

Shine a Light Annual Report, 2003

Though the schoolbus was old, it had been freshly painted, inside and out. A library was fastened tightly to the wall, and desks filled the spaces where there used to be seats. Homeless and working kids were running in and out of the bus, doing their homework with a teacher, making jokes, practicing math, memorizing poems... This is what street education is about, I thought.

The bus driver and I were talking about homelessness in Montevideo, about how some of these kids managed to stay in school, even while working on the street. "I read that essay you people put together," he said, as an aside. "That's what I mean. These kids are capable, you said it."

I was confused. "What essay?"

"That long one. A hundred pages or so, right? On understanding life on the street, on how to make social services better. We'd been thinking that for a long time, but no one had ever really expressed it that way, you know? I think it's made our work a lot better." The teachers in the bus nodded along with him.

I later discovered that "Toward a General Theory of the Street", a Shine a Light white paper, had been the center for a training program for all of the street educators in Uruguay – dozens of people mentioned it to me, though most joked that they expected the author to be some fat 60 year old German academic...

Though the story is flattering, I mention it for another reason. For the last four years, Shine a Light has struggled to help grass roots NGOs all over Latin America learn from each other, to "make local solutions international," as our slogan puts it. We had seen our impact on a small scale, but the bus driver in Montevideo showed that our work, collecting and disseminating the successes of small organizations, could make a difference in a whole country. Yes, a small country, but a real difference.

The street educators in Montevideo are among the best in Latin America. Shine a Light can't take credit for that, but we do feel proud that our work has made them even better and allowed them to help more children more effectively.

In the next years, we will expand on these successes. The beginning of 2004 will herald the publication of two important curricular projects, CD-ROMs that teach how to work with indigenous street children and with street girls. We're also developing new projects on street gangs and on work with families, and continuing our project on tourism and youth homelessness.

When we began Shine a Light, we were a bunch of Harvard grad students with only an idea. Thanks to your support, we're now making a real difference in the lives of homeless children around Latin America.

Sincerely,

Kurt Shaw
Director Ejecutivo

Achievements, 2003

In late 2002, Shine a Light concluded its three-year, forty-nine-city research project on the causes of and solutions to youth homelessness, the foundation for our work in this past year. In addition to systematizing and publishing the results of our research (available at www.shinealight.org), we built upon it with four important projects:

- Indigenous Solutions
- Street Girls
- Tourism and Youth Homelessness
- Street Kids and Soccer

Due to our management model, Shine a Light was able to do all of this work on a budget of less than \$35,000 (see financial report below).

www.shinealight.org

The Shine a Light website has grown to over 1500 pages in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. It allows any user access to:

- Detailed descriptions of the NGOs with which SAL collaborates, with references to their methodologies, experiences, and skills.
- Essays on the lessons of a dozen nations – how they have succeeded and failed in their work on the street.
- Essays on the contemporary situation in a dozen countries, describing life on the street and off it.
- Indexes that organize NGOs by their strengths, so that you can write to the best programs around when you need advice and ideas.
- A bibliography and virtual library on street homelessness
- Links to international press, human rights, and fair trade organizations
- Lessons on fundraising and how to find foundations that might fund an NGO
- Resources for prospective volunteers, allowing them to find and contact the organizations that need their special skills
- Networking and research opportunities for scholars, allowing them to collaborate with other academics and to share their knowledge with people working at the grass roots
- Tools for foundations and other donors, so that they can find the innovative programs in Latin America that need their support.

In addition to reforming the website, thanks to a dozen committed volunteers in 10 countries, we translated the entire page into Portuguese, in addition to translating many pages from Spanish to English and vice versa. www.shinealight.org is now the foremost internet resource on street and working children.

Indigenous Solutions Project

Many Latin American NGOs have reported increasing numbers of indigenous children on the street, while at the same time they lament that cultural and linguistic barriers prevent social service agencies from serving these children well. In order to solve this problem, Shine a Light and **Melel Xojobal**, a Maya NGO in Chiapas, México, have collaborated to create a multi-media curriculum that teaches street educators and program directors how to work with Native American children.

Project Director Mike Feigelson has been in Chiapas for the last 18 months, helping Melel Xojobal to organize and document its knowledge. His work – photographs, essays, video, interviews, and much more – has broken new ground.

In January of 2004, Shine a Light will publish the results of the Indigenous Solutions Project as an interactive Spanish CD-ROM (a Portuguese version will soon follow). In addition to its educational value, the visuals on the CD are beautiful, and will be an important resource for anyone that wishes to understand street children or indigenous cultures.

Project for Street Girls

All across Latin America, the number of homeless girls is growing. In the 1980s, most observers spoke only of street boys, but prostitution, poverty, and sexual tourism have forced poor girls onto the street, as have drugs, decomposing families, and abuse. In some cities, researchers suggest that as many as 30 percent of street children are girls, up from less than 10 percent a decade ago.

Unfortunately, the majority of programs that work with street children were designed for boys. They use soccer as a way to meet the children; lessons on sexually transmitted diseases come from a male perspective; vocational training focusses on traditionally male professions like carpentry, welding, and auto mechanics. Though almost all organizations have attempted to address this problem, they often find themselves wandering in the dark.

In Recife, Brasil, **Casa de Passagem** has worked with street and at-risk girls for the last decade and a half. Its efforts have forced the Brazilian government and civil society to think about gender when providing services for street children; more significantly, it has created a powerful new model for working with girls.

Emma Salter is a British graduate student whose research focusses on Gender and Development. From May to September of 2003, she worked with the Casa de Passagem to discover and publicize the best practices in work with street girls. By careful interviews with girls, staff, and local academics, Miss Salter compiled a detailed set of recommendations for other organizations that wish to serve street girls better.

Two professional translators, Ana Saravia and Beatriz Iglesias, have translated Miss Salter's

research into Portuguese and Spanish, and now the whole team is developing a multimedia training curriculum based her thesis. Shine a Light will distribute the results to the 230 organizations in the SAL Network for Street Children, so that they can take advantage of Casa de Passagem's Long experience. We hope to have the project ready for distribution by March of 2004.

Street Kids and Soccer

If Latin America is to find real alternatives for street and working children, it will require efforts from all sectors of society: not just NGOs and the government, but also individuals, churches, and businesses. The **Club Recoleta** (Asunción, Paraguay) has initiated one of the most intriguing efforts to find unorthodox solutions to youth homelessness – a partnership between civil society, committed individuals, and a second division soccer club to offer real options for street children.

Soccer has always been a dream for children in shantytowns: the Brazilian national team is full of young men from the poorest *favelas*, who had had to work and sometimes even live on the street in order to support themselves and their families. The Club Recoleta has tried to institutionalize this model with concerted outreach to homeless and working boys. Equally important, the Club has found volunteer doctors and psychologists to help the boys back on their feet, and has gotten donations of food, milk, and medicine that allow the boys to play at the highest level.

In order to support this innovative partnership, Shine a Light connected the Recoleta Soccer School with several adult and youth teams in New Mexico (USA). These teams have raised funds to buy medicine and shoes for the Paraguayan boys; some of the younger teams have become pen-pals with the Paraguayans; and everyone is learning from the exchange. In the long term, several of the youth teams hope to travel to Paraguay and play, or to invite the Paraguayan players for a series of matches in New Mexico.

The New Mexico teams raised sufficient money to buy soccer equipment and medicine for all of the children in the Recoleta Soccer School, a true collaboration between individuals, businesses, and activists.

Project on Tourism and Youth Homelessness

San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico, is a tragic illustration of the impact that tourism can have on poor children. Most of the foreigners that come to the city are young; few are wealthy; many are politically radical, visiting San Cristobal and Chiapas in order to bathe in the glow of the Zapatista Revolution. These tourists have very little money to spend on arts and crafts, the industry that supports most of the poor Maya refugees in the city.

Maya artisans soon learned that though these radical tourists could say no to adult vendors, they found it much more difficult to reject the entreaties of small children. Inspired by pity and a

sincere desire to help poor people in San Cristóbal, the tourists now buy belts, shawls, and other trinkets from children. As a result, thousands of children work on the streets of San Cristobal. For many, street work is the first step on the road to homelessness or prostitution. In almost every case, children's earning power undermines family and cultural structures, leading to violence and alcoholism.

Roberto Tommasi, a young Italian expert on responsible tourism, is directing the Project on Tourism and Youth Homelessness. He began with in-depth research in San Cristobal, finding that tourism was one of the major economic causes of youth homelessness in that city (the results of this research will be available as an SAL White Paper in early 2004). The project will continue by creating a foundation to support the strongest street-child programs in Mexico; with funding from major Italian tour operators, this foundation will fund innovations in services for street and working children.

Trainings, Papers, and Networking

In addition to these projects, the Shine a Light team continues with its day to day activities:

- Connecting grass roots organizations with partners that can help them learn and grow
- Helping volunteers find the programs that need their help
- Directing NGOs to the foundations that might be able to find them
- Coordinating the work of researchers in from Europe and the Americas
- Informing the public about the realities of life on the street

In addition, we conducted trainings on street education, street life, and childhood in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Perú, and Uruguay, and Shine a Light Director Kurt Shaw taught the fall semester at the State University of Santa Catarina (Brazil), where he worked with teachers and social workers to understand and undermine the causes of youth homelessness.

Finally, Shine a Light published (or is completing) four important white papers:

- On the ideological roots of violence against street children
- On understanding children as social agents
- On new pedagogical models for work with marginalized children
- On the best practices for children's rights pedagogy

All are (or will soon be) available in Spanish at www.shinealight.org .

New Projects in 2004

In addition to completing our current projects and continuing our research and support work, Shine a Light will begin two important and innovative projects in 2004:

The Diverse Families Project

Contrary to popular belief, research shows that more than 80% of street children have close contacts with their families. As the agencies that work with homeless children have learned this fact, they have wisely decided to work less with shelters and more with parents.

It is easy to condemn these families: many are abusive, some exploit their children as street vendors or prostitutes, and few provide structure or discipline, but experience has shown that trying to "fix" these families – to make them conform to a middle-class norm – helps neither them nor their children. Fortunately, several grass roots programs have found another option: by respecting the families, they find hidden strengths. They help parents express their love. They show families how to use community networks for support: friends, grandparents, local youth groups. They also show everyone that diverse families -- single mothers, gay parents, prostitutes, two parent families – can be and often are good and supportive parents.

For the **ACJ** in Bogotá and **Intercalle** in Montevideo, this model has transformed the lives of street children and their families. Shine a Light will help these programs to document their work – through research, video, interviews, essays, and lesson plans – and then distribute the results as an interactive DVD-based curriculum. In this way, hundreds of organizations around Latin America will be able to improve their support for street children and their families.

Project against Street Violence

In March of 2003, street gangs took control of Rio de Janeiro for three days. In Medellín and Bogotá, gangs have created a parallel government. In Honduras, gangs have become so powerful that the government was forced into peace talks with them, as if they were a guerilla army. Even worse, right-wing governments have used gangs as an excuse for human rights atrocities, including the extrajudicial murder and disappearance of street children.

The Project against Street Violence will document successful grass-roots responses to this tragedy:

- Children in Bogotá who have organized to negotiate peace treaties between rival gangs;
- The use of dance, music, and theater as options for gang-affiliated youth in Brazil;
- How education and political organizing help Argentine youth to see themselves as actors, not victims, on life's stage, thus keeping them away from gangs.

The resulting DVD -- with film, interviews, essays, and educational presentations -- will show other grass roots programs how to use community development as a tool against gang violence. Equally important, it will show governments and policy professionals that they can address these problems without violating human rights.

Budget, 2003

Expenses

Indigenous Solutions Project		8079
Stipend: Program Director	4900	
Stipend: Melel Xojobal	1800	
Travel Expenses	1379	
Hardware Purchases (Computer and video Equipment)		4000
Street Girls Project		800
Support	100	
Tourism and Youth Homelessness project		100
Support	100	
Ongoing Networking (travel expenses, Brasil, Uruguay)		850
Translations: Website		370
<u>Salary, Executive Director</u>		<u>18,000</u>
		32,299

Income

Donations in money and in kind:	34,780
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Budget surplus: 2481

In Conclusion

When Mike Feigelson presented the Indigenous Solutions Project to a schoolteachers conference in Oaxaca, Mexico, the teachers were stunned. Yes, they were impressed by the photography, by the computer graphics and the video... but mostly they were excited to learn. Many had never thought about the issue before, but now they wanted to know how they could change their classrooms to become more welcoming to indigenous children; they loved learning the history of the mayas and understanding how families and communities work in indigenous cultures. They wanted copies of the CD ROMs so that they could use them in their own schools.

The work of Shine a Light has been powerful because we build on the strengths of local communities and local organizations: the commitment of good teachers, the creativity of innovative thinkers, the knowledge of researchers. In this way, we multiply our efforts and make an impact far beyond our small size.

The past year has proved without a doubt that the Shine a Light model – finding the best grass roots programs and helping them to teach their peers – is both successful and cost-effective. With a miniscule budget – but with the help of dozens of volunteers, scholars, and activists – we have leveraged local successes into international solutions.