



The International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)

SPECIAL REPORT

Issue N. 1 - 2010

Summary of Selected Papers from ISPCAN's XVIIIth International Congress and Youth Empowerment Forum

The XVIIIth ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect took place from September 26-29th, 2010 in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The Congress incorporated numerous papers and symposia on child abuse and neglect by preeminent international speakers. Additionally, a Pre-Congress Youth Empowerment Forum was held on September 25th. This Post Congress Special Report includes summaries of selected papers from the Congress as well as papers by international youth from the successful Youth Empowerment Forum.

The Good and Child-Friendly Governments: Summary of a keynote speech

Assefa Bequele, PhD, Distinguished Fellow, The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), www.africanchildforum.org

This is a meeting mostly of medical scientists, clinicians, practitioners and social workers. So, you would be excused for asking why in the world I am talking about Governments, good or bad. My choice of topic arises from my belief in the pivotal role of public policy, especially of laws and economics, in influencing the state of child wellbeing. The great work of grassroots and national and international non-governmental organisations around the world notwithstanding, their efforts cannot be of enduring value unless they are backed by a committed State that is prepared to adopt the right child-friendly social and economic policies, sets and enforces the right standards, puts in place the right institutions and mobilises the required volume of resources for children. Families do not and cannot survive in isolation; their environment and the extent to which it is supportive affect their capacity to provide for themselves and their children an adequate standard of living and a life that is free from fear and insecurity. The State is the catalyst and the guarantor of that life of economic and social security and dignity. So, good government is as central to child wellbeing as it is to virtually every aspect of social, economic and political life. It is therefore important that we study the behaviour of governments and watch what they are doing; especially the extent to which they observe the principle of the best interests of the child as a major consideration in the formulation of public policy.

But what do we mean by a good government? What are its major characteristics? How do we know if a government is doing well or not so well for children? The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) developed a tool, called the **Child-Friendliness Index (CFI)**, which provides a qualitative, statistical and quantitative framework to assess government performance and the extent to which governments are living up to their constitutional and international responsibilities to promote child wellbeing.

In child rights parlance, child-friendliness is a manifestation of the political will of governments to make the maximum effort to meet their obligations to respect, protect and ensure children's rights. The concept builds on three central pillars of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: **Protection, Provision and Participation**. ACPF then developed a set of more than 40 indicators, collected data on various aspects of child wellbeing and on as many policy variables as possible for all African states, and assessed their individual and relative performance at a point in time and over time. **Based on these indicators and performance, ACPF divided the governments into five categories: Most Child Friendly; Child Friendly; Fairly Child Friendly; Less Child Friendly; and Least Child Friendly.**

The analysis showed that the governments that emerged on top as "**Most Child Friendly**" and "**Child Friendly**" did so for one reason: they all adopted a two-pronged approach.

First, they put in place appropriate legal provisions and policies to protect children against abuse and exploitation. More specifically, they adopted a standard definition of the child as any person below the age of eighteen; repealed all provisions that discriminated against children including on the grounds of parentage, sex and disability; raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 12; prohibited corporal punishment and harmful traditional practices; and provided for a child-friendly justice administration.

Secondly, they allocated a relatively high share of their national budgets to provide for the basic needs of children and ensure access to primary healthcare and universal, free and compulsory primary education. The budget that goes to children is perhaps the single most important measure of a government's commitment to child wellbeing. In Africa, national expenditures on health and education vary quite significantly among countries. The median expenditure for health was nine percent of total government expenditure, and it varied between a high of 20 and 29 percent for Liberia and Malawi respectively and a paltry 2.3 percent and 3.5 percent for Burundi and Nigeria, respectively. The empirical lesson that emerged was that countries committed to combating infant mortality and saving lives should, as a first step, aim to reach the median average and therefore allocate at least nine percent of their total expenditure to health and aim at raising it to as high 20 to 29 percent.

In respect of education, here too one finds significant variations in budgetary performance – ranging from 0.6 percent by the government of Equatorial Guinea to 13.4 percent by the government of Lesotho, with a median for the continent of 4.3 percent. The policy conclusion was

therefore that countries committed to education should aim at raising the proportion to as high as 13 percent of GDP, and those with the lowest should raise it to at least 4.3 percent of their GDP, as a minimum

The child-friendliness of a government is not necessarily related to its economic status. Governments with limited per capita resource at their disposal were able to score high in child-friendliness. On the other hand there were also a number of governments with relatively high income which scored low in the **Child Friendliness Index**.

The African experience confirms what many of us have long suspected. Yes, there are considerable challenges facing governments in Africa as elsewhere, but change and progress can be effected even at very low levels of development. You do not have to have oil and diamonds to provide a better country for your children. Rather, success has to do with whether or not children figure in the election manifestoes of politicians and their parties; whether or not they are at the heart of the budgeting process and are given a hearing; whether or not laws are based on the principle of the best interest of the child; whether or not the state has established a child-sensitive juvenile justice system; and whether or not we are moving towards a polity and society that is child-friendly. In other words, good governance, and this means: **Politics** that put children first, **Laws** that protect them, and **Budgets** that provide for them.

Prevention of Physical Abuse – Approaches and Evidence

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Physical abuse can be defined as any interaction between a child and caregiver which results in non-accidental harm to the child's physical, emotional, and/or developmental state. Physical abuse was perhaps the first type of child abuse to be widely appreciated, and laws and terminology (e.g. counting discrete episodes of abuse) better reflect physical abuse than neglect or sexual abuse.

Epidemiology

Physical abuse can be measured in various imperfect ways. Official US Child Protective Services statistics do not reflect the majority of cases which never come to the attention of authorities. In 2007, an estimated 794,000 children were found to have substantiated child abuse—26.4% with physical abuse as the main type. However, there were an estimated 1760 fatalities from child abuse; a figure known to be too low. Child Death Review Teams more critically examine cases; probably determining abuse more accurately. The teams, however, only look at dead children. The 4th National Incidence Study (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/index.html) used more intensive sampling methods and found an estimated 1,256,600 child abuse victims in 2005-2006 (12 month period), of which 44% were victims of physical or sexual abuse. Adult samples, however, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES), show at least 10% of the adult population sustained physical abuse. Regardless of the difficulty in estimating precise numbers, the problem of physical abuse is at pandemic proportions.

Harms of physical abuse

Physical abuse may lead to financial, crime, humanitarian, poor population health, and abnormal brain development. These are important considerations in understanding exactly what the harm of child abuse is and in making the case for prevention. According to Prevent Child Abuse America, child abuse costs at least \$104 billion per year in the US. Prevent Crime: Invest in Kids, in a 2003 report, conservatively estimated that there are an additional 35,000 violent criminals and more than 250 murderers each year in the US because of child abuse. However the costs to the health of the population, the brains that are negatively altered because of the world of abnormal rearing, and the moral harm to society are not as easily measured by dollars or crime statistics.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study reflects a body of research showing that a wide range of health problems in adulthood are strongly influenced by whether or not the person was the victim of child abuse. Child abuse prevention would potentially have a major impact on smoking, alcohol abuse, diabetes, cancer, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, employee attendance, sexually transmitted diseases, and many other health problems. For example, about 50% of mental health problems can be attributed to adverse childhood experiences and about 66% of all substance abuse problems. Abuse leads to physical consequences for the brain, sometimes permanently altering its function. Neurological consequences of abuse affect the limbic-hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, the locus ceruleus, and the prefrontal cortex (with low serotonin perhaps responsible for depression). Executive functions may become hyporesponsive, resulting in difficulty following case plans and performing daily activities. The amygdala may become hyperresponsive with dysregulation of other neuro-hormonal systems. Prevention of child abuse equates to growing better brains and bodies.

Prevention

Several illustrative programs help to understand many current approaches to primary physical abuse prevention: parent training programs, home visiting, and shaken baby prevention.

Parent training programs, such as parent-child interaction therapy and Triple P, rely on parents as the key source of safe, stable, nurturing relationships (SSNR's). The Triple P program is a multi-level system that delivers training and support to parents but has points of intervention throughout the community. It has been shown to decrease child behavior problems, result in smaller increases in substantiated child abuse cases, reduce out of home placements, and reduce child hospitalizations and emergency room visits due to child abuse injuries.

Home visitation (e.g. Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America) is widely used around the world and focuses on the role that modeling behavior has on learning. Modeling has historically been a key way in which humans and other mammals learn but adapting this to positive parenting remains a focus of research. Studies have been mixed about the effectiveness of home visitation, but they appear to be promising overall with certain caveats. Clearly families heavily enmeshed with substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental health problems need more intensive interventions. When offered universally or for high-risk populations, home visitation can deliver health messages, reduce punishment by parents, and enhance the quality of parent-child interactions.

Shaken baby programs are increasingly focusing on the stimuli that elicit the abusive behavior—crying for children under one year of age. The incidence of crying over the first 4 months of age can be described as a curve reaching a peak at 6–8 weeks of age and then decreasing. Three separate studies have shown remarkable similarities when plotting the frequency of shaken baby syndrome (SBS) by age. The SBS incidence curves parallel the crying frequency curve except for a “lag” of about 2 weeks. This is strong evidence that crying is the trigger for many cases of SBS (confirming perpetrator admissions) and points to an opportunity for intervention. A variety of SBS prevention programs now teach “coping with crying.” The focus is to help parents understand that some crying is normal and how they can deal with it. Research has shown that parents can learn these messages, and research is underway to determine how best to prevent actual physical abuse.

Non-programmatic interventions may also be effective such as social marketing campaigns to change social norms, available and affordable center-based day care, and parent leave policies.

Effectiveness and implications

It is vital that programs and other interventions be evaluated to determine what is best for children and to be responsible with limited resources. A multi-pronged approach to develop healthy children into healthy adults includes ensuring that safe, stable, nurturing relationships are in the home and community, universal access to health services, early prevention of what could become toxic stresses by promoting innovative policies and programs to advance all aspects of health, and methods to reduce the toxicity of abuse if experienced. Priority should be given to efforts that begin early in childhood, that create sustainable change, that go to scale, and link with key partners.

Traumatic Reenactment: How This Triangle can Sabotage Intervention and Treatment

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Abstract:

Trauma forces individuals to rely on basic survival skills that can often lead to a lifetime of chronic maladaptive behavior and interpersonal relationships. Helping trauma survivors learn how to negotiate and alter these dynamics is called re-scripting. Re-scripting reenactment, a primary tool of the Sanctuary Model, is an effective technique in managing these seemingly unconscious and controlling behavioral undercurrents that can impede an individual's recovery.

Introduction:

The notion that individuals can engage in behaviors that are by their very nature intended to “relive” the past was first identified by Freud (1914/1959) and termed “repetition compulsion.” As we have come to understand how trauma survivors often engage in unconscious and misplaced behavioral responses to current experiences, (Levine, 1996; Van der Kolk and Ducey, 1989; Bloom and Farragher, 2010) we have learned how “traumatic reenactment” is frequently the root cause of some of our most challenging cases. Traumatic reenactment refers to the vulnerability of the client, the therapist and even the system in which they work together to the disruptive influence of the past.

Discussion:

Reenactment in behavior

The simplest way to understand reenactment is to look at the direct relationship between past and present behavior. A classic example of this dynamic is an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse who finds him/herself practicing promiscuity or continually in relationships with partners who are abusive.

In this example of reenactment, re-scripting would mean helping the client to see that this behavior is a reenactment of past abuse. Making the unconscious conscious is the intervention's first step. Re-scripting would involve helping the client see the adaptive parts of the behavior in relation to the past trauma and, then creating a plan to change the behavior.

Reenactment in relationships

Traumatic experiences seem to create a filter in the brain that views everything through a lens of the past. This filter keeps a person from seeing a future that is different from the past, because through the trauma filter, everything looks like the past. Also a future that looks different from the past looks excruciatingly uncomfortable. Even when a person can see a different future, he or she may be completely unaware of how to get to it. Any steps toward a different future feel scary, so avoidance might be employed.

An example of this kind of reenactment sabotage might be the same client who is a survivor of sexual abuse, who refuses to come to treatment regularly or who is able to verbalize a wish to reach a goal, but creates reasons not to take any steps toward it. Another reenactment risk in this scenario is for the therapist to continue encouraging or challenging the client to take the steps, and in doing so reenacts a rejecting or critical parent dynamic for the client. The therapist may even begin to feel frustrated and dissatisfied with the client through a projective identification.

In this case, re-scripting means seeing the treatment refusal as skill practice rather than defiance. We might see treatment refusal as an attempt to set boundaries for a person who was not able to say no to an abuser or set boundaries with current partners. Setting a boundary by not showing up to therapy may be good practice, but is not particularly adaptive. Re-scripting in this case would involve helping a client titrate information and emotions in tolerable doses rather than set the boundary by his/her absence.

Re-scripting would also involve helping the client when taking steps to differentiate between his/her feelings as uncomfortable rather than unsafe on taking steps. Positive change should be safe, but it is rarely comfortable.

Reenactment in systems

We bring our own past to work, and we are also influenced by the past of the organizations in which we work. Our brains unconsciously compel us to act out the painful events of the past, and we see a similar phenomenon in organizations. An organization is a living thing with a “collective brain” that also compels whole groups of people to recreate the painful experiences of the organization's past.

An example is an organization that was originally an orphanage. As the economic, social and political environment changed, the organization had to reinvent itself as a residential treatment center. It was a very painful loss of identity for the organization and traumatic for the staff who had known and loved it as a small familial environment. Clinicians were hired to provide

treatment services, but they felt like an “add on” to the orphanage staff, or worse, like invaders to the community. To this day, the clinical staff continue to feel “outside” of the community and not able to be effective in influencing the milieu.

The re-scripting strategy here would be to create an organizational trauma history similar to that of an individual client and help the staff grasp how history is being played out in the present. This would be much like the intervention with a client in which the unconscious is brought to consciousness, where grief and loss can be addressed.

Conclusion:

Reenactment is often a driving force in a trauma survivor’s behavioral and relational life. Although reenactment stems from the very positive and adaptive wish to resolve the past, the cycle of traumatic reenactment often ends in just the opposite: a repetitive and dysfunctional re-creation of a past trauma experience. Traumatic reenactment can manifest in many ways, not just in individual clients, but in the providers of treatment and even the systems that provide these services to trauma survivors. Both individuals and organizations are vulnerable to recreating the traumatic past in unconscious ways, but once aware that one is reenacting a traumatic experience, the tool of “re-scripting” is an antidote to the apparent sabotage of client treatment or organizational functioning.

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Research-Based Best Practices and Current Issues in Child Forensic Interviewing

Patti Toth, J.D.

Best practices related to child forensic interviewing have changed greatly in the last 30 years. Many specially trained interviewers now conduct investigative interviews for both child protection and criminal justice systems. Training now reflects lessons learned from experience and research, including an emphasis on open-ended questioning and the importance of skilled supervision and peer review.

A number of interview approaches have emerged, though they tend to fall into one of two categories:

1. Those based on or similar to the **NICHD protocol**, developed by researchers at the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Adaptations emphasize open-ended questioning techniques to elicit verbal narratives and discourage the use of dolls and drawings.
2. Approaches based on the **RATAC protocol** developed by the “CornerHouse” Children’s Advocacy Center in Minnesota. These encourage the use of media and early questions about “touch.”

“RATAC” stands for: *Rapport, Anatomy Identification, Touch Inquiry, Abuse Scenario and Closure*. Training courses based on the RATAC protocol are offered in 17 US states and in Japan. The NICHD protocol is the most extensively studied child interviewing approach in the world and is utilized in various locations in the United Kingdom, Canada, U.S., and throughout Israel. This impressive body of research has led to widespread endorsement of the key strategies included in the NICHD protocol. Unlike the RATAC protocol, it includes specific interview instructions with practice examples as an early interview stage, as well as practicing neutral event narratives. It does not ask the child to provide names for different parts of the body at the beginning of the interview. The NICHD approach utilizes alternative open-ended probes to introduce the topic of concern during the interview, rather than the specific questions related to touch that are part of the RATAC protocol.

Areas of Agreement

Regardless of approach, there is broad agreement about the following basic principles of best practice interviewing.

Setting

The interview setting should be child-friendly, neutral (de-emphasizing interviewer authority), private and free from distractions. Ideally, one person should be present in the room to interview the child.

Documentation

Video-recording is the best and most accurate way to document interviews. The child should be informed when the interview is being recorded.

Timing

Children should be interviewed as soon as possible after the alleged events, with consideration given to what is a reasonable time under the circumstances.

Number of interviews

Unnecessary multiple interviews, especially by different interviewers, should be avoided. However artificial restrictions, such as setting a limit of one interview, should not be imposed, since some children require more interviews to obtain further information.

Interviewer demeanor and background information

Interviewers should be supportive, warm and friendly, while maintaining objectivity. They should be patient, allow for silence, and really listen, incorporating the child’s words in their next question whenever possible. Interviewers should be open-minded and use background information to help formulate and explore likely alternatives that could explain a child’s statements or concerning behavior.

Importance of building rapport

It is critical for interviewers to engage the child, establish a relationship, and make him/her comfortable before initiating questions about substantive allegations.

Importance of adapting to the individual child

Interviewers should consider the child’s age, developmental level, cultural background and experiences, mindset, level of support, any physical/developmental disabilities, etc. and adapt the interview accordingly.

Interviewers must pay careful attention to the child’s understanding and use of language, and adapt to his/her develop-

mental level. This includes making sure the child understands the interviewer (and vice-versa), keeping sentences short and simple, and signaling when changing the subject (“framing”). Interviewers must keep in mind that children are concrete, and that as a general age-related trend, preschoolers are the most susceptible to suggestion. Interviewers should use people’s names, place names, and specific nouns to avoid possible confusion from using pronouns and other “shifting” words. Concepts that are difficult for children to understand, such as time and number, should be approached with extreme caution or avoided. Even the use of simple negatives such as “not” and “no” should be avoided.

Encourage narratives

In order to trigger free recall and increase reliability, regardless of the child’s age, interviewers should maximize the use of open-ended non-suggestive prompts that encourage narrative responses throughout the interview. Interviewers should minimize the use of close-ended questioning techniques (including ‘yes/no,’ multiple choice, and questions that can be answered with one word).

Key Best Practice Interview Components

Research clearly establishes the following as best-practice strategies that improve the reliability and amount of information produced by children during interviews.

Interview Instructions

The following instructions at the beginning of an interview can orient children to interview expectations, discourage guessing, and increase resistance to suggestion.

1. **Don’t guess**
Children should be given permission to say “I don’t know” and told not to guess, with practice examples.
2. **Don’t understand**
Children should be given permission to say they don’t know what the interviewer means when a question is not understood, with practice examples.
3. **Correct interviewer mistakes**
Children should be encouraged to correct interviewer mistakes, with suitable practice examples.
4. **Interviewer lack of knowledge**
Children should be clearly told that, because the interviewer wasn’t there, he/she doesn’t know what happened and can’t help answer interview questions.

Elicit an Agreement to Tell the Truth

Children should be asked to make a commitment to tell the truth, since this is proven by research to increase honesty during the interview.

Narrative Practice

When done well, this is arguably the most critical component in the introductory phase of the interview. Interviewers should practice asking children open-ended questions about neutral events. This is the most effective way to develop rapport, assess the child’s developmental level, and establish the pattern of questioning for the rest of the interview.

Open-ended Non-suggestive Introduction of Topic of Concern

Interviewers should introduce the topic of concern in the most open-ended non-suggestive way possible, with the first attempt being a request to “Tell me why you came to talk to me.” If this

is non-productive, the interviewer can (if applicable) cue the child very generally to a previous disclosure, and should only gradually move toward more direct or suggestive prompts.

Conclusion

As the **2002 APSAC Practice Guidelines on Investigative Interviewing in Cases of Alleged Child Abuse** indicate, “There is no single correct method for conducting child investigative interviews in cases of alleged abuse.” There are still areas of controversy among child interviewers, including whether certification or credentialing is a good idea. However, the good news is that we have learned a great deal from the ongoing research about how to be better interviewers, and we will continue to learn more as research continues and as our experience grows.

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The organizers of the 18th ISPCAN Congress on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect held in Honolulu, Hawai'i were proud to host an International Youth Empowerment Forum on September 25, 2010.

Youth from Hawai'i, other parts of the United States, and from abroad gathered to share issues of childhood challenges, resilience, transitioning to adulthood, as well as other problems youth face in their respective regions. They shared in a cultural exchange and learned about concerns in other parts of the world. After engaging their talents through a wide variety of media to express youth issues and needs, they presented their findings in a plenary session at the main Congress.

The following papers were presented at the International Youth Panel by scholarship recipients representing each continent.

Gaby Taub

Youth Participation Co-Chair



Bree Steward is a youth that resides in Darwin, in the Northern Territory region of Australia. Bree is the third eldest in a family of two sisters and a brother. As a teenager he lived on the streets for six months and during this time was in and out of residential care. When he was 19 years old, the offer of a free

feed enticed him to get involved in the CREATE Foundation and he soon found there was more to it than food! Bree has been involved with CREATE ever since and has also volunteered his time with the Australian Red Cross and Headspace, a youth specific mental health organization. In 2006, he was elected Darwin City Council's Young Citizen of the Year and in the same year was awarded a citation for the Youth Meritorious Award from Australian Red Cross. He has recently enrolled to complete a Certificate Four in Community Services and hopes to continue working with young people. This is his first time travelling overseas so he is also very excited about this new experience! Bree is passionate about helping young people find their voice and was proud to represent young people from Australia and the surrounding areas.

and Q&A with other youth delegates representing North/Central America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. This was where I presented information about CREATE, such as: who we are and what we do; information about our National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC) and our Action Plans for creating change; and information about our CREATE Your Future Program. I got really good feedback about my presentation. They said I did a great job, was well prepared and that I wasn't nervous at all (little did they know!). It was interesting to hear the other youth delegates' presentations – some of this was very moving and I found it interesting that they were describing similar issues to those in Australia.

After the Youth Panel, we all got involved in an Expressive Session. This was where we used music and singing, dance and drama, slam poetry and writing, and graphic art to express our ideas and share our experiences based on the key themes of transitioning to adulthood and developing resilience. We then presented the final products or our artistic messages, which were filmed and shown the next day at the ISPCAN Congress as a summary of the Youth Empowerment Program.

I saw some amazing keynote speakers. The one that really impacted and inspired me was a woman from America called Tonier Cain. While she was in foster care, she used drugs and attempted suicide. Once she'd left care, Tonier developed a drug addiction, became homeless, and got in trouble with the law. All Tonier needed was someone to give her a hand to get over the emotional trauma. Tonier went into rehab, and now she's no longer on drugs, she owns two businesses, and owns her own house.

During my time at the Congress, I also sat with other members of the Youth Panel at a stall answering questions from different people at the Congress. There was a lot of interest about CREATE which was great. It was at the stall that I started chatting with someone from the organisation, Kids Hurt Too. They have a Hawai'ian Foster Youth Coalition. This is a youth led group of young people in and post care, aged 14-24, who provide education, advocacy, and support to help improve the foster care system so young people transitioning from care have hope and can reach their goals (really similar to our NYAC and Youth Advisory Groups). We got to talking about the different programs and activities they run, and found there were quite a lot of similarities with the programs that CREATE runs, and their programs which have a really strong cultural focus. A really cool program they do is swimming with the dolphins, giving young people in care a chance to do something they'd never thought they'd get to do.

Other amazing programs that the Hawai'ian Foster Youth Coalition runs are peer support and mentoring programs. The peer support programs for children, teens, and their parents

Australia and Pacific Region Report

Bree Steward

Aloha!

Last month I headed off to Hawai'i for the trip of a lifetime. I was chosen to represent Australia and the Pacific region at the ISPCAN International Congress and Youth Empowerment Forum. If I could describe my trip to Hawai'i in one word, it would be OHANA, which means family. Family is an important word in Hawai'i and it was about the family I found in the people I met. They treated me like one of their own.

The first day of the ISPCAN Congress was the International Youth Empowerment Program. This was where young people like foster kids and school students, youth groups and other youth organisations in Hawai'i came together to share ideas and find out what's happening for young people across the world. As the Youth Delegate for the Australia and Pacific Nations Region, I participated in an International Youth Panel

and care givers meet either once or twice a month for two hours in the evenings. After a healthy dinner, participants meet with children, teens and adults in separate rooms, with the trained mentors providing support.

Mentoring programs include the activities “Poi for the Soul,” “Surf for the Soul,” and “Seeds of Love.” Additional activities are organised in collaboration with other groups to engage children in culturally specific activities that teach positive values, increase skills, and widen the network of support for young people. All activities are free, teach children and young people about healthy eating, help with physical fitness, and include anti-drug and alcohol messages.

With the “Surf for the Soul” program, they work with young people in foster care who are involved in the justice system, teaching them how to surf. People, like house parents, lawyers, bail bondsmen, and police officers, donate their time. They say to the young people, “By the end of the day, you’ll be able to surf.” That’s the one promise that they make to the young people. They also teach them about the local history, about looking after the environment, and being part of a community. The program’s so successful that after young people finish the program, they still want to be involved.

To become a mentor, Kids Hurt Too run two types of training. The first option is run over one or two months, costs about \$2,500, and you’re billeted into a house if you don’t already live in Hawai’i. The other option is where you pay \$75 and you volunteer for a year. I’d love to go back to Hawai’i and participate in the mentoring program!

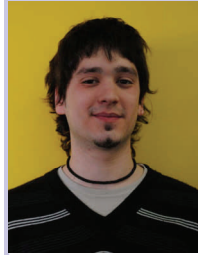
My personal highlights from the trip were:

- seeing that the world has a lot to offer;
- seeing the AMAZING scenery in Hawai’i;
- swimming at the same beach that President Obama swims at;
- experiencing a sense of acceptance and belonging;
- really seeing that it only takes one person to make a difference!

What I’ve learned and brought back with me includes:

- A better understanding that Australia’s not unique – across the world there are similar issues affecting youth.
- There are similar organisations and programs to CREATE, some of which have been around longer, and it’s really nice to know that we’re not the only ones doing this kind of work and looking for solutions; however, there didn’t seem to be other programs like our CREATE Your Future program, and there were a lot of people who were interested in that.
- It would be great to see CREATE get more involved in mentoring programs, and to reach out more to young people involved in both child protection and youth justice.
- How Australia should be more involved in international conferences – there was only one presentation from Australia, and I would love to see another CREATE young person attend the next ISPCAN Conference in Turkey in two years.
- how great it was to build my network with other people from Australia, as well as many other countries; and to meet other young people and make new friendships.

Thanks to CREATE and NAPCAN for putting me forward for this opportunity and supporting me. I’d really love to go back!



Facundo Bordachar was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he has lived all his life. He comes from a small family and is the only child. Facundo is a university student majoring in sociology at Buenos Aires University. He has been studying there since 2007.

Facundo has always been interested in social and political matters. In fact, in both high school and college, he has been involved in political activities. He is also interested in music. Facundo studied drums and guitar for the last five years, and is currently playing with two bands.

Literature and movies are also some of his interests. He works for a consulting group gathering media data for further research. Facundo represented the South America region.

Cromagnon was a nightclub in Buenos Aires in which, on December 30, 2004, 194 youth died and 174 were injured as a result of a tragic fire. Investigations eventually led to removal from office of the Mayor of Buenos Aires, Anibal Ibarra, and conviction of several others.

New Voices in the Construction of a Better Society

Facundo Bordachar

My name is Facundo Bordachar, I’m 21, and I live in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I am pursuing a career in Sociology. I also like to explore and enjoy art by means of music. Due to the influence of my aunt who is a social worker specializing in child maltreatment and abuse and my mother who is a psychologist specializing in Education, I have always been interested in my own country’s –as much as in the world’s– social reality. My career interests are to investigate and study social movements, and the action and life of individuals who are part of these movements in the world. Nevertheless, if I am only focused on my studies, parts of my interests remain unfulfilled or unexplored. Thus, for some time now, I have been involved in concrete action to change some aspects of our society: I am an activist in the context of a political group and, I take part of the activities overseen by students in my Facultad Ciencias Sociales (School of Social Sciences), Universidad de Buenos Aires. My primary goal is to find answers and solutions to the pressing current social problems.

On December 30, 2004, I witnessed an event that has left an unforgettable mark in my life. I attended a concert of a local rock band, *Callejeros* at the *República de Cromañón*, a music venue. On that excruciating night, the place was set on fire when a flare launched by someone among the audience reached the inflammable material used in the arrangement of the place. The deplorable safety conditions and the exceeded capacity of the hall combined to give way to tragedy: almost two hundred young people lost their lives that night, and thousands of survivors, including myself, carry the overwhelming burden of that experience forever.

What is most relevant about *Cromañón* is that the fire, and the

tragedy, was not a casual or isolated accident, but the result of the interaction of corruption and irregularities, under the inattentiveness or even connivance of the State, which was not doing its civic duty: i.e., to take care of the safety and well-being of its citizens.

After the tragedy, the Government of Buenos Aires tried to place the responsibility onto one actor for the appalling lack of safety conditions of the venue. In a case such as this, it's always easier to point to the one who started the fire, to the parents who let their children go to the show, to the musicians and their managers, to the organizers of the concert, or perhaps to the owners of the concert venue. However, blaming others does not absolve the Government of the responsibility that it has neglected for many years now: the duty of providing and enforcing policies to ensure public safety and to guarantee the rights of youth.

Even as of today, 6 years after that tragedy, many families, schools, institutions are potentially other '*Cromañóns*' because *there has yet to be full implementation of public safety measures*. Many boys and girls are exposed, day to day, to potential dangers and contingencies in which they are supposed to manage by themselves and to overcome many obstacles and dangers scattered along their way.

Cromañón was not an isolated case. It was no accident at all. It was no fortuitous event, as the media has portrayed. In my opinion, it was the unfortunate culmination of neglect by the Government of Buenos Aires which does not regard or take care of its youths' needs, and which continues to remain indifferent towards the issues related to youth nightlife and the intersection between the business of rock music, youth culture, and consumption.

In this case, it has become visible that impresarios, civil servants, and politicians, did not fulfill their duties, but devoted themselves to activities towards their own benefit. They chronically neglected basic duties which perpetuated a corrupt system that lacked control over required public safety regulations; and in one night, due to the cumulative effect of these neglected safety violations, led to the tragic fire and ultimately cost the lives of 200 youth. The violations were numerous: bolted fire exits, public crowding exceeding capacity of the venue, toxic and inflammable materials lying around, and the use of fire was not regulated. Had these issues been identified in advance, lives could have been saved. Those who were there that night in *Cromañón* were exposed to all these irregularities, which remained unaddressed, due to a lack of enforcement by the Government. Maybe this tragedy was necessary to raise community awareness of this situation. Nevertheless, I keep wondering if the price we paid –the death of two hundred young people– was not too expensive.

The State, far from being repressive, must provide the resources for the youth generation to develop, and this is not possible if the State is not interested in learning and understanding the habits and needs of youth and the dynamics of their playing a role in society. To know these dynamics, the State and its institutions must devote itself to the service of young people's needs, overseeing with care, to protect and to guarantee youth rights. In *Cromañón*, human rights were thoroughly violated. The rights of those thousands of young people to life, physical and moral integrity, and personal safety, were unprotected.

Immediately after the tragedy, the government's response was to investigate and eventually close down all the rest of the

pubs and other spaces in town which were previously permitted to offer musical shows despite not meeting regulatory standards. Only when a problem such as this gets to be widely known and when society as a whole begins to demand and make the government accountable, or perhaps when the situation reaches an unbearable point, then only do the politicians and other public actors finally do what's right.

But, I insist, the dangerous conditions of *Cromañón* from six years ago are still present in various degrees on stages where musical shows are offered to adolescents and young people in Buenos Aires. Additionally, six years after the tragedy, the most important sphere of activity where youth naturally congregate, i.e. the educational setting, is full of deplorable safety conditions. Many buildings lack adequate maintenance and have reached alarming levels of public concern. Many schools, not only within the area of Buenos Aires, but in the rest of the country as well, suffer from serious infrastructural problems with their walls and roofs broken. This situation has created so much heightened concern that high-school students have begun to organize themselves in order to undertake an extreme measure: the occupation of educational centres. This level of organizing is common in Argentina and a great part of Latin American culture: the students, united by one cause, and sometimes with the support of the teaching staff organizations, suspend the classes as long as their claims and demands are not given a satisfactory response. Currently, September 2010, the students are demanding an improvement in the conditions of the infrastructure of school buildings and, more broadly, demonstrating for substantially larger investment in education.

In a city, or rather, in a country which has suffered a significant tragedy such as *Cromañón*, it would be my hope that no one forgets what happened and works to avoid a future similar disaster. But perhaps memories are short and the seriousness of these problems forgotten until yet another tragedy such as a school falling down occurs. I sincerely hope that the government and the people find solutions before a new tragedy occurs and more victims have to suffer.

I wonder why we don't have better policies initiated by the State, to guarantee the rights of adolescents and young people to education and health, as well as to creation and recreation. And I wonder, too, why there is no priority to respond to and address the claims of youth organizations, in present social policies. My question is this: Does this happen only in Latin American countries, or is it a phenomenon that has a direct correlation with the lack of status of young people in the whole world?

Perhaps, as many sociologists explain, young people are often seen as a *dangerous* class or group, especially if they happen to be unemployed, economically excluded or if they do not finish their schooling. They are criticized and blamed when they are part of a tragedy; they are pointed at if they only live for pleasure, but they are also damned when they organize themselves to fight for their rights, when they fight to obtain a dignified right to education.

It is clear that the State must not adopt a managerial or business-like attitude, when undertaking its duties. It must not look for benefit or advantage. It must not reduce State expenditure which ends up affecting the education or the health of its people. Business belongs to private activity. Public institutions must watch over the safety and welfare of people. They must listen to the claims of every component of society,

including youth. They must consider youth as an active dynamic, respectable part of society, consisting of actors capable of organization, enthusiasm, and dynamic creativity.

Youth organizations in Argentina have always been an active political and historical influence. Most civil servants and government employees were once political activists in their youth. The implication that these civil servants should understand the youthful engagement of today and *respect, listen to, and look after* these dynamic youth should therefore be inherent. This will help cultivate young people's place within the course of the Nation's future, protect them from being underestimated, prejudged, or exposed to the risk of tragedies such as that of *Cromañón*.

Hence, I think policies devoted and destined to affect youth must, first and foremost, be reflective and representative of youth in society today as a unique social group, a group in continual transformation. These policies and policymakers must pay attention to new habits, new ways, preferences, and fashions among young people. It is necessary for law makers and civil servants to understand the new ways of socialization among young people today as opposed to traditional ways and how they differ from the past; and it's worth keeping in mind new technologies, and the way these affect the forms of communication and socio cultural expressions of present day youth.

Similarly, I believe young people must be considered as active players in "new social movements". Every youth should be considered as a participating individual, who can create, who is capable of mobilization and organization in many differing and action-oriented ways and with numerous strategies. It's about considering them as actors in movement, as actors who transform their social reality; not just as receptors, merely subject to adult protection or patronization.

Likewise, it's important to understand and reflect upon the vast diversity of youthful organizational expressions, and to see how power, authority, the conception of projects, methods of participation and interaction between social organizations and government institutions are experienced by young people.

I also think it is necessary to remark that many of the transformations and changes that occur nowadays in our society must be viewed through the perspective of political action. That is because we young people are activists and individuals capable of engaging in discourse. We possess a capacity to take over material objects, and to mobilize social objects, which is to say, that we see ourselves as social agents of change.

Therefore, we young people must be considered as relevant and visible actors in civil society. We are a voice which asks, today, to transform and to build our tomorrow; to build for us a future which should be fairer, more equitable and, hopefully, less tragic.

Please see these links for more detailed information regarding the fire: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/República_Cromañón_nightclub_fire

Or <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/socialissues/urbanlife/cromanon-que-no-se-repita/>

For more information regarding the school protests and demonstrations in Buenos Aires please see these links: <http://reclaimuc.blogspot.com/2010/09/high-school-students-strike-occupy-in.html>

Or <http://occupyca.wordpress.com/2010/09/>



Dr. Shehriyar Khan, an ISPCAN member, is currently a Pediatric Resident at the Postgraduate Medical Institute, Hayatabad Medical Complex, Peshawar, Pakistan. He has more than 3 year's practical experience of work on

issues surrounding child rights, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Since his school days, he has done volunteer work on raising awareness regarding children rights and helping children in especially difficult circumstances, including complex humanitarian emergencies. He directly worked on Child Protection during the devastating 2005 earthquake in Northern Pakistan and also with Internally Displaced People in 2009.

He has participated at a number of national and international conferences on child rights and youth issues. Shehriyar is a widely travelled person and has experience of working in cross-cultural environments. He has also been part of research projects conducted by the Child Rights and Abuse Committee, Pakistan Pediatric Association and is a co-author of 2 research publications on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Pakistan. Shehriyar represented the Asian region.

The Asian Perspective

Shehriyar Khan

Introduction

Youth, defined by the United Nations as persons between the ages of 15 and 24, is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. Because of their biological age, they are full of talent and imagination. By and large, they are dynamic, energetic and hard working. As history illustrates, youth have always been key agents for social change in societies around the world because of their ideals. They are also a driving force for economic development and technological innovations. In short, youth is a major human resource for development and no society can achieve significant human development without active participation and contribution of its young people.

Asia is the world's largest and most populous continent. Asia covers 8.6% of the world's total surface area or 30% of its land area. This vast continent hosts approximately 4 billion people, which is almost 60% of the world's current population. The continent can be arbitrarily divided into geographic regions—East, Central, Southeast, South, Western and North Asia. The world's most populous countries like China, India, Japan, Pakistan and Indonesia are all located in Asia. It is also home to the world's most important and vibrant economies like China, Japan, and India, plus the tiger economies akin to South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, etc.

The Asian scenario

According to UN statistics, youth constitutes almost 18% of the global population. Around 62% of the youth population of the world lives in the Asia Pacific region. Many Asian countries are

witnessing the so-called Youth Bulge or a demographic bonus. This means that 20% or more of a national population are of age 15-24, implying a growing cohort of working age adults relative to the dependent population. In other words, it provides these nations with an opportunity to harness the potential capabilities of its young people and proceed on the road to prosperity.

Owing to a combination of factors, youth in Asia are better placed than ever to participate in and benefit from the advancement of social, economic and political developments. Compared to previous generations, a higher proportion of Asian young people have completed primary schooling. They are pursuing better and higher quality education. The gross enrolment rate at tertiary level is reaching almost 18% for male and 15% for female youth. Barring a few exceptions, the infant and child mortality rates have come down and the majority of today's Asian youth is healthy both physically and mentally. In most Asian countries, youth show initiatives to participate in local, national and regional developments. Today they are important and equal participants, rather than passive bystanders in shaping their own future and that of Asia's.

Asia is very heterogeneous and it is difficult to make generalizations regarding youth issues but the critical issues facing Asian youth are linked to education, health, employment, and participation. The most important issue is that of education. The enrolment rates at primary, secondary and tertiary levels vary considerably across the sub-regions and various countries. In many countries, the school dropout rates are quite high and these children usually end up on the streets and in many forms of child labour.

Once on the street, they are vulnerable to all forms of abuse, violence and exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation. The quality of education also varies amongst countries and within a country.

Youth employment is also a major issue. The rates of unemployment and underemployment are on the rise in many Asian countries. These alarmingly high rates are creating social unrest and political instability. The education imparted to children and young people in many settings is not in conformity with the demands of the modern world putting young people at a disadvantage in current job markets.

Childhood and adolescence are key transition points for effective interventions for better health outcomes in later life. Young people face a range of life events that could have an impact on their health. These factors include acquisition of life-skills for health, contact with hard drugs and alcohol, mental health and wellbeing and issues surrounding sexual and reproductive health. Unfortunately, many young people in Asian countries do not have access to health related resources, information, and services specifically tailored for their needs. Sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS are a central area of concern for young people's health, since the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Young people have a right to participate in all matters affecting them at local, national and global levels. Although the participation rate is on the rise in many Asian countries, the majority of young people, particularly those uneducated and hailing from rural areas are still distanced from the mainstream and have very little space for participation. This is a matter of concern and needs immediate redress.

Conclusion

In short, the main challenges faced by Asian youth at the moment, is the poor understanding of youth issues at many levels. Lack of supportive policy environment, need for flexible education and training opportunities, lack of sexual health knowledge and access to reproductive health services, poverty and unemployment, digital divide and less space for participation are some important issues facing Asian youth. In order to make a positive difference, the planners and decision makers should increase awareness of the youth needs and issues at all levels. We must create a supportive policy environment where young people should be valued and their issues given due importance. We cannot have a patchwork approach to youth issues; instead there is a need to develop holistic solutions. There is also an urgent need to provide enough space for participation to young people at family, community, institutional, national and global levels. The bottom-line is that we should work with young people and not for young people.



Phillimon Sello Moseamo was born and raised in Makgodu Ramongwana, a rural village in Limpopo province, South Africa. He is currently in school at Kgakoa with an interest in the sciences. Sello wishes to further his studies and would also like to work in the media area as an actor or a journalist. He is also interested in being a counselor and helping those in need as his motto is "the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives." He is described as kind, caring, motivating, funny, goal driven and passionate. During his free time, Sello volunteers and is the founder of a drama group known as Development StageProduction. He is also an active member of the Makgodu community. He is a member of his school's debate team and enjoys playing soccer and motivating his peers. Sello represented Africa.

Challenges faced by the African youth

Phillimon Sello Moseamo

Hi. I'm Sello Moseamo from Africa, and I'm involved in some projects around my area. I'm part of the Junior Management Committee of Childline Limpopo, the peer educator at Moletjie community radio station, a founder of a drama group in my community known as Development Stage Production, and a former president for the Learners' Representative Committee at my school.

Like any other continent in this world, Africa is also facing some serious challenges which often limit youths' ability to excel in many aspects of life: socially, economically, physically, and at times, even psychologically. HIV/AIDS, child labour, child neglect, gender inequality, and stereotyping are some of the major challenges faced. Upon analysis, all these challenges stem from poverty.

HIV/AIDS in Africa

There are still parts of Africa where HIV/AIDS is not understood because of lack of information, specifically in the Central and Upper regions of Africa. In those areas, there is still a belief that HIV does not exist.

African youth are facing a terrible danger with the prevalent risk of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and it seems we turn a blind eye to it. We believe we know everything and are invincible, and we are wrong. We consider ourselves the 21st century generation and more clever than our elders. We repudiate the traditional ways of survival that had kept our elders safe from this dreadful disease like simple practices of abstinence until marriage, faithfulness or even sticking to one partner.

If we as youth can at least try to think deeply about everything we do and engage ourselves in activities to learn more about HIV/AIDS, we might survive this epidemic. HIV is killing youth in Africa because most of our youth believe we know too much and can do everything in our own time.

Child Labour / Neglect

Another pervasive problem is the neglect and labour of children. In the Western and Southern regions of Africa, children are denied an opportunity to be children. They don't get to learn and grow and enjoy their childhood because they are forced into child headed households. Because parents are working away from home or have died, some children are forced to live in orphanages due to having no other family members to care for them. Some parents are even neglectful as they pass their responsibilities of babysitting and house chores onto children whilst they go out to party and have fun. This applies to peaceful countries in which parents are not bothered by much but only think of having fun.

Now let us consider the countries exposed to war or conflict. Children as young as 8 years old are forcibly taken from the safety of their homes to join the local militias. What can come of such youth? Through no fault of their own these children grow into angry, heartbroken, and revengeful youth, ultimately traumatized, who learn only to destroy. Can we blame such youngsters? Not really; they became what they are because they never received the love, warmth and care they deserved as children or youth. Instead they were nurtured by the brutal environment they grew up in, which was one that taught them to kill for survival. Some of these victims had no choice but to submit themselves into battle so that they can provide for their families due to poverty or to stay alive due to their ethnicity.

Africa is a continent in which most of its people live in poverty. This forces many youth and children to engage in prostitution, drug trafficking and selling, and other criminal activities like armed robbery and smuggling. At times, their efforts to legally survive are curtailed by the lack of resources to fund projects and programs that can help them to live a positive healthy lifestyle. Even the mere lack of educational resources takes them out of school at an early age with little preparation for life or self sufficiency.

Children are vital individuals that need to be cared for. They need someone who can help them grow and be better people in the future. In Africa, it is a different story. Children grow up to fend for themselves as orphans. They are deprived of education due to poverty, and they are trafficked and forced into prostitution, drugs, crime and war. Africa's children suffer from a multitude of problems that are not only caused by poverty, war, disease, and famine but further exacerbated by them.

Africa is one of several continents with strongly rooted traditional beliefs that women should be submissive and men more dominant. For several centuries there were gender specific roles and responsibilities for men and women. Women were not allowed to go to school and be educated but instead were to remain at home and babysit, do house chores and give birth, while the men went to school and got educated. It was believed that men were better leaders than women.

In some companies that employed both men and women, men had always occupied higher positions because in many African cultures, it is believed that men are superior and will have more knowledge and capacity for decision making.

I'm proud to say now we are living in a new Africa where most countries are of the view that everyone is equal and men and women share the same rights. Gender stereotypes are slowly starting to erode with each new generation. In many countries there are less and less gender specific roles for women or men; both are in control and share equally the family and work responsibilities. It is an emerging belief that women should have access to education equal to men and as a result women have begun crossing professional gender barriers as mining engineers and bus and truck drivers, for example.

Unfortunately, some cultures still hold fast to their conservative beliefs. Changing gender roles takes generations and some countries change slower than others, while some remain steadfast to traditional gender roles. In these countries, they continue to believe that men will always be the leader and women are to be submissive and therefore powerless to assert their rights, if known. This poses a distinct challenge to the youth who are socialized within this traditional mentality of gender inequality in terms of awareness and access to their rights. Some girl children still find it socially and culturally difficult to stand up for their rights against men and often submit to their demands simply because they have not been educated or exposed to a rights based culture or upbringing. As a result, some girls have been infected by STIs and HIV/AIDS as they 'femininely' or culturally submit to the sexual (and cultural) demands of their male counterparts despite the foreseen dangers. In cultural ceremonies, men and boys still dominate as the leaders while women and girls stand only as supporting figures with no authority to make decisions.

Youth and its societies

Generally in Africa, youth are exposed to significant problems unique to the continent. Children everywhere need to be taken care of and youth deserve the same too. I personally believe that we are the future of this world. It is said "If you educate the child/youth, you educate the nation."

If we as youth can be given a chance to do what we desire to do, we can help make this a better world because if we acquire the skill or the knowledge from our elders, we can pass it to the next generation. We can be catalysts of change perpetuating a rights based culture.

Youth behave badly because deep down they are afraid of being rejected in their societies. They behave badly because they are struggling to change and be better people. They find it hard to change because elders dwell too much on their mistakes rather than accept them and allow them to follow their dreams. If we can be given a chance, we can change the world because we are an abundant source of creative and positive energy and we are seeking change!

"Give a youth a chance and you can see the world change and it will be better for me and for you and the entire human race."



Alexandra Pattee has recently graduated from the Bachelor of Commerce program at the Queen's University School of Business. An avid international volunteer and youth activist, Alexandra's passion for child rights has led her across the globe on volunteer projects in isolated regions of China, southern Guyana and with highly marginalized ethnic groups in

India. She has recently completed an exchange semester in Bangkok, Thailand studying in the BBA International Program at Chulalongkorn University where she enjoyed the international academic environment and exploring all that South-East Asia had to offer.

Alexandra has been involved in the field of child rights and international development in many ways. This past summer Alexandra sought to bridge the gap between her business education and her passion for development by working with Empowering Entrepreneurs, a pro-bono consultancy, to address the organizational and strategic challenges of a Cambodian Microfinance Institution. When she's not seeking to contribute to the social sector during her summers, Alexandra keeps herself busy leading a group of Queen's students to fundraise the cost of building a school in rural Kenya to empower youth to break the cycle of poverty through education.

In recognition of her leadership, Alexandra was recently appointed as the lead of the Kingston Mobilizers, a regional hub of a grassroots movement seeking to connect the youth from across North America to effect social change. Alexandra represented the North and Central America region.

The Power of Youth

Alexandra Pattee

The issue, concerns and needs facing youth in their region

As in most countries, it is difficult to get a clear picture of how widespread child rights abuses are in Canada, as it often remains hidden and its victims silent. There are many different efforts for protecting children in Canada, which include: legal structure, government supports and non-profit and community-based organizations that provide much needed services and programs.

One of the most vital methods for protecting children against rights abuses is education and awareness at both the individual and issue level. On the individual level, education provides children with knowledge about their rights, teaches them the skills to identify abuse, ask for help and avoid being victimized. At the issue level, educating children and youth about the issues facing young people in their communities and country has a long-term ripple effect. By empowering youth to understand these issues and providing them with the tools they need to take action, the efforts for protecting children are multiplied.

Canadian Youth

Canadian youth are eager to learn and even more eager to get involved with various issues that affect youth in Canada and youth around the world. Whether it's through classroom based learning about the convention on the rights of the child, fundraising to support non-profits in their vital work or taking action on their own. Young people are an incredible force and when engaged with an issue they can bring insight, action, energy, and new ideas to create change.

Share possible coping strategies to deal with these issues or a program in their region that has addresses these issues

There are a growing number of youth initiatives focused on child rights across Canada, and while not all have a specific focus on abuse and neglect, they all contribute to raising awareness, educating and fostering engagement with issues surrounding child rights. The first steps to prevention are education and awareness and the following initiatives all aim to achieve this whether through educational initiatives, gathering youth insights, or engaging youth through new mediums like social media. I would like to highlight a few incredible Canadian initiatives that are doing remarkable work to educate and engage youth on issues that affect young people.

Youthscape: Youthscape, an International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) project, is an exciting Canada-wide initiative to engage young people in creating long term change. It is based on the idea that all young people can make important contributions to their communities that result in more inclusive, adaptable, healthy, diverse, protective, and collaborative spaces and places for all members of society. YouthScape seeks to create the environment for young people to safely participate and contribute to decision making and planning in partnership with adults and key decision makers. In a nutshell, Youthscape is community based and youth paced.

Amnesty International: Amnesty International first came to Canada in 1973. It has since grown to over 67,000 members across the country. Amnesty International is a human rights activism organization whose mission is "to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated." Of particular relevance, is Amnesty's work in engaging youth with human rights' activism. Amnesty has over 400 youth groups across Canada that work to raise awareness and take action against a variety of human rights issues both at home in Canada and abroad. Outside of Canada, Amnesty operates in many countries, in fact, there are chapters right here in Hawai'i to get involved with.

Free the Children: Free the Children, is a Toronto-based organization that has grown to become the largest network of children helping children around the world. Beginning as a grass roots organization advocating against child labour, Free the Children has grown into a dual-mission organization that on one hand builds schools and other community building projects internationally. Their other mission is to engage and empower youth in North America to "be the change" they want to see in the world. They do this through leadership training, social issue campaigning, and volunteer programs that foster an environment where youth begin to explore the various social issues they care about and craft action plans to begin making a tangible difference in both small and big ways.

Each of these organizations take different approaches to social issues but they all have a common thread—engaging

youth because they understand the power that young people have to make a change.

"One World, One Family, Many Cultures"

While we each stand up here today to share with you the issues that face our countries and regions, it is important to recognize that these issues are not in fact national or even regional, they are global. In today's increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, we are all, first and foremost, global citizens. Learning, understanding and taking action on issues that affect young people from around the globe is a true investment in the protection and empowerment of all young people. When it comes to child rights, there are no borders and it permeates all cultures. We are one world. We are one family. And we must work together.

Challenge

There is no better group of people to affect change for young people, than young people themselves. So I challenge you, to learn, to question and to dig deeper for an understanding on issues that you're passionate about. You are never too young to take action and to engage in a social issue that affects young people, whether it's in your community or in another young person's community on the other side of the world. We can all contribute to making a change so that all children have the chance to grow up happy, healthy, safe and protected.



Rille Roomeldi grew up in Tartu, a small, cozy student town in southern Estonia where she lived with her family until the age of 17. Thereafter, Rille moved to the capital Tallinn, as she received a scholarship for business studies at a top private university EBS where she

studied for two years. On the third year, Rille went to Denmark as an exchange student for a year. She enjoyed the environment and cultural surroundings of Copenhagen so much that she decided to continue her studies there and is currently in her 7th year in Denmark with the expected date of graduating from the Master's program in Applied Economics and Finance in December 2010.

Her personal interests and hobbies are singing in a gospel choir, participating in gospel workshops and concerts. Rille speaks several different languages and is always trying to improve her Russian and sometimes follows German, Spanish, Italian and Swedish broadcasts in order to improve her language skills and be updated with the latest news. She enjoys sports such as running and swimming and is very fascinated by alternative medicine and New Age projects. Rille's field of research is investigating the prospects of ethical investment in the field of finance as well as the funds and institutions claiming to act ethically, i.e. ethical banks, social entrepreneurship initiatives, micro-loan institutions and corporate social responsibility in corporations in general. Rille represented Europe.

Youth Problems in Europe

Rille Roomeldi

It is a great challenge to identify and generalize what could be called the main youth problems in Europe. In the European Union there are currently 27 countries, but geographically, depending on definition, Europe also includes several other countries like Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Turkey. For perspective, there are about 500 million people living in EU-27 and about 20% are youth between ages 15-29, which amounts to almost 100 million youth.¹ In all of Europe however, there are approximately 830 million people and thus the number of youth is even higher.

The European Commission defines youth as "the passage from a dependent childhood to independent adulthood."² Adulthood in various European countries can be determined by the age limit of child benefits, the end of full-time compulsory schooling, the voting age and the minimum age for standing for elections; whereas independent adulthood could be looked at as the time when young people become financially self-sufficient. The increase in the length of studies combined with difficulties in getting a first job and access to affordable housing have increased the length of the transition from youth to independence. Because of that, this report will deal with the population aged between 15 and 29.

There can be large differences when talking about the most imminent youth issues in these countries, and much of this could be explained by the different levels of welfare in the east and the west. It is quite impossible to scale the problem areas according to their level of importance in a society, since it would require taking a stand on whether we rank the consequences or some other factors, which cannot appropriately be measured. The following is a short overview of what I see as the main problem areas of the young people in Europe—a view shaped by my own experiences from living in a multicultural environment together with youth from around the world, combined with information from youth specialist as well as from the national and Europe-wide youth surveys and statistics.

With no intention of ranking, I have identified the following as the main problem areas of the European youth: unemployment, school related problems, addictions, eating disorders, psychological problems, violence, youth crime, trafficking, prostitution, focus on material/external characteristics, ethnic minority problems, HIV and other STDs and high mortality rate. Many of these issues are interconnected, for example, if a young person for some reason drops out of school than he or she might have difficulties finding a job. In this situation a youth is more at risk to become involved in criminal activities, drug and alcohol addictions, self-indulged injuries or even suicide.

Unemployment amongst youth is a big problem. The average unemployment rate for young people up to 24 years of age is more than double that for 25-74 years old in EU-27.³ Since these are average figures, there are several countries where the figures are much higher: in Spain 37% in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Slovakia around 30%.⁴ The situation is such that even though many of these youth hold advanced degrees such as Bachelors or Masters, it might be difficult to get a job without experience, as is often the case with many of these young people.

One of the largest *school-related* problems is *bullying*, which

can be either psychological (teasing, labelling, exclusion) or physical. Increasingly becoming more common is cyber-bullying—sending offensive messages via internet, ridiculing, etc. A second related problem is *social exclusion*. By this, some youth are outsiders to “popular groups” at school and are often kept away from, teased or even ridiculed. A third problem is the large number of young people *dropping out of school*. Despite justifiable reasons for dropping out, the impact on the youth’s future may be very serious.

Another group of problems are addictions. Firstly there is the widespread *alcohol abuse*. This can have very serious consequences. Just to bring to light some statistics—over 10% of female deaths and 25% of male mortality is due to alcohol.⁵ Furthermore, alcohol is the cause of 16% of child abuse and neglect.⁶ As for smoking, the situation is no better. About 27% of youth between ages 15-24 smoke daily, while the figure is even higher, 33%, for young people between ages 25 - 34.⁷ *Drug addiction* is another problem. On average a little less than 2 youth per 100,000 in EU die from drugs. Drug dependence, as a cause of death comprises mental and behavioural disorders due to use of opioids, cannabinoids, sedatives, hypnotics, cocaine, hallucinogens, volatile solvents and other psychoactive substances including caffeine.⁸ Not uncommon is the use of multiple drugs at the same time.

Eating disorders are wide-spread among the European youth. In general, these are very complicated illnesses, causing extreme damage to body; not only serious psychological health problems such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, dental problems, but also physical health problems such as infertility, kidney and liver failures, seizures or even death. *Anorexia nervosa* is the most visible eating disorder, since people having this illness are mostly significantly underweight, while being preoccupied with food, training and self-image. *Bulimics* are people who either throw up food after eating or use laxatives. They are very hard to detect since they usually have a normal body weight and often go for years without treatment due to illness-related feelings of shame. The third most common eating disorder is *binge eating*, where a person consumes excessive amounts of food frequently. Some youth with an eating disorder use *excessive training*, which is different from training to be in a healthy shape, which is fun and enjoyable. Some indulge in *self-injuries*. They often do it to cope with, block out and release built up feelings and emotions. It is not uncommon to have some kind of a combination of the above mentioned disorders. For example, binge eaters may be bulimics, and bulimics may also have anorexic traits, while an anorexic may be purging and using laxatives for the purpose of controlling his or her weight.

Psychological problems increasingly cause various types of youth issues. These are problems like stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, self-esteem, and relationship related problems. Eating disorders and addictions can also be classified as psychological problems. The “problem” with the psychological problems is that they are not very visible and therefore difficult to understand. Thus, those suffering from a psychological illness often do not find support and understanding equal to what one with a physical illness can expect to receive. For example, in a really severe case of depression, a person might not be able to get out of bed for months, but one has to get a document from the doctor to give to school, work, etc. Additionally, it is often not something one would talk openly about. On the other hand, when one has a broken bone one does not have to do much explaining.

Psychological problems can often leave big (invisible) scars on a person, which can have a negative influence throughout the person’s entire life.

Another large problem area may be described by a single word, “*violence*.” *Violence* may be prevalent almost everywhere: inside a family, in a partnership, in places like school, work, on the street, etc. The main types of violence according to a simple classification are physical (i.e. hitting), psychological (i.e. bullying, undermining, ridiculing, threatening), sexual, economic (where one forces his own agenda, puts down and/or uses violence against a partner, who is financially dependent on him), and neglect (in case of children/youth).

Youth crime, trafficking and prostitution are other problem areas. *Youth crime* can, among other things, be related to being stressed, dropping out of school, belonging to minorities and having bad family relationships. *Trafficking* victims are often youth from families of lower education and income or single mothers and mostly come from the Eastern-European countries. Linked to *prostitution*, in which the provision of sexual services arise out of real need to support themselves or to support their drug-addictions, there appears to be a new group of youth selling their bodies no longer out of necessity, but for the sake of pure luxury, i.e. for buying designer clothes and nice cars. This leads to the next identified problem - *focus on material/external characteristics*. Pertinent questions surface: Why would some girls be willing to sell their bodies in order to buy a piece of clothing or a pair of shoes from a famous designer? Or why do some people focus on their body like it was some object one has to design to perfection? Why is it so important to most children what car their classmate’s father is driving? Why is it so important for youth to get an excellent career, nice house, car and perhaps a family? Is there something wrong with the values that people have? What is most important in life...is it a nice car? Who is responsible for teaching these values to children and youth and how is it addressed, if parents themselves perpetuate it?

Ethnic minority problems are problems which youth could experience when having a different national or cultural background than the majority of the local population. Several issues impact the lives of these youth—insufficient language skills, lack of education, and poverty to name a few. The search for identity, while trying to find a positive coexistence between one’s own traditional and the dominant local culture, represent additional complications for the future development of these youth.

Another problem is the large number of youth infected by *HIV and other STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)*. The rate at which HIV is spreading alone is alarming, given that over 50,000 people a year are diagnosed with HIV in the EU and the neighbouring countries.⁹ In 2006, nearly 30% of the new HIV cases were among young people between 15 and 29 and almost two thirds of which concerned those aged between 25 and 29.¹⁰

The last problem that I would like to highlight is the *high rate of youth mortality* (measured by crude death rate). Among the causes there are various accidents, but also self-inflicted injury and suicides. In 2006, crude death rate by suicide stood at 15 cases per 100,000 inhabitants among the male population aged 25-29 in EU-27, while the figure was slightly lower than 5 for the female population.¹¹

An important related concept is *resilience*, because it is necessary to understand why and how some youth are better

able to cope with very difficult life situations than others. Resilience could be described in many ways and on many levels. On a personal level, resilience can be described as the ability to cope with stress, trauma, tragedy or difficult situations such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, etc. It includes the ability to recover and develop after crises.

There are several factors that promote resilience but the primary and most important factor is relationships inside and outside family, which provide care and support, create love and trust and offer encouragement.¹² Among other factors there are the ability to cope with stress effectively and in a healthy manner, having good problem-solving skills, seeking help, belief that there is something one can do to manage one's feelings, having social support, capacity to make realistic plans, self-confidence and a positive self image.

There are several initiatives on international Europe-wide, governmental and local levels trying to improve the lives of youth by building their resilience. These are programs like CAP (Child Assault Prevention), Big Brother/Big Sister and TORE (Student Support Movement in Estonia). Yet, despite these initiatives and good intentions, there are many youth that these programs do not reach or have not been able to help. A very important factor in my eyes is the goodness, humanity and understanding of the representatives of the supporting professions. Even the best possible system, if it doesn't have good and warm-hearted people, is not of much use.

To illustrate and summarize, I would like to use a nice example of creating real values from a small school in Estonia. Some years ago this school was quite unpopular and parents were reluctant to send their talented children there. Then the school got a new director. He believed that the most important task of a school is to support and encourage the development of a student. As the basis for improving the gloomy situation, he established a motto for the whole school: the principle of three A's – "Armastus, Austus ja Areng" (Love, Respect and Development). He started applying these principles himself, by giving a good example in everything that he did. This began to translate into the actions of the teachers and the pupils. Slowly the school started to become more open, friendly and warm. In about two years, the satisfaction of the students, parents and the teachers had increased considerably. The school's image had improved to the extent that it started attracting the most talented students who also wished to continue their education there. This example shows how by a well-chosen motto and by setting an example, one can create a positive change within a large group of people, harmonizing mutual relationships and the overall surrounding environment.

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The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and the Turkish Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (TSPCAN) invite you to Turkey for the 19th ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect to be held in Istanbul September 9-12, 2012.

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