he could do about it. Make some notes of your ideas on some scrap paper.

3. Imagine you are the agony aunt/uncle at Youth@ Write your own response to James starting with:

"Dear James,
I am really sorry to hear about your situation. My advice would be..."

Try to include as many practical ideas as you can!