

standing is a complex issue

I stand for human rights!
 Standing room only.
 If you like, I'll stand aside.
 Stand here!
 Stand there!
 We stand together.
 Standing room only.

Stand up - and be counted!
 Standing room only.
 I stand corrected.
 Stand in a corner!
 Stand down!
 She stands firm.
 Standing room only.

Stand against the oppressors!
 Standing room only.
 Are you standing for election?
 On a standing committee.
 What's your stand?
 Standing room only.

They won't stand for it!
 Standing room only.
 I can't stand any more.
 Don't be standoffish.
 Make a stand!
 Take a stand!
 I understand.
 Sorry

STANDING ROOM ONLY!

Anne Schuster

reports from the regions:

How the system targets children: Natal

Example 1: Three mothers from Clermont, KwaDabeka, and St Wendolins separately approached a social worker. 'Please keep our children in detention,' they asked. 'They'll have a better chance of surviving the violence.'

Example 2: A child at a street shelter (now closed) said he ran away from Mpumalanga, outside Hammarsdale. 'On my way to school I was beaten up because I didn't belong to the United Democratic Front and on the way home I was beaten up because I didn't belong to Inkatha,' he explained.

Example 3: Henry, age 9, lay in a cell in the basement of CR Swart Square police headquarters in Durban. He was held for loitering. He had typhoid. Nobody had noticed.

Last example: Bongani, 13, dropped out in Std 4 to join the UDF and later led a gang of comtsotsis. He was shot by police after he had been spotted driving a bakkie he stole in an armed hold-up. 'I can't help him', said his lawyer. 'He needs rehabilitation.' Bongani went to a reformatory.

These lives make Sash member Priscilla McKay angry. Priscilla directs the Pinetown/Highway Child Welfare Society. She spoke of the four examples above at a South African Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (SASPCAN) conference in Cape Town. What follows are a few points only from her paper on the systematic child abuse built into our society.

- 'It's no good dealing with sexual abuse and stuff like that unless we also look at what happens to children as a result of state policies.'
- 'Three generations of apartheid is the greatest abuser of children in this country.' Her own organisation runs nine daycare centres for more than 800 children but this drop in the bucket 'in no way makes up for the inability of the parents to parent their children.'
- 'Child Welfare has a sophisticated "systematic training for effective



Gus Ferguson

caught in the storm

parenting" programme. But the real need of the parents is for housing and for employment nearby so they can get back in the evenings.'

- 'Domestic workers never see their children in daylight. All the parenting programmes in the world will not enable those parents to help their children.'

The system targets the children - and that makes Priscilla's profession difficult and risky: 'The anger of the children is often extremely high. A school in Inanda Newtown was petrol-bombed while I was there - the headmaster had refused to have an SRC. One of our social workers was shot at. She was in an area where homes were being bulldozed by a public utility company to make way for a housing development for another population group.'

Children are politicised and criminalised without any rehabilitation facilities. Typhoid Henry's place of safety in the dark under CR Swart Square was home to more than 100 children charged with apolitical offences like vagrancy. Nationally the figure is 170 000: 'Sometimes they are held for very serious reasons. There were 16 children held in Pinetown charged with murder, rape, armed robbery and arson around Soweto Day. We accept the need for institutions. But we object to the children's prisons. Do we rather not need rehabilitation and treatment centres?'

A postscript: Priscilla - and daughter Ann, another Sash member - were arrested and held briefly at the Durban 'Free the Beaches' protest on 3 September after she objected to police arresting children. □

Christina Scott, Natal Coastal Region



How the system targets children: Peelson

To be a child in Nkqonkqweni Village, Peelson, today is to be a target of the Ciskei police. Children sent to fetch water try to dress up as adults to avoid harassment. Many have stopped going to school. Others have been sent away to stay with relatives or comrades in surrounding communities.

Since the incorporation of East Peelson into the Ciskei in August 1988 violence has never been far from the surface of daily life for residents. For over a year now the Ciskei government has tried to impose itself on very unwilling 'citizens'. The continual harassment of a community obviously will have serious consequences for the mental wellbeing of the children. However, recently the violence has been directed at children whom the Ciskei authorities see as their most radical opponents.

On 15 August 1989 a busload of pupils on the way back from a sports meeting was forced to proceed to a police station. Here pupils from Nkqonkqweni were pointed out and promptly detained. The next day pupils from the school boycotted classes in protest, forcing the principal to intervene on behalf of those detained. This led to the release of all those detained, after being charged with malicious damage to property.

The youth reacted in anger. That night windows of the houses of Ciskei sympathisers were smashed. The police did not react and the following day the majority of the small group of Ciskei supporters left the village. But on the Sunday, after a service organised by the Council of Churches, the police again moved into Nkqonkqweni. Teargas was fired indiscriminately. Four youths aged 14 to 17 were arrested, taken to the headman's house and sjambokked.

Most of the children and many young adults fled into the bushes and onto neighbouring white farms. Unable to chase them across the 'border', the police opened fire at those fleeing with semi-automatic rifles. Fortunately no injuries were reported. The continued presence of the police in the village prevented many children from returning home for up to three days.

Parents have been powerless to protect their children. Even the courts have showed little interest in their plight. It is little wonder that in September-October one could see reports in the newspaper of children stoning police vehicles, of children burning down the houses of President Sebe's supporters. The tragedy of the South African situation, and its devastating effects on township youth, is being acted out once more. □

Larry Field, fieldworker, Border Region

Discouraging news for street children: little help in sight

Like other cities, Pietermaritzburg has a growing number of street children - children who have fled to the city, who sleep in doorways, on pavements, in parks, wrapped in newspapers and plastic for warmth, sniff glue to overcome cold and depression, survive by begging or stealing. With each escalation in the Natal conflict there are more children to be seen in the city, refugees psychologically traumatised by the violence, the destruction of their homes, the loss of their parents.

What has been done to shelter, feed, educate and rehabilitate the children? The Pietermaritzburg Child and Family Welfare Society found accommodation for about 25 children in a vacant, municipally owned house in a run-down area. For a full year the children were fed and cared for, and many were rehabilitated to the point of voluntarily returning to school.

Then, in March 1989, because a white neighbour had complained about the presence of black children in a 'white' area, the municipality was 'compelled' to evict the children. Petitions drawn up by the Black Sash - initially to prevent the eviction, later to ask for a reinstatement of the children in the still-empty house and for accommodation and care for the many other street children - were sent to the Administrator of Natal and to the Minister of Home Affairs. Appeals went simultaneously to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg.

The plight of the street children has evoked a considerable response from the public who have donated blankets and clothes, and money to the Street Children's Fund. There is also a feeding scheme organised by the Street Children's Management Committee (made up of church and other concerned members of the public) and administered by Child Welfare. It has been the authorities who have remained strangely un-

good times, bad times, for street children



Street children in a Pietermaritzburg park. The woman with two small children, pictured above, takes food to the park every day.

responsive. Admittedly, an offer was made to accommodate the children in a Place of Safety. This offer was rejected by most of the children and the authorities seem to feel that they are therefore absolved of further responsibility.

Replies to letters by Sash members to the press and to the Mayor and the Administrator have revealed a seemingly granite indifference on the part of those in authority, and an ignorance and insensitivity which could come only from a deep reluctance to know the facts of these children's situation. There has been a plea of powerlessness, and a moralistic line has been taken: to provide the children with food and warmth would encourage them in their pursuit of the adventurous city life.

The number of street children in

Pietermaritzburg has been estimated at around 300. Undernourishment and neglect are taking their toll: many of the children look ill. Not surprisingly, an increase in delinquency has been reported. Black Sash spokespersons have repeatedly argued that the longer the children are left on the streets, the more they will become criminalised, therefore the longer it will take to rehabilitate them, and the greater the cost to the community will be. The latest initiative has been an appeal to Mike Tarr, Democratic Party member of parliament, to use his influence to promote the street children's cause. We are presenting him with a memorandum which he will use to inform and put pressure on the authorities. □

*Fidéla Fouché,
Natal Midlands Region*

More positive news

A number of projects reach out to the estimated 5 000 to 9 000 children who live on South African city streets. Street-wise (depicted here) is an educational and job skills programme which aims to provide quality residential care for those who make a strong commitment to the programme and want a settled life. Johannesburg, 1989.



Good news for refugees: the Pietermaritzburg Day Centre

During a two-week period in July this year, three things happened: funding from Victims of Apartheid for a centre for displaced youth was confirmed; a venue was made available; and an organiser for the centre was employed. For those who had been involved in lengthy and often frustrating negotiations, this exciting chain of events marked the end of one phase of the project while at the same time presenting new demands and challenges. Within a few days, a group of 23 refugees from the Swayimani area, aged 12 to 25, arrived at the centre. They were homeless and without food, and required immediate assistance.

The plight of these people has become commonplace in this area, so much so that it is regarded by many

as 'normal' and certainly not the responsibility of citizens of the city. It was this realisation and a desire to focus the attention of white Pietermaritzburg on a situation that is a direct result of apartheid ideology (and so, our responsibility) that resulted in the Black Sash decision in March to explore the possibility of providing facilities for refugees. Consultations with local and progressive organisations indicated that what was needed was 'a place' - somewhere for displacees to gather and, it was hoped, to embark on a more settled and integrated life.

What started as a Black Sash initiative became more broadly based and a steering committee on which local black communities were represented was set up. They looked for

accommodation and sought funding for the project. Problems ranged from a city council unwilling to take any action at all, to angry racist responses from a few white residents, and the inevitable refusal to rezone in terms of the Group Areas Act. More positively, the committee was constantly encouraged by generous support from a large number of members of the public.

Since things came together in July, the centre has begun operating from the YMCA premises in Edendale. The organiser and the displacees together are creating 'the place'. It is a place which we hope will be important in the lives of some of the victims of political disruption in this troubled area. □

Jenny Clarence, Natal Midlands