

Celebrating International Day of Co-operatives . . .



ICA Housing helps street children in Ecuador

As a contribution to this year's ICA Co-operative Day and the UN International Day of Co-operatives, ICA Housing is helping street children in Ecuador to build a home, a school and a workshop to train them as carpenters.

Concrete support for such models of integrated projects is a contribution to test new forms of working with street children and may encourage other NGOs to do something similar and collect their own experience. Results and reports will be regrouped in an international documentation centre for street children in Berlin, where case studies are collected, made accessible and disseminated for encouragement and exchange.

The Situation of Street children

Financial pressure, ruined family structures and the daily experience of brutality as well as slave-like work are the main reasons that children take to the streets in developing countries. Their parents generally are faced with their own struggle for survival, so that street gangs for these kids become a substitute for family ties.



Without external help the circle of violence and hopelessness cannot be overcome and most governments are neither very much willing nor in a position to help them. If international organisations are involved, they may be able to bring about a change in this situation. In the case of the ICA-supported project at Guayaquil in Ecuador land to construct a small centre at least could be offered at favourable terms. This means a stable basis for meetings and the street gang can be stabilised as group. All are willing to give their support for the construction work and thus make this project "theirs", which is a good start to equip them with identification and self-esteem.

There are alarming signals in Latin America that the worst situation for street children is the international trade with human organs, which is one of the reasons that thousands of them are killed every year. Criminal gangs in this "business" are well organised, earning a lot of money - also by kidnapping and illegal export of children for adoption.

Integrated Project combining Housing, Education and Professional Skills

Housing is the precondition for improvements in the life of street children. A home for street children means much more than a roof over the head. It is also more than just a safer place. It

is a social, economic and psychological uplift. It is a new family, living in community instead of living in isolation, in peace instead of permanent threat, in mutual help instead of fight and jealousy, in learning instead of drug abuse, in professional skills instead of crime...

Writing, reading and elementary mathematics are school issues missed by most of the street children, as they became school drop-out early, vocational training as carpenters means opportunities to earn, some funds to finance education and food until an independent life can be achieved.

Self-help is an integral part of the project. The children are instructed by a German engineer to build their future homes and workshops. It promises to be a positive start for the small street children's community. They will see their homes and future growing...

ICA Housing Co-operatives initiated a European partnership for housing development assistance "Hand-up for Housing"

The European housing co-operative organisations linked to NGOs for development assistance like SCC, NBBL, DESWOS, FENACHE, BSHF, Shelter Austria founded a European partnership last year during the ICA meetings in Lisbon in October 2002. The objective of "Hand-up for Housing" is the pooling of resources, financial as well as expertise, for the benefit of those in need of decent housing in developing countries. There are also important NGOs outside of Europe, e.g. in USA (Co-operative Housing Foundation) and Canada (Roof Tops), linked to the Canadian housing co-operatives. Together with the European partnership joint ventures could be realized.

In order to overcome bottlenecks of financing it is planned to apply for European Union funding as a European NGO network or with national funding institutions. As the network is still in the beginning stage, all European NGOs working in this field are invited to join the network.

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