

# Surviving the streets

For most street children each day is a struggle for survival and, in order to survive, they have to be very resourceful. Different street children have different ways of coping with living and working on the streets. Here are just two ways many street children try to survive.

## Peer support: gangs

**"Fundamentally we are friends who hang out together. We started this gang about five years ago to protect ourselves from other gangs."**

Street child - Nicaragua<sup>1</sup>

Children often find alternative 'families' amongst their peers on the street, usually in the form of groups or gangs.

More experienced street children will teach new arrivals survival skills and members of the group will share food, clothing and shelter. Groups will also protect their members when gang warfare breaks out or when one of them is in trouble with the police.

However, there can be negative consequences of being in a gang as well. Gangs often have strict hierarchies maintained through violence and can be involved in substance abuse and crime. There can also be inter-gang rivalry and fighting.

Sexual activity in gangs can either be an expression of comfort and affection between companions or it can be forced and violent.

**"Here we do not have any kind of blood relation with each other. But when we are in the street with other friends, though we do not have any name for our relation, we are like a family. We are all actually members of our street family. We share food and shelter with each other. If someone gets sick we care about him, and we take him to a clinic. If we have to buy medicine, whoever has money shares it or we search help from others."**

Street child - Nepal<sup>2</sup>

**"There was a gang war every day. I did not want to join because I feared that I might die. One of my companions was raped. Her belly was sliced open. She was murdered. I was forced [to join the group]. They slapped me and I cried."**

Street girl, aged 10 - Philippines<sup>3</sup>

## Substance abuse



See also:  
Section B6, Health

**"The best part of living on the street is the glue. I haven't eaten in two days because I'm not hungry. The glue makes me feel that way."**

Street boy - Bulgaria<sup>4</sup>

Many street children resort to drugs in an attempt to escape from their daily lives or as a result of peer pressure.

Substance abuse can help to lessen hunger pains and extremes of temperature, help to ease loneliness, depression and difficulties in sleeping, give 'Dutch courage' in the face of violence, or keep them awake at work and alert to danger. It also has serious health consequences.

**"I've been living on the streets for the past 5 years...I've tried just about everything: glue, marijuana, crack, hard liquor and cigarettes. Now, I just sniff glue. I do it because I feel very sad. I feel like I'm really alone. I don't want to live on the streets. I've already suffered a lot and I'm only 15 years old."**

Street child - Nicaragua<sup>5</sup>



Footnotes: see page 76

# Citizenship

## 'Surviving a year' board game



### Key learning point:

- Some children have their rights protected better than others.



**Resources:** A3 board game base, cards (below - photocopied onto A3 and cut out) die and counters.



**Instructions:** Ask students to play the board game in small groups. Each time they land on a square with a picture they must pick up a card corresponding to the picture. They must make a note of what has happened to them over the year on some scrap paper. At the end of the game each student should have a different list of life events that have happened to them over the year. This can then be shared or used to generate material for some creative writing exercises.

		
 Today someone gave you some money. You can eat for 2 whole days.	 Today the cough you have had for ages got a lot worse and your chest is starting to hurt.	 Today the police caught you sniffing glue and poured it over your head to teach you a lesson. It really hurt.
 Today you sold more roses than usual. Your family will be really pleased with you and you may be able to get some medicine for your sister.	 Today you were begging at the railway station and someone shouted at you. They said you must have a lazy father – but your father died 2 years ago.	 Today your head hurt badly. Someone said to you that your headache is because you sniff glue. You don't feel you can stop as it is one of the very few things that makes you feel less worried.
 Today you stole a wallet that was sticking out of a businessman's pocket as he bought his lunch. The police chased you but didn't catch you. Now you just need to hide it from others. You will only tell your best friends.	 Today children from another gang made you give them the money you earned last week. Now you have nothing.	 Today you sat and chatted with your friend. Both of you said that life didn't seem worth living. "People like us," you said, "don't have futures."
 Today you made a new friend. He had just arrived in the city because he can no longer bear to live at home.	 Today you saw some children playing football in the street. You went to join them but they wouldn't let you play. They told you to go away and called you 'scum'.	 Today a man approached you and asked you if you wanted to 'waste some time together'. You did not like him and ran away.
 Today you went to the centre as you were really hungry. You had a big meal and your stomach felt full for the first time in days.	 Today the head of your gang heard that you had stolen a wallet and you had to hand it over as he reckoned you owed him.	
 Today a kind person in the street talked to you and asked how you were. They would not give you any money but gave you a biscuit. They talked to you and were nice.	 Today you were standing selling roses at the roadside for 6 hours and you only sold three roses. Worse still, everyone just ignored you and pretended you weren't there. You wanted to shout loudly "I am here! I am here!" but you knew there was no point.	
 Today the workers from the street children centre came and looked at the sore on your leg. They bandaged it and it felt nice to be looked after.	 Today you heard one of your old friends had been killed. He had been beaten up so badly he died. Nobody knows who did it.	



### National Curriculum

- 1) Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens:  
 a) the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society, basic aspects of how they are financed, and the opportunities to contribute; f) the work of community-based, national and international voluntary groups; a) use their imagination to consider other people's experiences.

**B3a** Citizenship

# 'Surviving a year' board game

Student handout

<b>STREET LIFE STARTS HERE</b>					<b>3 MONTHS LATER</b>
<b>1 YEAR IS UP</b>	<p>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</p> <p>Article 1: A child is every human being below the age of 18</p> <p>Article 2: Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3: Best interests of the child</p> <p>Article 4: Governments must use all available resources to put into practice all of the CRC rights</p> <p>Article 5: Parents &amp; families should direct and guide children as appropriate to their age</p> <p>Article 6: Right to birth registration, name, and nationality</p> <p>Article 7: Right to be registered and to have your name and nationality</p> <p>Article 8: Right to be registered and to have your name and nationality</p> <p>Article 9: Right to be with your family</p> <p>Article 10: Right to enter or leave your country</p> <p>Article 11: Right to be protected from being recruited into the army or to work</p> <p>Article 12: Right to say what you think, unless it is against other people's rights</p> <p>Article 13: Right to express what you think, unless it is against other people's rights</p> <p>Article 14: Right to think what you like and have what religion you want, with your parent's guidance</p> <p>Article 15: Right to meet with others and join or set up clubs, unless it is against other people's rights</p> <p>Article 16: Right to privacy</p> <p>Article 17: Right to get information. Information on the radio, in newspapers, books &amp; TV etc. should be useful to you and not harmful</p> <p>Article 18: Right to be cared for by parents if possible</p> <p>Article 19: Right to be protected from abuse and neglect</p> <p>Article 20: Right to be cared for by other people if you are not with your parents</p> <p>Article 21: Right to have special protection if you are orphaned</p> <p>Article 22: Right to special protection if you are a refugee</p> <p>Article 23: Right to special care and education if you have a disability</p> <p>Article 24: Right to the best health possible and to medical care</p> <p>Article 25: Right to be regularly checked up on if you have to be looked after away from home</p> <p>Article 26: Right to help from the government if you are poor or in need</p> <p>Article 27: Right to a good enough standard of living for you to develop properly</p> <p>Article 28: Right to education</p> <p>Article 29: Right to education which tries to develop your personality and ability to respect other people's rights</p> <p>Article 30: Right to practice your own culture, language and religion</p> <p>Article 31: Right to play and free time</p> <p>Article 32: Right to be protected from work that is harmful to your health or education</p> <p>Article 33: Right to be protected from using and selling dangerous drugs</p> <p>Article 34: Right to be protected from being exploited</p> <p>Article 35: Right to not be kidnapped or sold</p> <p>Article 36: Right to protection from any other kind of exploitation</p> <p>Article 37: Right not to be punished in a cruel way or tortured. Right not to be put in prison with adults</p> <p>Article 38: Right to not be in an army or fight in a war before you are 15. If you are affected by war, you must be protected</p> <p>Article 39: Right to help if you have been hurt, neglected or badly treated</p> <p>Article 40: Right to help in defending yourself and to have your age taken into account, if you are accused of breaking the law</p> <p>Article 41: Right to any rights in laws in your country or internationally which give you better rights than these</p>				
					
					
					
					
<b>9 MONTHS LATER</b>					<b>6 MONTHS LATER</b>

Citizenship

# Positives & negatives of belonging to a gang

**Key learning point:**

- Street children often form gangs to provide themselves with the support and protection they don't get from others.
- There can be positive and negative consequences of joining a gang.

**Instructions**

After the students have watched the video ask them to discuss as a whole class what they think the positive aspects of being in a gang might be. Then ask them to discuss in pairs what the negative aspects of being in a gang might be.

The students can use the sheet below to summarise what you have discussed or it can be set as a homework sheet. The table can be filled in with writing or with pictures.

Good things	Bad things
Answers (examples): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help and support each other</li> <li>Get protection from gang warfare</li> <li>Share things like clothes and shelter</li> <li>Learn survival skills</li> </ul>	Answers (examples): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gangs can be violent – to other gangs and to their own members</li> <li>Gangs can be involved in crimes</li> <li>Gangs can encourage substance abuse</li> </ul>



Street girl in the Philippines taking part in a workshop to explore the positives and negatives of being part of a gang.



**National Curriculum**

2.Developing skills of participation and responsible action: a) use their imagination to consider other people's experiences.

**B3b** Citizenship

# Positives & negatives of belonging to a gang

Student handout

Good things	Bad things

## Geography

# What are the risks?



Key learning point:

■ That living on the streets carries many risks, some of them very serious - even life threatening.



### Instructions

#### 1. Handout activity

Ask students to draw on one side of the handout all the risks they face at home, and then on the other side all the risks they think they would face if they lived on the streets. Then ask students to grade each risk between 1 and 4 in terms of both seriousness and likelihood of them occurring. (4 = the most serious and the most likely to happen, 1= the least). Total each column, and use this information to inform the class discussion.

#### 2. Class discussion

Ask the students:

a) What risks did you identify?

✓ ✗ Answers (examples):

*E.g. at home: falling down stairs, having a bad argument with your parents, burning yourself on the oven.*

*E.g. on the streets: being involved in a road traffic accident, being beaten up, the weather, unclean water.*

b) Where do you face the most risks?

c) What is the main difference between the risks faced at home and those you experience living on the streets?



See also: Activity B6c, 'Health hazards', p.50



Isolator cell, Mongolia. One of the risks of living on the streets is being arrested, whether or not you have committed a crime.



#### National Curriculum

1. Geographical enquiry and skills: 1a) ask geographical questions; d) analyse and evaluate evidence and draw and justify conclusions.

