



The Place of Children: Poverty & Promise



World Urban Forum Dialogue Series
Youth in Cities

WORLD URBAN FORUM DIALOGUE SERIES: YOUTH IN CITIES

Foreword

The well know demographic challenge of the 21st century – a rapidly expanding world population growing from 6.1 billion in 2001 to 7.2 billion in 2015 (NIC 2000) - will occur almost entirely in cities in low income countries. Rapid urbanization is coupled with the fact that nearly half of the world's population are under the age of twenty-five (State of the World Cities report, 2007), and 85 per cent of those of working age live in the developing world (UN HABITAT, 2005). Of the one billion slum dwellers in the world today, it is estimated that more than 70% are under the age of 30. Migration to informal settlements is predominantly by the young.

As the lead agency for cities in the United Nations, UN HABITAT recognized the urgency of this issue and began to focus resources and energy on how to better the lives of youth and their communities, launching their youth programming initiatives at the second World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004. (UN HABITAT, 2005).

This collection of dialogue papers describes the situation of youth in poverty; outlines some of the hopeful programs that are successfully engaging youth in their communities, specifically the One Stop Youth Centres and provides a case study of one NGO's experience in integrating youth into its programs and governance. The collection has been compiled for practitioners – youth service providers and youth themselves. While some of the papers draw from research, they are not academic treatises aimed at building theory but are rather reports from the field aimed at enhancing practice. Originally written for different audiences the styles of the papers vary. They all take an asset based approach to their topics, seeing youth as a positive part of the solution to urban challenges.

For purposes of a common language, this series of working papers uses the most commonly used definitions, in different demographic, policy and social contexts. These are: Adolescents: 10 to 19 years of age: Youth 15 to 24 years of age and Young People: 10 to 24 years of age.

One of the frameworks developed by Seymoar was originally an appendix to the 2008 case study by the International Centre for Sustainable Cities (Seymoar, N.K;2008). That framework, reproduced on page iii, provides a useful set of categories to consider when undertaking youth programming. Unlike the ladder of participation or engagement (Hart, R; 1997), it suggests that all activities on the grid are valuable and necessary to a comprehensive approach to youth in cities. To urban practitioners it may provide a helpful diagnostic tool to guide the introduction of activities and engage a wider range of adults or youth in analyzing and addressing their civic experiences. It is also a useful lens through which to consider the ideas presented in each of the papers in this series.



Youth Project with Vernon and the Okanagan Indian Band Canada

A Framework for Categorizing Youth Programming (Seymoar et al, 2008)

Category 1.	About Youth	2. For Youth	3. Empowering Youth	4. By Youth (Youth-led development)	5. With Youth
Description	Data, information and research about the status or perceptions of youth and/or that measure progress	Activities that improve the health, education, income or environment of youth	Activities that enable youth to understand the need for change and enhance their ability to positively effect their own future	Activities designed and implemented by youth to improve their lives or the sustainability of their communities	Activities where youth are equal partners with adults
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish baseline data Identify assets and problems Monitor progress Enable adjustments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve health Improve education and skill level Improve employability Occupy youth in positive activities (prevent crime etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overcome despair, apathy and give hope Raise consciousness Mobilize youth to act on their own behalf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage leadership Provide community services Improve livelihoods and reduce poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual benefits such as improved community infrastructure
Typical activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research on demographics, trends, impact of health, poverty, location etc on youth Establishment of benchmarks, goals, targets and monitoring of progress Developmental evaluations Participatory action research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HIV AIDS programs Stay in school programs Life Skills programs Employment related skills training Training in proposal writing, operating a small businesses Employment placements, internships Sports, recreational programs Active Living (biking, soccer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth to youth exchanges Student Conferences Youth Visioning Projects Youth Congresses and Forums Appointed Youth Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Micro Enterprises Youth credit and savings organizations Elected Youth Councils Youth led Community Demonstration Projects Youth Climate Action Teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities hiring youth businesses to deliver services Joint projects – co designed and delivered
Case examples	Youth Vital Signs project, Vancouver, Canada	Training for youth brigades to do construction in Nairobi slum redevelopment, Kenya	AISEC Conferences Water detectives program in Matamoros Mexico	Sierra Club's Youth Coalition for Climate Change, Canada One Stop Youth Centres	Youth Enterprises hired to provide community services by local governments in Canada

This overall framework for viewing projects and activities related to youth ,is intended to clarify the nature and purposes of different approaches. Some activities fall into more than one category. It is hypothesized that activities in all categories are important and needed, not only those in the youth-led development column.

The Other Papers in this Dialogue Series include:

Space for Change by Claire Wilkinson provides an in depth analysis of the One Stop Youth Resource Centre in Nairobi, introduced in the above *Youth in Urban Development* paper. Originally a master thesis, her paper provides a useful theoretical and geo-political context for the One Stop initiative and goes on to give examples of partnerships and of the use of space to affect change and address the issues in their community. It suggests factors for success, gives observations about the objectives and goals and identifies the main difficulties that continue to exist. The paper concludes with the authors reflections on her experience as an international intern.

Youth in Urban Development: Bringing Ideas into Action, by Kevina Power, Darcy Varney, Doug Ragan and Karun Korenig, was a key discussion paper for more than 500 youth who attended the World Urban Youth Forum held leading up to the World Urban Forum in Vancouver in 2006. The paper introduces two key concepts: youth led development and youth mainstreaming. Both approaches are derived from an asset based philosophy that recognizes youth as leaders in their communities and emphasizes their capacity and interest in contributing to the decisions that affect their lives. Following an overview of the evolution of youth programming in the UN system, the authors advocate youth mainstreaming as an effective strategy for addressing youth and cities. The approach adapts gender mainstreaming from the women's movement which has been used in the field of development since the mid 80's. Youth-led development is introduced as a meaningful approach to engagement and social inclusion. Practices that emphasize mentorship (both peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth) and asset based community development are described. Four broad support conditions that create an enabling environment are introduced – understanding of youth involvement, the need for financial and human support, a positive policy environment and access to decision-makers so as to effect long-term change. The paper concludes with illustrative case examples.

One Stop Resource Centres: Local Governments Response to Improving Youth Livelihoods, by Doug Ragan and Mutinta Munyati, further elaborates on the One Stop cases. Building on the experience of the Nairobi One Stop, similar Youth Centres have been introduced in three cities in East Africa - Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Kampala, Uganda; and Kigali, Rwanda. Five key principles for Youth-led Development were identified in a conference in Kampala. The paper is based on an evaluation report on the state of the One Stops and provides an overview of their development, elaborating on their use as a model for effective training and capacity building for marginalized youth. The paper provides a useful focus on strengthening the capacity of local authorities to effectively engage youth, referring to the role of youth councils in Dar es Salaam and Kampala. Finally it points out the value of using the One Stops as a platform for amplifying the voices of youth locally, nationally and internationally.

Youth Led Development in Organizations: From Idea, to Policy to Practice, is a case study by Nola Kate Seymoar and a team of people engaged in introducing youth initiatives in an established NGO active in Canada and cities around the world. The candid story of the International Centre for Sustainable Cities' path to embrace Youth Led Development within its own governance and as one of its program areas was not straight forward. The lessons gained from the experiences include; the need for unwavering commitment; the importance of co-designing the program with youth; the value of undertaking two paths simultaneously – mainstreaming and specialized projects; maintaining an active approach to learning; managing risks and conflicts; providing seed funding for small community based initiatives; using flexible evaluation and monitoring tools; and nurturing innovation. The Framework for Categorizing Youth Programming (see above) was originally incorporated as an appendix to the case study. It was developed in conjunction with the team of authors and provides a practical framework – both for analytical purposes and for guiding program choices and managing expectations

Nola-Kate Seymoar, Ph.D. and Doug Ragan Ph.D. Candidate

Co-editors

Sustainable Cities, February 2010



Aykut, 13
Ankara



Judy, 13
Nairobi



Thiago, 13
Rio de Janeiro



Brandon, 11
New York

The Place of Children: Poverty and Promise



The Place of Children: Poverty and Promise

"...youth are a resource, in fact the most important and strategic resource a country can have. Youth are agents of social change; they take on a very active role in addressing the issues that affect them. We have examples of many youth led processes that are working and making a difference in society even with minimal resources. What is required is to provide these initiatives with an enabling environment that will facilitate their replication."

Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka

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Fieldwork was undertaken by Fahriye Hazer Sancar (Ankara), George Awuor (Nairobi), Illène Pevec (Rio de Janeiro), and Pamela Wridt (New York). In Rio de Janeiro, the work involved considerable risk, as it took place amidst the constant threat of violence that accompanies daily life in Rocinha, Thiago's neighborhood and a center of drug trade to Europe where guns are openly touted. In Nairobi, fieldwork took place when the usual lack of safety was made worse by a spell of gang violence and police actions that left a number of slum residents decapitated and made Mariguini, where Judy lives, inaccessible for outsiders for a while.

Photography was by Beysun Gokcin (Ankara), James Njuguna and Sylvia Njenga (Nairobi), Illène Pevec (Rio de Janeiro), and Scott Wynn (New York). The photos included here represent only a small number of those available. Prof. Dr. Sevda Ulugtekin connected us with the social work staff at the Ulus Center for Children and Youth in Ankara. Hakan Erdogan and Aysel Okhan helped set up visits to the homes of several children. Demet

Ozgun, Director of Children's Center at Altindag, introduced Aykut Boztas, and Aysegul Gokcin arranged meetings and transportation.

Laban Kuria introduced Judy and was an indispensable, hospitable and knowledgeable guide to the Mariguini community in Nairobi.

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The Place of Children: Poverty and Promise

Children live and grow up *somewhere*. Where that “somewhere” is makes a difference. The qualities of place help define children’s access to life chances.

Place matters.

Introduction

Children live and grow up *somewhere*.

Where that “somewhere” is makes a difference. The qualities of place help define children’s access to opportunities for play, health care, education, and other life chances. In short: Place matters.

This report focuses on the “place” of children, where place has two meanings. First, it refers to the physical environment where children live. This includes their home and the wider community where they live their daily lives. Second, it refers also to the place that children occupy in their families and the society that surrounds them. It relates to their ability to make their voices heard and to the roles that they (are allowed to) play.

More specifically, this report concerns itself with the place of children who live in poverty with two main goals: (1) to increase awareness of the challenges of urban poverty, as experienced every day by millions of children in cities around the world; and (2) to dispel the myth that these children are passive victims of their circumstances and, instead, to show them as active participants in efforts to improve their situation. Thus, this report points to the promise that children represent for a future free of poverty. This report presents a view of children who live in poverty, not as burdens but as resources.

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This perspective is important from a policy perspective because it helps identify approaches to address challenges associated with current demographic realities. There are more young people today than ever before. Almost half of the global population is under the age of 24; 1.2 billion people are younger than 15. Within developing regions, it is the least-developed countries that remain younger than the rest of the world: in 2005, the global median age was 28 years, but in 10 least-developed African countries, the median age was 16 or younger.¹

Estimates suggest that 60 percent of the world's population will live in cities by 2030 and that as many as 60 percent of urban dwellers will be under the age of 18. Most urbanization will occur in cities in the low-income countries, where already 30 percent of the population lives below official poverty lines.² Many urban dwellers have limited or no access to basic services, employment, and adequate housing. The challenges arising from this urban growth exceed the capacity of most cities to meet even the most basic needs of large proportions of the urban population.³ For this reason, investing in urban children and youth is not only a question of human rights and social justice. It is also about potential economic benefits and increasing citizen security, as young people are supported to become integrated members of society.⁴

Against this background, four essays provide insights into the daily experiences and environments of four children, living in four cities: Ankara (Turkey), Nairobi (Kenya), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), and New York (USA). We purposely decided not to focus on exceptional children and instead selected children who inspire positive action by succeeding to live regular everyday lives while facing uncommon hardships.⁵ Each of these brief chapters uses a combination of narrative and photographs, based on fieldwork that in-

cluded interviews, neighborhood walks, and home visits (see note on methodology).⁶ The picture that emerges illustrates considerable variation, but also gives evidence of similarities across places.

Next, this introduction outlines normative frameworks that have recently made a focus on children and youth into a higher priority for urban policy. These policies increasingly call for programs that support the exercise of agency by young people, enabling and empowering them to act as productive participants in the development of their communities. A commentary on issues of (mis)representation of children and youth in policy documents and media then leads to a summary of key findings that are brought into fuller view in the chapters that follow. The conclusion advocates including the voices of children and youth in policies and practices aimed at improving the well-being of young people living in cities.

New Normative Frameworks

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the international community began to reconceptualize security more in terms of people, and less of states. Fronting people engendered a slow and contested process to articulate and implement new normative policy frameworks around human rights. The World Summit for Children in 1990 was the first of a series of global conferences driven by a growing awareness of a single world that shared common problems requiring non-confrontational, cooperative approaches. It adopted a Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a Plan of Action for implementing the Declaration, which followed the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) one year earlier. The CRC, since ratified by all but two countries, recognizes, *inter alia*, the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for development and the right to have their voices heard on all matters that affect

them. It stipulates non-negotiable standards and obligations and declares that states shall provide material assistance and support programmes.

The U.N. Habitat Agenda, adopted at the City Summit of Istanbul in 1996, maintains a concern with the well-being of children, but brings into focus the significance of the larger urban context, providing that:

*"Governments at all levels, including local authorities, should continue to identify and disseminate best practices, and should develop and apply shelter and human settlements development indicators, including those that reflect the rights and wellbeing of children."*⁷

It further states that:

*"...the wellbeing of children is a critical indicator of a healthy society."*⁸

In the wake of the Habitat Agenda, UNICEF established the Child-Friendly Cities secretariat, which stimulated work around the world to make cities more supportive of children's needs. These efforts led to the creation of a set of assessment criteria that have not, however, so far been systematically used in evaluation research.⁹

In 2001, the UN Secretary General reported in *"We the Children"* on progress made since the World Summit of 1990. His report also noted where there was still room for improvement, or "unfinished business."

In a follow-up to that summit, at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, held in 2002, children from 154 countries for the first time played an official role in a General Assembly session, serving as delegates from governments and NGOs and producing the statement, *"A World Fit for Us."*¹⁰ This Special Session also resulted in a global agenda, *"A World Fit*

for Children,”¹¹ that laid out a plan to bridge the gap between “the great promises” and the “modest achievements” of the 1990s, which was assessed in a mid-decade review in December 2007. The Millennium Development Goals, approved by world leaders in 2002, specify various targets related specifically to children, including a reduction in child mortality and achievement of universal primary education, to be attained by 2015.

The emergence of these new normative frameworks, briefly reviewed here, put forth rights-based policy platforms that set the stage for an increasing emphasis on children living in poverty as a priority in development policies. This report advances this agenda by giving expression to the voices of children themselves. Through case studies based on field work in four cities, it presents an “inside view” of urban poverty through the eyes and words of four children.

Issues in (Re)Presentation

Unless properly contextualized, singling out particular children can create stereotypical views that do not do justice to the diversity of children in the wider population.

This report focuses on four children, selected for the dual purposes of this project. This approach has unique strengths, providing insights into their everyday lives in ways that give a richer picture than possible with statistical indicators alone. However, important caveats must be borne in mind when using this more personal approach. Unless properly contextualized, singling out particular children can create stereotypical views that do not do justice to the diversity of children in the wider population. The following remarks are intended to counteract such simplistic perceptions.

To begin with, the situations of the children featured in this report are

meant to be *indicative*, rather than *representative*, of conditions faced by children living in poverty in cities around the world. As seen in the essays that follow, there are significant differences in these conditions, even among the four cities included here. The variation is far greater yet when including other cities. It would be a mistake to think of urban poverty in uniform terms.

By the same token, also within any given city, there exist a variety of situations. Not all children living in Nairobi slums experience the same conditions of urban poverty. Nor do all children in the *gecekundus* of Ankara share identical situations. Nor do they do so in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, or in the projects in New York City. The manifestation and experience of poverty varies from place to place.

In addition, national contexts of poverty differ significantly among countries. In terms of GDP per capita, the range in this report goes from a low of \$547 for Kenya up to a high of \$41,890 for the USA, with Brazil (\$4,271) and Turkey (\$5,030) falling in between. Ranking on the Human Development Index similarly spans a broad spectrum, with the USA placing 12th and Kenya 148th, while Brazil (70th) and Turkey (84th) occupy intermediate positions. The proportions of the population living in urban areas likewise vary greatly, from 21% in Kenya to 84% in Brazil. Significant differences also exist with respect to the urban growth rate, access to safe water, electrification, and indicators of health and educational attainment, among others (see Appendix A for summary country profiles).

Just as environments of poverty are not the same everywhere, so also are not all children alike. Not only are there many individual differences, but children also experience poverty differently according to age, gender, enti-

lements, and social support systems, among other factors.

Hence, the four children highlighted here are *not* representative of all children living in poverty in Turkey, Kenya, Brazil, and the USA. To avoid erroneous impressions in this regard, the titles of the case studies are simply the names of these four children, rather than the names of the cities or the countries where they live. They *do* live in specific communities to be sure, and the characteristics of these places *are* relevant. Indeed, they profoundly affect their lives. But, the pictures emerging from the narratives and the photographs are first of all about those lives, while in the process sketching some of the background against which those lives play out every day.

Variations notwithstanding, there are some commonalities as well. In this regard, the observations in this report are consistent with insights obtained elsewhere, suggesting that children the world over share certain fears and hopes for the future (see below).

This report purposely augments narrative presentation with visual documentation. A picture can be worth more than a 1000 words and can better convey a sense of the daily lives of Aykut, Judy, Thiago, and Brandon. However, photographs can also introduce bias, since they just show selected instants in these children's days. We can only glimpse mere moments, sliced from the weeks, months and years that make up their lives.

The table below demonstrates how the choice of images can easily be slanted and skewed to favor a particular intent. The photographs on the first row show Aykut, Judy, Thiago, and Brandon with happy faces. They smile and look directly into the camera. Their expressions exude confidence

and joy. They project positive energy.

Issues in Presentation: Contrasting Views



In comparison, the second row of photographs shows these same children, captured on film with entirely different expressions. Their faces appear somber. Eyes cast downwards and averted, their looks suggest skepticism, weariness, and a sense of resignation.

The visual contrasts between the two sets of images are striking. They produce entirely different impressions of the same children. Yet, they *are* the same children, photographed at different times in different moods. In this report, we have steered away from portrayals of children as passive victims of poverty, showing them instead more positively as active participants in their future, without ignoring or belittling the adversities they face.¹³

Media representation of children living in poverty brings responsibility for creating a balance between truthfully showing the realities of poverty, while avoiding the suggestion that their future follows inevitably from their current situation.

Finally, media representation of children living in poverty involves a difficult ethical issue. It brings responsibility for creating a balance between truthfully showing the realities of poverty, on the one hand, while avoiding the suggestion that the future of these children follows inevitably from their current situation, on the other.

Research has well established that labeling, positive as well as negative, can strongly influence children's self-perceptions and development. Identifying children living in poverty with their circumstances would stamp them with poor prospects for success.

It is, therefore, important to use "people first" language. Accordingly, this report is careful not to speak of "poor children" but, instead, uses terms like "children living in poverty."

This poverty is multidimensional. It includes insufficient income, inadequate shelter, deficiencies in physical infrastructure and other forms of material deprivation, but it also includes lack of access to basic services such as health care, education, and transportation, limited safety nets, lack of legal protections, and voicelessness.¹⁴

Research has unequivocally demonstrated that poverty produces negative outcomes for children. It adversely affects access to nutritious food, medical care, education, play, jobs, and, more generally, their chances to lead healthy, productive and happy lives. Tremendous challenges remain after the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006).

Children living in poverty do not think of themselves as “poor children,” nor do they do see themselves as passive victims of poverty. These case studies attest to the active roles that they play in their families and their communities.

However, these facts are not to say that children living in poverty cannot also have positive daily experiences. Work carried out as part of the UNESCO-supported Growing Up in Cities Programme has found situations of “paradoxical poverty” in which children who face material poverty enjoy rich social networks in their community. Children living in poverty do not think of themselves as “poor

children.” Usually, they do not see themselves as helpless casualties of poverty either. Indeed, the case studies in this report attest to the active roles that these children can play in their families and their communities.

The Children in this Study

The children featured in this study are remarkable because they manage to live ordinary lives under extraordinary circumstances.

While facing difficult challenges everyday, they go to school, play, and have friends. Although still young, they help their families

and volunteer in their communities. Their dreams and hopes for the future are not very different from those of more affluent peers.¹⁶ See Appendix B for background summaries of the children profiled in this report.

The children featured in this study are remarkable because they manage to live ordinary lives under extraordinary circumstances.

In conversations with the field workers, Aykut, Judy, Thiago, and Brandon brought to the fore common themes woven throughout the stories of all four of them. Family plays a crucial role in their daily lives. Family, also and maybe especially in the lives of these

Family plays a crucial role in these children’s daily lives. In addition, they have rich social networks.

children, takes on different forms. Their families vary in composition according to fluctuating circumstances, and may include an aunt or grandmother and may exclude fathers or siblings. Regardless of these variations, family members provide love and protection. They lead by example and serve as role models. Even while acknowledging they themselves may fall short, they hold up positive values which the children internalize.

Besides their families, all four of the children have rich social networks that include friends, neighbors and other adults in the community. This “social capital” fulfills a bonding function, but also creates bridges to resources and makes possible future improvements over their current circumstances.¹⁷ These relationships make the children feel valued and, on a practical level, they enable them to negotiate the places where they live safely.

Safety is the main worry of these children.

Safety is the main worry of these children, as it is of so many others in similar situations. Violence is all around them, day and night.

They hear gun shots. They see fights and witness people getting hurt and killed. They know which places are dangerous and where not to go. They know the drug dealers, gang members and their territory. Yet, it is difficult to avoid danger. Aykut reports how he wrested a knife from a drug addict confronting him and his brother, and was helped by a nearby resident. As these children’s stories reveal, the risks of being harmed or worse are ever present. It is this concern for their safety and well-being, and that of those close to them, which stands out in their accounts. The centrality of this concern underscores the importance of strong actions to realize the intent of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

The children in this report chronicle many examples of environmental challenges.

The children in this report also chronicle many examples of environmental challenges. Judy steps over sewage on her way to school. Thiago watches rats, crossing

from house to house on powerlines illegally strung up in the alley where he lives. Brandon sees an infestation of roaches on the wall above the kitchen stove in his apartment. We hear about rain, flood water and vermin entering the places where these children live. They talk about the lack of space in their crowded homes and the lack of play space in the communities where they live. They tell of garbage in the streets and say they would like to live in a place that is clean.

Living in difficult environments, constantly surrounded by peril, these children do find a place and a time to play.

Yet, while living in difficult environments, constantly surrounded by peril, these children do find a place and a time to play. Aykut in Ankara and Thiago in Rio prefer soccer, while Brandon in New York enjoys

baseball, and Judy and her friends in Nairobi play a toss-and-pick-up game with little stones during recess at school. They also participate in cultural activities and sometimes perform publicly in their community, including reciting poetry, dancing, and playing music.

The daily orbits of these children give them a keen awareness of the superior living conditions of others, more prosperous than they are. Thiago has no computer, cannot afford required school books and does his homework on a tiny table in the entrance of his small home, knowing full well that his class mates

These children are aware that their lot does not depend on individual accomplishment alone, and they grasp that community-level change will require concerted action, organizational initiatives, and government support.

include children from some of Rio's most privileged families for whom resources are no concern. In Nairobi, Judy lives in a community where 25,000 people share two public latrines, abutting a walled community of more affluent residents who have their swanky cars washed and polished by Judy's friends just outside gates that mark an unmistakable barrier. Looking out from a crowded New York apartment infested by roaches, Brandon sees luxury condominiums with roof gardens. Aykut passes through some of Ankara's wealthiest areas when delivering groceries from the street markets where he works.

Yet, these children do not express resentment about the disparities they see, but accept them as a fact of life, at the same time realizing there are opportunities to improve their situation. They are aware of the importance of going to school and doing well academically to be successful in the world of work. Even though Judy may have nothing but a wooden stool on which to do her homework, she and the others look to education as the means to get the jobs to which they aspire and enabling them eventually to move to a better place to live. At the same time, they are aware that their lot does not depend on individual accomplishment alone. They know that community-level change will require concerted action, organizational initiatives, and government support.

Conclusion

These children represent the potential of people living in poverty, whose empowerment offers the single best prospect for improving urban livability in today's world.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2009, these children are our best hope for the future. Their lives represent the potential of people living in poverty, whose empowerment offers what is the single best

prospect for improving urban livability in today's world. Their stories hold a message about poverty and prosperity – and the differences between them. They convey despair about wasted and lost lives. But they also show resilience, bring hope and raise expectations for the future of children everywhere. Indeed, in the words of Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of its Human Settlements Programme:

"...youth are a resource, in fact the most important and strategic resource a country can have. Youth are agents of social change; they take on a very active role in addressing the issues that affect them. We have examples of many youth led processes that are working and making a difference in society even with minimal resources. What is required is to provide these initiatives with an enabling environment that will facilitate their replication".¹⁹

Required, as well, is research to provide evidence-based guidance to the formulation of policies that create the enabling environments for initiatives aimed at eradicating child poverty. Studies, such as being conducted through the Young Lives project in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, are encouraging.²⁰ We need quantitative and qualitative data on the conditions and effects of poverty, and the evaluation of poverty reduction strategies. We also need to listen to the voices of children themselves in efforts to improve children's well-being. This report seeks to mobilize support for such inclusionary practices.

Endnotes

1. See UN-HABITAT (2006).
2. Ruble et al. (2003, p. 1).
3. See UN-HABITAT (2003).
4. See Note 2.
5. Various books have used somewhat similar formats, but none of them based on the personal narratives of children living in poverty. *A Life Like Mine*, published by Dorling Kindersley in 2002 as a UNICEF production, focuses on concerns articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Richly illustrated, it is organized around the four themes of survival, development, protection and participation. It differs from this report in several important ways. For example, it concerns itself with pre-selected issues in relation to children's wellbeing (e.g., vaccination), and each theme is illustrated with a few two-page vignettes of a particular child (18 children total) aimed at children aged 8 to 11. This age group is similar to that for *Children Around the World*, which is the title of no less than three different books, all seeking to make a juvenile audience aware of cultural diversity (e.g., clothing, recipes, music, games). The most recent of these books, by Donata Montanari (2001), targets 4 to 8 year old children. Earlier, *Children Just Like Me* by Anabel Kindersley (in association with UNICEF, 1995) became a very popular book that combines colorful photography with text, offering a celebration of cultural diversity and shared needs among children worldwide. *Our Time is Now*, produced through the International Youth Foundation, profiles 30 young people, mostly in their 20s, standing out for their unusual accomplishments, in contrast to this report which observes inspiration that stems from the everyday activities of a younger age group.
6. Work for this project was carried out by the Children, Youth and Environments Center at the University of Colorado under contract for UN Habitat. The sites were selected to show children living in urban poverty in a range of environments: Ankara, Turkey; Nairobi, Kenya; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and New York City, U.S.A. Researchers familiar with the sites and proficient in the local language undertook fieldwork consisting of neighborhood walk-about, interviews, and photography. The children featured in this report were contacted through existing social networks, based on prior relationships of trust. Each child was interviewed more than once. Additional interviews were conducted with siblings, parents and other adults. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of questions around a shared core of points related to everyday life, the social context of "typical" daily activities, life history, concerns and fears, and expectations, hopes and aspirations. We also asked the children to draw a mental map of their community, showing the location of their home and school, and other places important to them.

These primary data were supplemented with information from secondary sources concerning the community's and the country's demographic profile, economic base, migratory patterns, political system, and level of human development (see Appendix A).

Photographic documentation included the children themselves and their family, neighbors and friends, as well as aspects of their environment, such as their home, street, school, and public places. Safety concerns limited the possibilities for photography in two of the sites. Although these sites could have been left out from this report for that reason, we decided that it would be inappropriate to exclude places too dangerous for perfect photography when those places are the everyday environments for the children living there.

7. Ibid.
8. UN Habitat Agenda: Goals and Principles, Commitments and the Global Plan of Action (1996).
9. See UNICEF (2004).
10. UNICEF (2002). Available at http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/docs_new/documents/wffc-en.pdf.
11. Ibid.
12. Age criteria to define "children" and youth" in part overlap, but the focus in this report is specifically on children, referenced here as those under 18 years of age. There exist additional agreements and policy documents that concern themselves with youth, which are not included in this review.
13. See also Kirschke and Van Vliet- (2005).
14. For an excellent discussion of definitions, concepts and measurements of child poverty, see Minujin et al. (2006). See also Satterthwaite (2002).
15. See Chawla (2002). In contrast, it is possible to conceive of "paradoxical privilege" as situations in which children in affluent communities suffer from segmented relationships and social isolation.
16. The same observation emerged from a review of the drawings and answers of more than 1000 street children in response to the question "If I had the Chance..." (Asian Development Bank 2003).
17. Cf. Narayan (1999).
18. Van Vliet- (2002).
19. Commonwealth Youth Forum Opening ceremony: Statement by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. Entebbe, Uganda, 14 November 2007. Available at <http://hq.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=5454&catid=14&typeid=8&subMenuId=0>
20. For more on this project, see <http://www.younglives.org.uk/>.

Aykut Boztaş

Ankara, Turkey¹



"My name is Aykut Boztaş, I am thirteen years old and I live with my father, mother, two brothers and two sisters in Altındağ, Ankara Turkey. My parents moved from Değirmendere, Kağızman when I was about one year old. My grandmother still lives there. She sends us cheese from the old village, for breakfast."

History

Altındağ municipality, one of Ankara's most historical districts, includes the oldest "gecekondu" and has some of the poorest neighborhoods, adjacent to the wealthier and most established areas. Since the 1950's, it has gone through several transformations as a result of economic policies, labor market changes, and political interventions. Despite its stigma as an illegal settlement, built and occupied by unskilled, poor migrants from rural areas, most early observers acknowledged the positive energy of the residents, the orderly social life in these settlements, the mechanisms they had developed for successful adaptation to urban life, and their economic contributions. These positive aspects were also reflected in gradual improvements of the physical environment (Figure 1.1).

Starting in 1966, realizing that the market was unable to meet the growing demand for housing, the government responded by amnesty laws that legalized the settlement and brought city services, resulting in political patronage as well as commercialization of the housing stock. Taking advantage of the opportunity to rent, some areas densified with low- and low-

middle income apartments. In the 1980's, liberalization of the economy by massive privatization; localization of administrative functions; reduction of rural subsidies; social assistance; unionization; and Turkey's war against terrorism in the east, led to further migration into already existing gecekondus whose original owners rented housing to the newcomers. At the same time, urban land became more precious so that the government stopped legalizing land tenure and began enforcing the demolition of old squatter developments, especially those that were visible along major arterials.



Figure 1.1 The area where Aykut lives is slowly being upgraded by the residents.

Thus Altındağ includes older 5-8 storey apartments where low- and middle-income families live, as well as large patches of very dense older squatter homes, especially on steep hill-sides. The early gecekondus allowed for limited continuation of a rural lifestyle, thus contributing to livability as well as productive use of land for vegetable gardens and husbandry to help meet

basic needs. However, today, the environment lacks any type of vegetation since every inch has been converted into rentable area for migrant families (Figure 1.2). Ties with the rural hinterland and rural ways of living have been severed.



Figure 1.2 Every square inch in Aykut's neighborhood is built up. There is no green space for gardening or playing.

At the same time, the labor market has become much more specialized, blocking opportunities of family members for upward mobility from marginal jobs into better paying employment. The environment of the more recent immigrants reflects abject poverty, accentuated by the inability of the residents to improve their physical conditions owing to their status as renters. In most of these neighborhoods, more than 80% of the population is

unemployed. Aykut lives in one of these neighborhoods (Figure 1.3), an older squatter settlement built on a steep hillside close to the main street of Altındağ, a few blocks away from apartments on flat terrain where lower and middle-income families live.



Figure 1.3 Neighborhood friends, posing with Aykut and the push cart he uses for his work.

The Family

Aykut's family comes from Kağızman, Kars, known for its lush vegetation, orchards and animal husbandry. When economic and political factors disrupted the area's traditional livelihoods, the villagers started looking for permanent work elsewhere. Aykut's father began to work as a seasonal laborer in Ankara to bolster the household income from animal husbandry, the traditional occupation of the region. Aykut, his mother, older brother, and sister were all born in Kağızman.

Twelve years ago, when Aykut was one year old, his father decided to move the family to Ankara, near some of his brothers. In the next few years, Aykut's parents had two more children, while his father continued to work in construction until he had a serious accident on site and was hospitalized. His boss prevented him from going to court for worker's compensation on the promise that he would take care of expenses. When the statute of limitations passed and his boss did not keep his promise, it left the family with considerable debt and little prospect of finding a steady source of income. Today, they survive on government subsidies for the poor and occasional part-time jobs that the father and older brother find. Aykut notes:

"My older brother is away most of the time looking for work in the city."

The Home

Aykut and his family live in a second-storey rented dwelling on top of another rental unit. It consists of two rooms accessible from the street by an exterior staircase (Figure 1.4). There is a bathroom/toilet that opens to one of the rooms. Aykut's father re-built the bathroom, with nice tiles, surplus from a construction site. Laying tiles is his trade. He also regularly repairs the roof.

The space on the landing, protected by a make-shift awning, is used as the kitchen. The total living space for this family of seven is about 40 square meters. They use a coal-burning stove to heat the home (Figure 1.5). The ruling party provides coal as a favor and as part of its campaign for votes.



Figure 1.4 Aykut, father, older sister, mother and younger brother in front of the stairs leading up to their second-storey, two-room apartment of 40 square meters (not pictured: younger sister and older brother)



Figure 1.5. Living room with stove for which the local ruling party provides coal as fuel.

Early in the field work, the rooms did not contain any furniture except for sitting pillows on a bare floor and a small television set. Later, the living room was furnished with two new sofas, a carpet, and a chestnut credenza with a glass display case filled with china and mementoes set on doilies. This furniture was delivered by people who “took interest in the family.”² The stove is in the living room. The family has dinner here, watches television, and receives guests when they drop in (Figure 1.6).



Figure 1.6 The family sits down for a meal in the living room, also used as bedroom by the parents. After the first field visit, the previously bare room was furnished by “people who took interest in the family” (not pictured: Aykut’s two brothers.)

“Neighbors often come to visit; women with their small children make deserts, like cake, with my mother. People visit each other during holidays. My grandparents live elsewhere in Ankara and we visit them or they come here for holidays. My other grandmother will come from Kağızman to stay with us.”

As customary in rural areas, dinner is served on a low wooden table and eaten sitting on the floor. The living room also serves as the bedroom for the parents. Aykut explains that their large screen television set was taken away when the family could not pay its debts:

"They took away our large television set because we could not pay back our debt. This is because my father fell from the building on the construction site and was in the hospital for three months. We had to borrow money because he could not work and for his treatment. He cannot work full time in construction anymore and can only do light jobs when they come up. If we could pay back the remaining half of the debt, then we can save money to get our large television back. If I could earn more money, I would like to get my father a cell phone and a laptop for myself."

In the other room, Aykut sleeps with his two brothers and two sisters. There is an electric heater and a cassette and CD player. They also use it for listening to music, playing, and doing homework (Figure 1.7).

"My brother helps me with math sometimes. Besides homework, we listen to music here in this room with my friends. The children play, work, listen to music, and sleep in this room".

"My older sister helps my mother with housework and she sometimes fights with my brother; that upsets me while I am doing homework. She is fourteen years old and quit going to school because she did not like the teacher. There are people who made inquiries to find out if she is available for marriage. She says she will not get married until she is at least twenty two years old.³ My

baby sister is three and a half years old, she likes to dance and used to ride the tricycle, but that was stolen.”

The family also stores the bedding in this room; which is laid down every evening with mattresses, quilts and pillows that are gathered up in the morning.



Figure 1.7. Aykut and his two brothers and two sisters sleep in this second room.

Daily Life

In Turkey, eight years of primary education is mandatory and public schools are free. Aykut wakes up around six-thirty to go to school. Sometimes he does not have time for breakfast which generally consists of tea, bread and cheese. He washes up and puts his blue school uniform with white collar on top of his clothes. School has two sessions. Aykut attends the morning

shift, which starts at 7:30 AM. It can be very cold in the morning. Grabbing his backpack, he runs down the hill from his house, across the main street and two more blocks. He has a break mid-morning, which is a time he uses to eat lunch served by the school. The morning session ends at 12:30 (Figure 1.8).



Figure 1.8 Aykut in front of the school, which he attends from 7:30AM till 12:30PM. Math is his favorite topic.

First, Aykut said math was his favorite topic. His grades were very good. However, during a return visit the following year, the family could not locate him for a follow-up interview. As it turned out, he was hiding because he was failing in mathematics in 6th grade. However, he called back in the spring to announce that his grades were up and that he had passed all his courses.

Aykut also goes to the school when he is troubled about something. Then he sits in the school yard by himself. When asked what kinds of things may trouble him, he was at first vague, but eventually suggested that these could be disagreements with his friends or family.

After school, Aykut goes home. He then often changes into his sweat suit to play soccer with his friends. When there is a tournament, he plays in the school soccer team on the field behind the school. The soccer field is just a barren lot, and Aykut says *"I will put in turf when I become rich."* Other times they play on the street in his neighborhood. Aykut's favorite possession is his soccer shoes. They do not last for more than a month of serious playing. However, new ones are costly, so he does not always have "proper" shoes for soccer.

Aykut also goes to the community center everyday, where he participates in the activities it offers. He likes playing computer games there. Staff there also help with homework (Figure 1.9).



Figure 1.9 Children's rights are posted in the community center where Aykut goes after school to do homework and play games.

"I like school work. I am bored when teachers don't give any homework."

Early in the fieldwork, Aykut was singing Turkish folk songs (Türkü) in the choir at the Center. He said he liked listening to cassette recordings of regional folk music at home. He played a lively folk song while his three-and-a-half year old kid sister danced a "halay." Later, when asked what kind of music he listened to, he replied "mostly hymns." He did not say how religious music entered his entertainment repertoire as a teenage boy. These are touchy topics in Turkey these days (See also endnote 2).

At 5:30 in the afternoon, Aykut picks up his younger brother from school, where he attends the afternoon shift, and then they walk home together. Aykut knows lots of people in his neighborhood. He has uncles and cousins who live close by, and he also knows the owners of stores who live in adjacent homes. His best friend lives down the street.

He is also on good terms with many people at the two local markets, where he works each weekend and every weekday during summer time (Figures 1.10 and 1.11). Talking about his work there, Aykut observes:

"Most vendors and other workers in the market know me. I also have regular customers. I go to collect candy and pocket money from them on holidays."

Aykut often runs errands for his mother and for his neighbors whenever they ask him to go the grocery store, to the butcher, or to the "Russian Market." These markets, which sprang up in Turkey after the break-up of the Soviet Republic, are visited by Russians who come with suitcases to buy



Figure 1.10



Figure 1.11

Figures 1.10 and 1.11 Through his work at the local market, Aykut knows many people and is on good terms with vendors and customers.

cheap goods which they take back to sell at home. Locals also shop at these places. He knows his way around, all the way to Yenidogan, to Ulus (old city center). He knows where to buy what for the least price. The stationary store on the main street is one of his favorite stores. The owner rolls his eyes when he sees him because he visits so often to view the latest mechanical pencils, notebooks, soccer balls and other stuff attractive to children at his age.

Aykut's Neighborhood

On the whole, Aykut likes his neighborhood. While he is well aware of the low quality of most of the housing, he says:

"It is a nice environment. The streets are not dirty, except when cats get into garbage bins. And it usually is pretty safe during daylight hours. There are lots of children on the streets and people sit outside when the weather is good."

Aykut's father and mother agree. They say that they are happy in this neighborhood. His parents are known as good neighbors, even though they are renters. They say:

"People keep an eye on each other. During the day it is pretty safe but it is not a good idea to be out and about at night. But the police also know us, and they come and help if and when needed."

However, the other day, when Aykut was walking with his younger brother, a gang member came lurching towards them, asking for money, shaking a

knife in his hand. He was not from their neighborhood and clearly on drugs. According to Aykut:

"There was this man coming towards us, he was unsteady on his feet and had a knife in his hand. I told Eyup, (his younger brother) you run, fast. Then I grabbed the man's wrist back to his back and shook the knife free."

When asked how he dared to resist this man with a knife in his hand," he replied:

"Oh, he looked stoned, so it was not difficult. Besides right then, some other man came and separated us. Then I walked back home."

Just before this incident, there had been another scare, when a car was burned down a couple of streets away from his house. Its charred remains were still there. *"Such things happen around here,"* noted Aykut. His biggest concern is for his safety and that of his family and friends. His parents try to keep him at home after darkness falls.

The Future

When asked what he sees in the years ahead, Aykut answers:

"If I am rich when I grow up, I will say: "Tear these houses down and build beautiful ones." These houses leak, everything about them is broken down. My house does not leak, because my father fixed it. He repaired the roof, all the walls, painted the inside, built the toilet and tiled the floor. He knows construction.

My neighbors own their houses but we rent ours. My mother's greatest wish is to own a house. If we owned this house, my father could fix it even more. The landlord does not want to sell it because he thinks he can make more money in the future if the government decides to tear down this neighborhood."

He knows that it will not be easy to get better housing and move to a better neighborhood. It will take hard work, but he is prepared for that. Already he is doing what he can, working on weekends during the school year and all week during the summer vacation and giving his earnings to his parents (Figures 1.12 and 1.13):



Figure 1.12 On weekends and summer weekdays, Aykut delivers produce from two local markets to people's homes. It takes him 90 minutes to walk to one of these markets.



Figure 1.13 With his cart, Aykut helps people carry groceries home.

"I go to work in the weekends during the school year at the weekly markets. I have a cart and help people carry groceries home. One of the markets is close by and the other one is an hour-and-a-half away; I just put one foot on the cart and push it with my other foot like a skateboard all the way to the market and back. In the summers, I work five days a week and rest for the other two days, because I do get very tired."

Although he gets tired, Aykut is not complaining and reveals a broader sense of purpose. Talking about his family, school, and what the future holds for him, he says:

"Being with my family and doing school work make me happy. If I cannot do my school work, that makes me unhappy. In the future if I have a good position, I will concentrate on my work and take care of my workers and help the poor."

Endnotes

1. Edited field report prepared by Fahriye Hazer Sancar. Photographs by Beysun Gokcin.
2. Families, such as Aykut's, are especially affected by the "faith-based volunteerism" doctrine of the ruling party that effectively transferred provision of after school and remedial education, social services, employment opportunities from central government bureaucracy to local governments and the various "non-governmental organizations" working as extensions of the party apparatus on the ground.
3. However, in May of 2008 we learned that Aykut's sister was getting married at age 16. When asked, she said that she had no objections and had agreed to this marriage willingly. In these situations, usually the new wife will move in with her in-laws. Aykut's family will receive an agreed upon sum of money (başlık parası) in return for her hand in marriage.

Judy Musyoka

Nairobi, Kenya¹



Judy Muniyiva is special, but not unusual.

Self-confident, loving, and opinionated (but wary), she inspires those around her in ways one might not expect from a soft-spoken 13-year old girl. She is somewhat precocious, but modest, and acutely aware of her situation. She is popular with her friends, and often called upon at community meetings to recite memorized poems and bible passages. She dreams of being a nurse.

Growing up in Mariguine in Mukuru—one of Nairobi’s largest slums—Judy has faced the well-known challenges endured by a majority of those living in that city: nonexistent services, corruption, hunger, crime, displacement, and insecurity. The all-too-familiar descriptions evoke compassion, guilt, frustration, sorrow, even pity. Certainly, Judy is the victim of official neglect, a possible poster-child for the shortcomings of Africa’s cities and the failures of the international development industry (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

But Judy does not play the victim role well.

She has a sense of purpose, a keen sense of self, and a strong desire to make things better, for herself and her community. Judy is the anti-victim.



Figure 2.1 The central Square is the only open space in Mariguine, where Judy lives.



Figure 2.2 Judy encounters unsanitary conditions on her walk to school.

Given her circumstances, Judy's optimism and tenacity are inspiring. But her story is not unusual.² It is part of an anthology of thousands of stories by young people in slums throughout Nairobi, communicated in smiles, laughter, curiosity, tenderness, playfulness and a resilient belief that tomorrow will be better than today. In a city and country with complex economic and political challenges, Judy and her generation represent the possibility of a way forward.

Judy's story does not excuse the neglect, corruption and ignorance that has created the appalling conditions faced by her, her family and millions of others in similar settlements around Nairobi, Kenya, and the world. But it underscores the complex realities that shape life and gives hope, in one of the world's least hopeful places.

"I Come from Tala Kangundo..."

Judy was born in Tala Kangundo, in Kenya's Eastern Province. Like most people who live in Nairobi's informal settlements, she and her family used to live in a rural village, far from the city.

Tala Kangundo is a place of fond memories: a place where life was simpler and less costly.

"I like the village more because here [in the city] we pay rent, but in the village the houses are free and there is free water... the land is open...one can go plough the land and there are trees everywhere and I can go rest under the trees... here there is no open space."

When Judy was in the third grade, she left Tala Kangundo with her mother and brothers, to seek both refuge and opportunity in Nairobi: refuge from an abusive father, and the opportunity to eke out a living away from his brutality. As Judy's mother recalls:

"...my husband neglected our children. He even used to send the older boy to go buy him alcohol at night. The boy had to walk a long way and I had told him never to do it. So my husband got mad and beat him and refused to give him food and tried to even cut him with a machete. So when I heard about this, I went to pick my children but the dad refused. So after a few days, I tricked him. I gave him money to go buy some food and when he rode his bicycle to go get food, I packed my stuff and the kids and left."

Like thousands upon thousands of her fellow Kenyans, Judy and her family followed their kinship ties to find a safe place in the city—or at least as safe a place as they could afford. Following a short stay with her sister-in-law in a nearby neighborhood, Judy's mother was able to secure a room in Mariguine, where her younger sister already lived.

Since then, a 9-foot by 10-foot shack of corrugated metal and cardboard has been their shelter, and home (Figure 2.3). Judy lives here with her mother, her oldest brother's wife, and her little nephew. Two of her older brothers (age 14 and 17) live nearby. The 14-year old goes to Judy's school, where he is in the eighth grade. She does her homework on a small wooden stool (Figure 2.4).

Although Judy and her family sometimes go back to Tala Kangundo to see family, returning there is not an option.

"There are no jobs there, and even when you find a job, they don't pay well," explains Judy's mum. "I used to work as a house help in another village, but again my husband would take all the money and go drink it all. If I buy hens, goats, he sells them to get money for his alcohol. I cannot deal with that!"



Figure 2.3 Bathroom for Judy and her family.



Figure 2.4 Judy doing homework on a wooden stool in her one-room home of 90 sq. feet.



Figure 2.5 Narrow alleys serve as pathways, social space, drain and sewer.

“The only place to rest is my bed...”

Part of the larger self-built settlement of Mukuru³, Mariguine’s flimsy structures of tin sheets and tarps on a wood frame provide housing for between 10,000 and 15,000 people, with monthly rents typically in the range of US \$10 to US \$20. Extended families live in a single room or—if they can afford it—two or three rooms, where they eat, sleep, work and socialize. Dirt roadways and pedestrian

paths serve simultaneously as walkways, social space, drain and sewer (Figure 2.5). A chaotic assemblage of police, gangs, self-help groups, NGOs and local government representatives “govern” and provide sporadic, and often costly services.

Official land deeds are rare, and a complex system of land “ownership” has evolved in Mukuru. A myriad of small and large landlords control the vast maze of illegal structures where most residents pay exorbitant “rent” for

the chance to eke out a meager living. A recent World Bank study estimated that slum dwellers in Nairobi pay approximately US \$31 million in collective rent each year.⁴ This does not include payments for water, electricity and toilets—typically at higher rates than residents in adjoining middle-class estates, due to corruption and the vast network of middlemen. The money stream that flows out from Mariguine erodes hope for those who need it most, while benefitting others.

Judy's family has lived in the same room since they moved to Mariguine. Originally a shack with four rooms, shared with other families, their living quarters shrunk several years ago when the landlord converted it to eight rooms. Then, in 2004, a fire destroyed the entire settlement, including their shack and possessions.

"All the rooms in the village were destroyed... two [firetrucks] came but stopped by the main road...they did nothing. They said there were no access roads, but surely they could have at least tried to save the houses by the road. They should have done something. Eventually they only came to make sure that the fire did not spread to the estates nearby. They did not care about us and our stuff."

Judy and her family worked with their landlord to rebuild their shack, using the charred remains and some new materials. After sleeping in the open for three days, they moved back in, and rebuilt their lives, once more (Figure 2.6).



Figure 2.6 Hairdresser, grocery, and phone service in the central square.

“...and now I sell the same alcohol”

Judy and her family live with the daily irony of their survival: Judy’s mom sells the same “local brew” that inebriated Judy’s father each day and drove their family apart. For Judy, it is a source of some agony, as she does not like the local bars and clubs where “drunks” cause problems. She wishes her mum did not have to sell it, but her mum says she has no choice.

Her mum used to earn money by working in a bar downtown, but she disliked having to leave her children alone.

“I felt guilty because I would leave them in the house by themselves at night and sometimes they did not have food. So I decided to quit and stay home and sell the alcohol at home and be able to watch my children.”

Working for herself has allowed Judy's mum to be at home, but has had its own challenges. She describes how when she had just started,

"I did not know that when I purchase the concentrate I had to dilute it to make a profit."

And even on days when she is able to turn a profit, there is the challenge of keeping it:

"I was able to sell alcohol for a month before the cops discovered my place.... [Now] when the cops come knocking...they want bribes. Sometimes they take all the profits."

"Mutua is always there. I know him"

Mariguine, like the rest of Mukuru and most slums in Nairobi, is officially a temporary place. Thus, there is the ever-present potential of eviction.

Community life amidst such insecurity and desperation is complicated. Trust is limited, resulting in social ties that are many and varied, but often tenuous. Family ties form the safety net of survival, supplemented by close-knit groups of friends within the settlement (Figure 2.7).



Figure 2.7 Judy with friends in front of her home.

For Judy, such precariousness causes profound concern for her safety. She is kept safe by her relatives and friends who keep an eye out for her—like her two aunts and cousins who live close by, her brothers with whom she stays in the evening when her mother is selling brew, her friend Mutua who works as a night watchman at the neighborhood toilet (Figure 2.8), and her friends who walk home with her from school in the evening (Figure 2.9). Through her life at church,



Figure 2.8 Having no toilet in her home, Judy uses one of the two public latrines which “serve” about 25,000 people in Mariguine.

school and the local youth group, Judy almost always knows someone close by.

These networks help insulate Judy and her family from the jealousy and gossip that gnaw at neighborly relations. Appearing overly successful in a place that is so unrelentingly precarious can be detrimental. There is the ever-present possibility of theft and loss: walls of tin and tarp offer no protection.



Figure 2.9 Judy on her way to school.

“Youth clean and unclog the drains”

Despite her daily insecurity, Judy remains positive and kind, thinking not only about herself and her family, but her community. Sustained by her faith and her belief that tomorrow will be better than today, she is deeply involved in church and school activities and is also active in a local youth group. She leads a dance group at her church, staying after church on weekends to practice their songs and dance moves so that they can provide entertainment at community gatherings. She is often asked to lead prayers

during community awareness events and political gatherings, or to recite one of her memorized poems. She also regularly volunteers for cleaning the church.

Judy also participates in a “child-to-child” club at her school. She works with classmates to sell books and supplies, with the proceeds going to a local orphanage. She is friends with some of the young men who have formed a self-help youth group to clean the local area and provide services that the government has failed to provide.

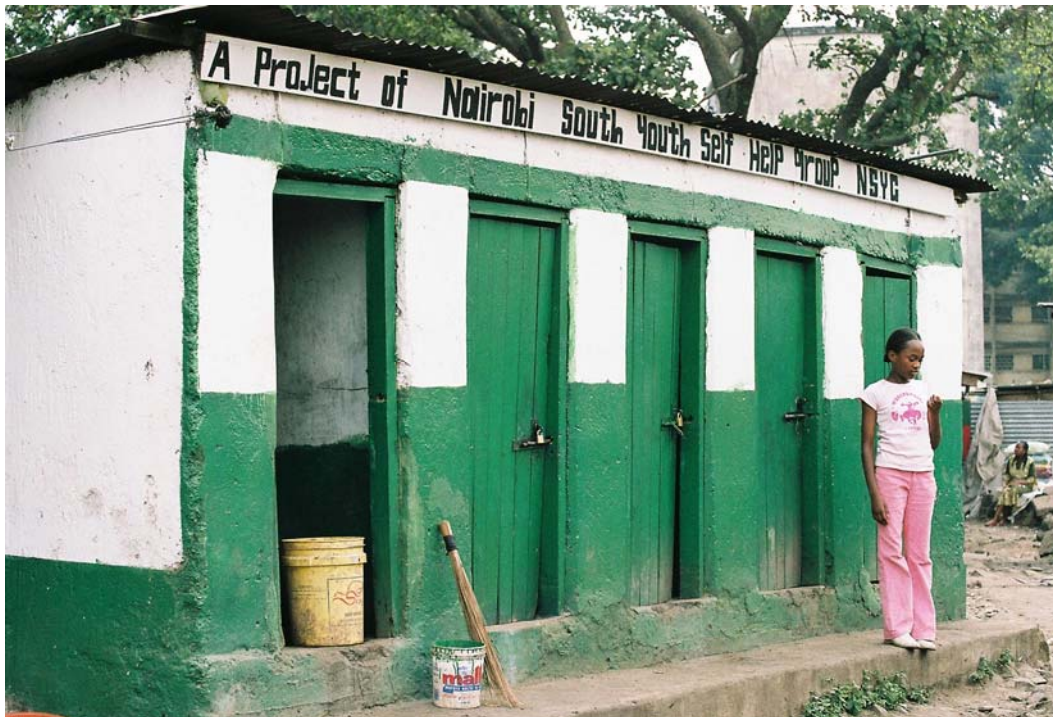


Figure 2.10 New public latrine built by a local self-help youth group.

Initially organized as a strategy to ward off idleness, they support their activities through a carwash and by charging a nominal fee for a community toilet they constructed (Figure 2.10). Like Judy’s mom’s women’s group, these young people provide financial and social support to each other, in addition to community service. No one has asked or told them to do these

things. They volunteer them. It was they who first suggested that Judy be the focus for this profile, though it could just as easily have been written about any one of them.

For Judy, I hope she finishes...she has always been talking about being a nurse..."



Figure 2.11 Mariguini's medical clinic. Judy aspires to becoming a nurse and treating people for free.

For Judy and her family, daily insecurity is offset by hope: hope that Judy and her siblings will do well, hope that God will protect them, hope that school will provide a path to stability, if not prosperity (Figure 2.11).

Education is highly valued by Judy and her family, as it is by most Kenyans. Although schooling in Kenya is free up to the 8th grade, the quality of public schools varies widely, and they are rarely located in the slums. Parents who can afford it send their children to private schools located within the slum areas, many of which are run by charitable trusts and NGOs. Judy attends a private school along with her next-older brother, for which her family must pay tuition of about US \$5 per month, but which provides a much better education. As Judy says, "...the teachers always come because it is a private school and they are paid only if they perform."



Figure 2.12 Judy (3rd from left) in her class of more than 40 students.

She arrives at school at 6:45 am, and finishes at 8:00 pm, with a mid-day break during which she returns home for lunch (Figure 2.12). During recess, she plays games (Figure 2.13).

After school, Judy helps her mom with laundry and other chores and does shopping errands (Figures 2.14 and 2.15).



Figure 2.13 Judy playing with friends during recess at school.



Figure 2.14 Judy hanging up laundry in front of her home.

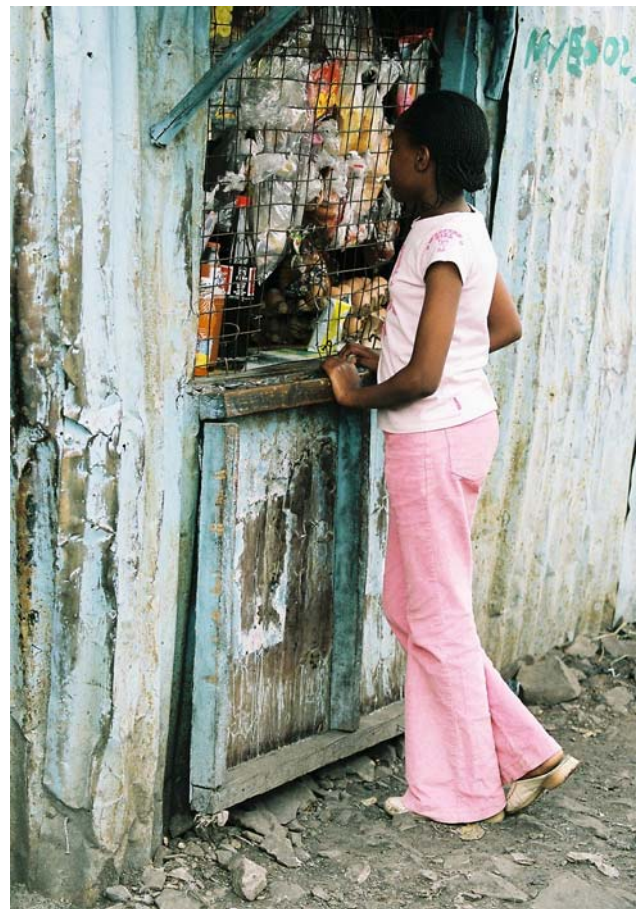


Figure 2.15 Judy buying groceries for her mom.

It is a full day, but one for which Judy is grateful. The most challenging part of the day is the walk home in the evening, as she and her friends must navigate the dark alleys, with both real and perceived threats around every corner. Being able to walk with a group is critical to her safety.

But balancing education's hope with reality requires trade-offs. For Judy, this has meant holding back a grade so that her brother can complete the 8th grade and attend high school next year—which requires a much larger tuition payment. If things go well for her brother and the family's finances allow, she hopes to follow in her brother's footsteps in the coming years.

“I would like toilets and bathrooms available for each plot and make them free. I would also like to bring free light to all of us...”

Judy does have strong desires to see Mariguine improved; to see it become safer, cleaner and more similar to the nearby middle-class housing estates. She wants to contribute to this improvement, and to help alleviate the suffering. *“I see all the sick people and I would like to treat them for free.”* Judy dreams of being a nurse.

Judy is not unusual. She occupies a place that is far too familiar to far too many girls of her age around the world. It is not a place of her making, but it is her place in the world for now.

But Judy is undoubtedly special, in the extraordinary but everyday way in which so many young people like her are special. She touches the lives of her friends, family and community, and does her part to make Mariguine a place of joy and hope even amidst its unremitting despair. She is defining her own place in her own small part of the world, and in doing so expanding

the possibilities of hope for herself, for Mariguine and for Kenya.

Judy's story calls to mind the Swahili proverb: "*Bahari haivukwi kwa kuogolea,*" or "*the ocean can't be crossed by swimming.*" Judy's place in the world is within the sea of Nairobi's vast urban slums, and she—like so many others—is doing her best to swim across. But what she needs is a boat, a bridge, or at least a life raft. She will need the adults of the world to do their part. Judy expresses no desire to leave Mariguine. She likes being close to her family and friends. As she says, "*I never want to go far and leave my mum.*" (Figure 2.16). In the meantime, Judy must persevere on the buoyancy of hope, love, ingenuity and determination.



Figure 2.16 Judy with her mom.

Endnotes

1. Edited field report prepared by David Driskell and George Awuor. Photographs by James Njuguna and Sylvia Njenga.
2. Shared over several meetings in April and May 2007.
3. Mukuru's population in 1999 was officially estimated at approximately 100,000 according to a 2001 report prepared jointly by the Government of Kenya and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (P. Syagga, W. Mitullah, and SK Gitau. Nairobi Situation Analysis. June 2001). Unofficial sources report a total Mukuru population in 2007 of up to 600,000.
4. S. Gulyani (Columbia University) and D. Talukdar (SUNY Buffalo). Slum Real Estate: the low-quality high-price puzzle in Nairobi's slum rental market and its implications for theory. Unpublished manuscript. November 30, 2006.

Thiago Santiago

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil¹



"My nickname is Locko. I chose it myself.

I saw 'Loco' on the internet and added a 'k'."

explains Thiago Santiago, a tall thirteen-year old boy with dark curly hair and large brown eyes, who lives in one of the world's most beautiful cities, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Overlooking Guanabara Bay with its many small islands, Rio has coastal mountains and the Atlantic rain forest creeping up the sides of the steep hills that divide the city into many distinct neighborhoods. Thiago lives on one of these mountainsides in an area stripped of forest in one of Rio's most infamous favelas, Rocinha (Figure 3.1).

A favela originally meant a settlement on a hillside but now signifies a poor community anywhere in Brazil, built somewhat haphazardly, often with scavenged building materials, almost always with the land squatted, not owned



Figure 3.1 Thiago lives in a crowded *favela*, built illegally by squatters on steep hillsides. Note the child on the roof corner with the water containers in the foreground.

by the residents. Since colonization by the Portuguese five centuries ago, people have flocked to Rio because of its beautiful location by the Atlantic Ocean and its economic opportunities. However, the government has never had an adequate program to provide decent housing for the millions of people who need it. Even though Rio was one of the first cities in the world to have a public sewer system, rarely are there sewers to carry human waste out of the favelas. In a heavy rain, the streets carry a horrendous mix of debris and sewage down the mountainsides towards the sea.

Thiago's Neighborhood

Rocinha settlers first built with wood illegally cut from the Atlantic forest, and now mostly use honeycomb bricks made of local clay to build always higher up, one room on top of another, as land is minimal and flat spaces nonexistent. In many parts of Rocinha, the streets are only narrow passageways of stairs carved into the rock formations of the mountain. In the higher areas, people carry cement for long distances on their backs in order to build their houses. Electric wires trace the sky in a mish mash going from poles to shops to apartments, many of them installed illegally. Rats walk the wires at night between buildings.

Rocinha has a reputation for its size of over 250,000 people and its violence. Rio lies at the heart of the export of Columbian cocaine heading to Europe, and the drug traders find refuge in the twisting, turning favela alleyways that create a confusing maze and make it hard for police to track them down. The illegal drug traffic brings with it many high-powered weapons and gun battles between rival drug dealers and police with resulting loss of life among the young people who engage in this dangerous business.

Rocinha straddles a main road that goes over the mountain of Gavea and links two wealthier neighborhoods on Rio's waterfront. The road looks like a

moving, twisting puzzle of buses, cars, and trucks delivering goods and people to local businesses, and motor scooters carrying entire families that weave in between the other vehicles (Figure 3.2). Traffic fatalities are high. In the curves of the road trash is perpetually piled up in stinking mounds. There is money to be made in recycling plastics, metal and cardboard, but the rest of the trash just sits and rots.



Figure 3.2 Rocinha's main street is congested with traffic, dirty and unsafe.

By recent estimates, 60 percent of the population of Rocinha is 18 or under. Children get involved in the drug trade at a young age, employed to watch for police cars entering the neighborhood. When the police approach, they set off fireworks to alert adults working in illegal activities.

"It's very violent here, very violent," Thiago emphasizes.

"People do it, sell drugs, for the money, and they all have guns."

Lack of employment and educational opportunities to prepare people for reasonably paid work, and the ease of making money fast entice youth into this dangerous drug world. Many people who live in Rio are afraid to go to Rocinha. On the other hand, international tourists pay to go on guided tours there, led by Rocinha residents.

These guided tours take tourists to places and programs for children that provide educational havens from the dangers of the streets. Often tourists feel inspired to give donations to these programs in the hope that a better education will keep children from entering criminal activities. Sometimes tourists buy arts and crafts made by the children's mothers.

Despite the danger caused by the drugs and arms trade, people continue to settle in Rocinha because it has cheap housing and easy access to public transit. New immigrants coming from northeastern Brazil, the origin of many in Rocinha, want to live near people with similar backgrounds, as they enjoy the same music, dance and foods. Culture involving the arts and food plays a central part in the life of all Brazilians.

Most available jobs pay no more than minimum wage: under \$200 a month. The women often work as maids in Rio's rich neighborhoods and the men as laborers and janitors, deliverymen and waiters. Their level of education is very low, if they went to school at all. People struggle to get a roof over their heads and some food on the table. They watch out for each other, and like all parents, want better opportunities for their children. As a result of this desire to improve the future of children, the community boasts ten community daycare centers for little ones too young for school.

Thiago's Family, Volunteer Work and School

Thiago's parents moved separately to Rio from Ceará, a northeastern state with severe unemployment caused by chronic drought. They met and married in Rio. His mother, Goretti, came to Rio as a domestic maid to a middle-class family, then got a job in a daycare center when Thiago was only two so that she would not have to leave him behind when she went to work. Thiago's parents have been divorced since Thiago was four because his father drank too much. Thiago lives with his mother, and they have a close, loving relationship (Figure 3.3).

Thiago very rarely sees his father. He has older siblings, but doesn't know them well, because they live more than two thousand kilometers away and come from prior marriages of his parents. Thiago and his mother are on their own in Rio.

"I want a rabbit and a bird," Thiago confides, "but my mother won't let me because our apartment is too small."

The daycare center where Goretti worked when Thiago was a toddler gave both mother and son strong roots in the community where they continue to



Figure 3.3 Thiago with his mom.

live, work and volunteer. Named Alegria da Criança (A Child's Joy), it provides care for working mothers' children from four months to age four.

Thiago began volunteering at the center when he was only ten years old. He comes three days a week after school and plays with the four-year-olds for two hours. He teaches them games and songs, supervises painting and art activities, and plays with them in the playroom and toy library (Figure 3.4). When asked why he does this volunteer work, he replied

"There are many children for the teachers to care for, and usually they don't have time to play with the kids, so I play with them. I like to see them laughing, having fun; they paint, they sing, they play games, it makes me happy to see them happy."



Figure 3.4 Thiago reading to children in the daycare center where he volunteers after school.

The daycare center received some grant money from the city to upgrade its facilities, and has tiny toilets and sinks and showers for the toddlers. The airy, light filled dining room has long tables and miniature chairs, and the littlest children wear bibs to the table. Downstairs at the main entry there is a crafts room where mothers and grandmothers make things for sale. This unusual daycare is a stop on a tour for the international tourists who come to Rocinha (Figure 3.5).

Thiago receives many hugs from the women who run the daycare and from the children. His warm affectionate nature, his contagious smile and his caring way with people of all ages have endeared him very much to this community he chooses to serve.

Goretti, defying all odds, managed to go to a university while working and raising her son by herself. She got a basic degree in education that she hopes to augment to a higher degree in the coming years. (Only one percent of Brazilians have university degrees, and by far most of those are in the upper and middle class). During the day, she works for a non-profit organization that helps people in Rocinha get legal title to their homes which were built without permits. Many of



Figure 3.5 Path to daycare center where Thiago volunteers.

these buildings have stood for quite a few years, wooden structures have been replaced by bricks and mortar (Figure 3.6), and residents are getting legal



Figure 3.6 Over time, Rocinha's residents build more durable structures. Note the steep, eroded hillside.

rights to own them with the help of the NGO where Gorette works.

Five nights a week she also supervises three other teachers and teaches in an adult literacy program, with only a small stipend for her time, as most adults cannot afford to pay for classes. Gorette feels called to serve the illiterate adults of her community for she knows what a difference it makes in

the life of a parent. The government does not pay for these programs, despite a large adult illiteracy rate.

Goretti's dedication to education has helped Thiago get a good start in his own schooling. From the daycare he attended as a toddler, Thiago went to a public school in Rocinha. Many public schools in Rio and other Brazilian cities have poor academic standards, overcrowded classrooms, under-trained teachers, and minimal resources. But Thiago took a competitive exam when he was nine years old to enter Rio's oldest and most prestigious public middle and secondary school, Dom Pedro II.

"I came in second out of 350 applicants. Only fifteen people entered," Thiago explains.

Many of Brazil's leading doctors, lawyers, engineers, judges, and government officials attended Dom Pedro II and proudly share this information. Thiago finished second in the entrance exam with 350 applicants for fifteen openings. If he continues to do well, he will attend until he graduates from high school, with a good chance of winning a place in one of Brazil's universities, also entered by competitive exam. Coming from such a disadvantaged community, Thiago has beat many odds to enter such a good school.

Goretti felt very proud when her son entered Dom Pedro II, especially considering that most of the other children had attended private schools and taken special preparatory courses to pass the difficult exam, Thiago entered without this extra help.

"But I cannot afford all books required by the school. Its library does not keep textbooks for students who do not own them," Goretti laments.

Thiago must do his written daily assignments on a computer. At school he only has access to a computer once a week for one class period, so he has to go to an internet/computer business where he can use a computer and print out his homework, costing about \$1.20 per hour. These private businesses that make internet available to the paying public are sprinkled throughout Rocinha. There are also a few non-profits that offer computer training and access within Rocinha, but Thiago has not yet connected to any of these small computer programs for youth and adults, as they are not in his immediate vicinity. It is dangerous to go into parts of Rocinha that are not your own neighborhood where people know you--especially for a young boy or man, who might be confused for someone from a rival drug group.

Home

Thiago's mother has a lot of concern for her son's safety. She found a small rental apartment in a quiet one-block street, too narrow for cars. Most apartments have a few potted plants outside on the windowsills that green and soften the narrow alleyway of cement and plastered bricks (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7 Thiago coming home from school. The door provides the only natural light inside. Rats use the power lines overhead to cross from house to house.

Their tiny apartment leaks in the hard, tropical rains. It has a narrow entry hall where they hang laundry and where Thiago studies (Figure 3.8).



Figure 3.8 Thiago does his homework in the entryway, which leaks during heavy rains.

The front-door window is the only source of natural light in the apartment. Off the entryway lies a tiny kitchen with a small stove fueled by bottled propane and a sink for dishes and laundry (Figure 3.9). Sometimes Thiago does his homework at the miniature table where they also eat. The kitchen



Figure 3.9 The tiny kitchen doubles as the laundry room.



Figure 3.10 Thiago and his mother watch TV in their small bedroom.

opens on one side to a small bathroom with a shower where an electric showerhead provides the only heated water. On the opposite side, the kitchen opens to a room with a single bed that serves as the bedroom for both Thiago and his mother. They sit on the bed to watch a black-and-white TV in their rare moments of relaxation at home (Figure 3.10).

A small stand-alone armoire holds their few clothes, which they handwash in the kitchen sink and iron in the hallway. Goretti and Thiago like their little apartment because their street is relatively safe and quiet. They worry they may have to move because the owner wants to sell it.

"I don't want to leave here because of my friends, we play in the street—only on his tiny little alley way, but we can play soccer here. I like my friends and the local radio station. My dance class is nearby."

Thiago loves to read. He keeps his books on a shelf in the entryway. He has won Harry Potter books as prizes at school. Books in Brazil are very expensive and a rarity in the homes of people who earn minimum wage. Thiago and his mother go together to a Catholic church on Sundays, and all through his childhood, Thiago has been a frequent reader of the daily lesson. His church attendance has dropped off somewhat since becoming a teen, but not his passion for reading good stories.

Thiago's Weekly Schedule

On school days Thiago gets up at 6am, grabs some coffee and bread that he eats as he runs to catch the public bus. It takes 30 minutes to reach his school. He has a student bus pass that is valid on weekdays as long as he wears his school uniform, but not on Saturdays when he also must go to school. He has classes six days a week from 7am to noon, and he usually stays longer to study or take an

extra class. His favorite subject is French. When given a new book in French, he immediately sits down to read it, dictionary in hand.

"I love reading and speaking French. When I am a grown-up I want to go to Paris to live. I have seen pictures and it is so beautiful there," Thiago announces with a big grin.

Three days a week, Thiago volunteers at the day-care center from 2pm to 4pm. Then he goes home to do homework, while his mother is still at work. On the two days he is not volunteering, he does chores at home, studies, and sometimes plays soccer with friends in his narrow street. Sometimes he goes to a friend's house to listen to music. Thiago and his mother do not often have dinner together, as she teaches at night and he goes to his dance, theater and music classes.

On the weekends Thiago sometimes walks with friends to the beach. São Conrado, where the current mayor of Rio lives and the closest beach to Rocinha, is about a 2 kilometer walk. All the beaches in Rio are free. People of all ages, and all economic and social classes often go there on Sundays to swim and play volleyball and soccer.



Figure 3.11 Thiago during a dance lesson.

The Arts in Thiago's Life

Several dedicated people and non-governmental organizations offer programs for children and youth in Rocinha as a sanctuary from the dangers of the street. In the evenings, Thiago attends a dance program three times a week (Figure 3.11), and theater classes as well as flute once a week. The young woman who runs a miniscule studio in Rocinha gives local children the chance to learn dance from ballet to hip-hop. She raises the money to run the program herself, and is grateful that someone has paid the rent for the second-story two-room studio.

During the teen class, about ten girls and five boys crowd the narrow floor and partner for the lifts and dips. As sweat pours off them after an hour of rehearsal in the tropical heat, their dedication to improving their moves shows in their willingness to keep on rehearsing on their own when their teacher gets distracted by a visitor and pauses to talk. During the day, when Thiago waits for his time to work with the children at the daycare, he practices his pirouettes. Dance, drama and music enter his play with the younger children. These arts provide him pleasure and discipline. He takes pride in the many public events in which he has performed. They offer him experiences beyond his own neighborhood and bring smiles to others.

Thiago's mother is very concerned about her son's well-being in a community that is very violent. The children and youth of Rocinha live daily with the sight of armed men walking the streets. They know that a stray bullet can kill anyone. They know that during a police raid, the only place to head is indoors and as far from an exterior wall and window as you can get. They know what street corners to avoid.

Thiago is sure of himself, though, despite the dangers.

"There are people who use drugs, do bad things, but I have a conscience of what is bad, and I am not going to do that. I don't think I will fall into that at all. I have seen kids at school using drugs and bringing alcohol to school to drink, but I don't. I don't go where they sell drugs—I know those corners, those places, I avoid them."

Thiago, when asked if he could change anything about his community, answers quickly:

"I would stop the violence. We need more jobs for the adults so they all have a way to earn an honest living, and more schools for the children so that they are not on the street. We need more and better housing, too."

Thiago, if he could change anything about his community, would stop the violence. He would provide more and better housing, too. His formula includes more jobs for the adults so they all have a way to earn an honest living, and more schools for the children so that they are not on the street. In most of Brazil, school lasts only half a day. Some children go to school in the morning, others in the afternoon, and others yet go at night until 11pm. When children are not in school, they often have nowhere to go but the street. If their parents are working, there is no one at home to supervise them. Young boys, particularly, often gravitate to older adolescents who have money from the drug trade. Some organizations provide after-school programs, but many children do not have adequate daily educational and recreational activities.

Thiago has grown up with his mother's example of helping others to learn and he sees its importance for his own activities. Giving happiness to others brings him pleasure. He does not worry about himself. He knows who he is, where he comes from, what his values are and that nobody can make him

do something he does not want to do. He has learned to navigate between the worlds of his friends who go to a very exclusive school and his friends in his own neighborhood. *"I have a conscience of what is right and wrong,"* he says as he flashes his huge smile.

Endnotes

1. Edited field report prepared by Illène Pevec. Photographs by Illène Pevec

Brandon Heard

New York, United States¹



"Hey Mayor, I am gonna be you one day." Brandon lights up his dark, crowded bedroom with infectious laughter after expressing his genuine conviction to do something significant during his life for his family and community. His mother, Lisa, knew Brandon was special at the age of three, when she saw him giving money to a homeless person who was a familiar face in their public housing development in New York City. *"This kid is going somewhere,"* Lisa claimed with pride. Now at age 11, Brandon has exceeded all his mother's expectations, contributing to the community in meaningful ways, despite the challenges of living in poverty.

When people read about urban poverty in the world, they rarely think about families like Brandon's in the United States. According to most statistics, the United States is one of the richest nations in the world, ranking eighth, for example, on the United Nations Human Development Index in life expectancy, education and gross domestic product indices.² However, such statistics do not capture the significant inequalities within "wealthy" countries like the United States, particularly in global cities such as New York, where Brandon and his family live.

To help others understand what living in poverty means in the US context, Brandon agreed to share his story. It highlights the poor living conditions of forgotten Americans like Brandon, but it also celebrates his accomplishments, illustrating the ability of children to make real changes in the communities where they live.

Home

Every school day, Brandon wakes up at the crack of dawn and climbs down from the top level of his bunk bed into a cramped, cluttered, yet clean 10x12 foot room he shares with his 13-year-old brother John and 17-year-old brother Kyle (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Brandon on a bunk bed in the bedroom he shares with two brothers.

"Sometimes, I make coffee and bread for my family and surprise them." Brandon loves to cook for himself and his family and is proud of knowing how to make *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) (Figure 4.2).

His family - which consists of brothers John and Kyle, mother Lisa, a large German Rotweiler named Tyson, and occasionally, aunt Debbie - all share a small four-room apartment in a 24-storey building in the Stanley Isaacs/Holmes Towers public housing development, located on the border between Spanish Harlem and the Upper East Side in Manhattan in New York City.



Figure 4.2 Brandon cooking his favorite chicken and rice dish.

“We take turns eating at the table,” Brandon explains to me, *“because there’s not enough space for us all to eat together at one time.”* The small kitchen stove is clean yet littered with pots and pans for which there is no storage. Brandon’s mother points to a soccer ball-sized hole in the ceiling of their small kitchen and recounts in detail how many times she has lobbied the New York City Housing Authority (NYHA) to repair this insect and rodent infested area (Figure 4.3).

“I don’t know how many times I have raised this issue – maybe eleven or twelve – and nothing has happened. I’ve written letters, spoken to NYHA officials, and now I am at a point where I need to find a lawyer to fight this problem with me.”

As a single mother, Lisa knows that she is raising her children under difficult circumstances, but does everything she can to empower them to live decent, well-rounded lives.



Figure 4.3 The New York City Housing Authority has not responded to repeated requests by Brandon's mother to fix a large hole above the stove and rid the kitchen of the infestation of roaches.

"We shouldn't be living in this apartment with all of us, but we are on a waiting list for a new larger place."

The overcrowded conditions of the apartment, which is about 500 square feet, are evident to Brandon, who when asked what he would change about his home stated, *"I would make it wider, with more space, and I would like my own room"* (Figure 4.4). Brandon admitted that when I asked him to draw a map of his home, he made the rooms look bigger than they really are. With little closet space, the family stores items in an efficient way.



Figure 4.4 With space at a premium, Brandon and his family store clothes in plastic buckets in their living room.

As Brandon puts it, *"we have a lot of buckets. My clothes are in a bucket in the living room, my mom's bucket is in the hallway."*

Buckets are plastic covered, movable storage containers that stack on top of one another, enabling the family to keep some order in their cramped living quarters.

Despite the crowded conditions of Brandon's home, he speaks fondly of his life with his family and was proud to take me on a treasure hunt inside his buckets, *"one of the world's largest toy boxes,"* to point out favorite toys and all the trophies he and his family have accumulated in *tai quan do*, a form of martial arts Brandon has been practicing since the age of three (Figure 4.5). *"I wish I had a rug where I could sit and play,"* he chuckles, *"because Tyson (the dog) always takes over this rug."* Brandon easily transforms his cramped bedroom and home into a play land, where games of hide-n-seek do not require much space, but ask for creativity to find new secret locations in which to disappear.



Figure 4.5 Aunt Debbie, brothers Kyle (13) and John (17), Brandon (13), and mother Lisa pose with their dog in front of the family's *tai quan do* trophies.

Neighborhood

Space is a premium in New York City. For poor families like Brandon's living in public housing developments, there is a long line of needy people waiting for a home.

When the Stanley Isaacs/Holmes Towers public housing development was built in 1963, there was already a high demand for affordable housing among the predominantly Italian, German and Irish working class families in the surrounding neighborhood. Since the early 1950s, the Upper East Side has witnessed relentless gentrification, as developers and private investors destroyed many tenements block by block, displacing working class families and replacing walk-up tenements with 30 to 50 storey luxury buildings housing upwardly mobile professionals (Figures 4.6 and 4.7).



Figure 4.6 Brandon and his mother cross the street in front of his apartment building, adjacent to luxury condominiums.



Figure 4.7 Brandon opening the entrance door of his apartment building.

Residents often mobilized themselves to combat the forces of gentrification, forming anti-gentrification committees and developing strategies to retain their homes, such as passing on apartment leases from generation to generation. Such efforts were largely ineffective.

From 1951 to 1960, some 15,000 families were driven from their homes.³ From 1980 to 1990, there was a 12% loss in housing comprising 10-19 units (tenement buildings) and a 15% increase in housing comprising 50 units or more (luxury apartments).⁴ The Stanley Isaacs/Holmes Towers became a refuge for working-class families in the neighborhood, and later on, for families like Brandon's who were randomly placed in the development through a computerized tenant selection process employed by the New York City Housing Authority. The result is an economically polarized community in which there is a difference in median family income of over \$100,000 from one side of the street to the next.

"I see people walking around on top of their buildings, with trees and stuff," Brandon acknowledges when I asked about his wealthy neighbors. Brandon largely ignores "the other half" of his community, where he observes rooftop gardens from his bedroom window, or at least does not give much thought to the social division.⁵ As a result of the gentrification of the Upper East Side, poorer residents have witnessed a sharp reduction in their quality of life. Grocery stores which now cater to different culinary desires and tastes are often too expensive for poorer residents, leaving many to travel greater distances to the north into East Harlem for food, clothing and everyday living needs. In addition, many of the 50 storey luxury buildings have blocked the view residents used to have of the sun and of the East River. Some important childhood spaces have been gentrified from abandoned lots to expensive luxury recreational facilities. Policing of the neighborhood in-

cludes aggressive monitoring of public housing residents who are largely Puerto Rican and African American, as opposed to their wealthier, white neighbors.

People and Places Important in Brandon's Everyday Life

To Brandon, his neighborhood and the people living there are the most important things in his life, despite all the recent changes and polarities. *"I see new kids moving in here all the time,"* Brandon observes astutely, priding himself on knowing almost everyone in his building and community (Figures 4.8 and 4.9).



Figure 4.8 Brandon knows many people in his neighborhood and relies on them for safety from violence.

Brandon has friends in almost every building of the Stanley Isaacs/Holmes Towers, whom he has met from playing in Batman Park (a popular playground in the development), through his mother's social networks, or from playing in his building, walking Tyson the dog (Figure 4.10), and attending programs at the Isaacs Community Center.



Figure 4.9 Brandon chatting with maintenance staff outside his apartment building.

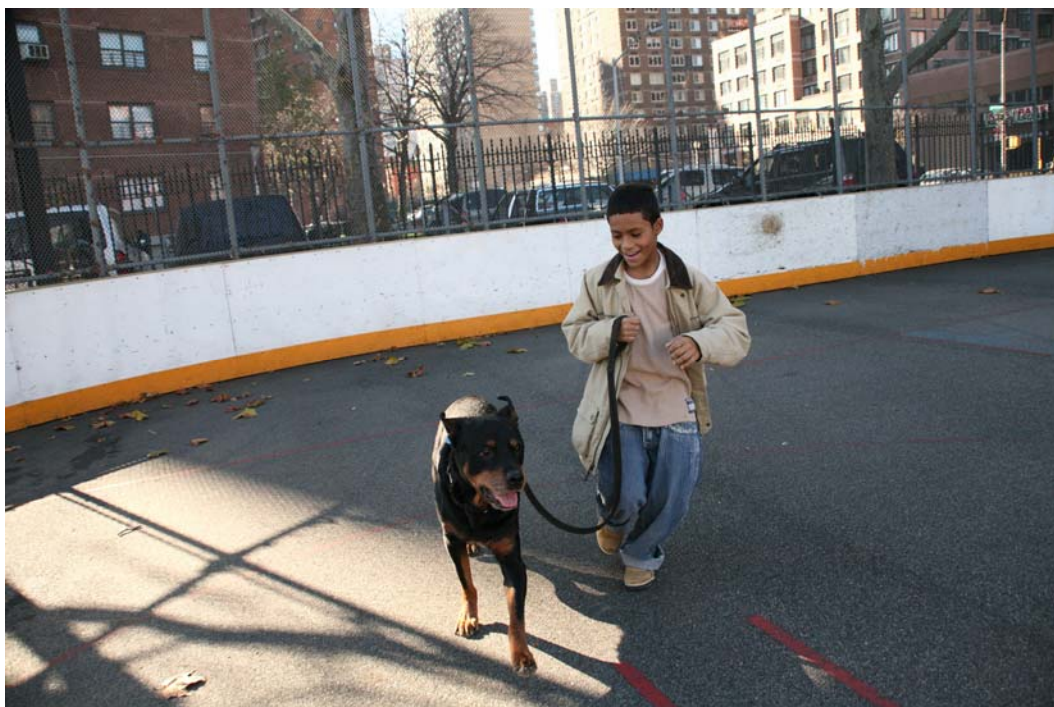


Figure 4.10 Brandon likes walking and running with the family dog.

Brandon also has a range of adult role models in the community, such as his godparents Genesis and Sabrina, a foster mother of about 10 children in the community named Olga, and his neighbor Carmen who teaches Brandon Spanish. Brandon's rich social networks reflect his role as a "caretaker" of other people in the neighborhood and also his sense of belonging to a place that is easier to negotiate with the support of others, rather than as an isolated individual or family group.

"In the morning it [the community] is busy with rush hour and on Sundays I can hear noise from all the construction. In the afternoon it is peaceful and I can go for a walk, but in the evening it is hectic, but you can hang outside with your parents and play with friends and no one bothers you. In Batman Park I go bike riding, listen to birds chirping and sit with my mom and aunt. I also help baby-sit little kids in the park who want to learn how to use the slides."

At the age of 11, Brandon prides himself in looking out for others, such as his friend Devante, with whom he often plays ball on a concrete surface in the development (Figure 4.11).

One of Brandon's favorite places to go is the pizzeria across the street from his building called Francesca's. *"Sometimes I get free pizza from the owner,"* Brandon laughs (Figure 4.12).

Brandon knows the rhythm of his community and how to get around without much trouble, largely because he is on good terms with many people. *"I don't want me or anyone I know getting shot, because the world is getting too dangerous,"* Brandon worries. According to Lisa, Brandon's fears about his community are valid.



Figure 4.11 Brandon playing ball near the Isaac Community Center.



Figure 4.12 The neighborhood pizzeria is a favorite place for Brandon. Sometimes the owner gives him free pizza.

"It's a hell of an experience raising a child here – you need to teach your kids street smarts to keep them out of trouble and to avoid peer pressure to join gangs and do drugs."

At first Brandon tells me he would not change anything about his community. But, after a long pause, he abruptly changes his mind.

"I think everyone should stop selling drugs and stop the gun shots. I think the neighborhood could be cleaner, and I hope more people could learn to get along with one another and be nicer."

Perhaps this statement reflects Brandon's newfound intimacy with his neighborhood. For the first time this summer, Brandon was allowed to go places in his neighborhood alone or with friends. He is required to check in with his mother every half hour by going up to his 23rd floor apartment (Figure 4.13). His mother says:

"You pray that all the morals and values you taught them – you hope they take it with them. Keeping your kids in the right direction is not easy."

Brandon's Role in the Community

The potential social hazards in the community are substantiated by other residents who work hard to provide alternative opportunities for children and youth living in the neighborhood. However, Lisa's childrearing has paid off. Brandon is known as a leader in the community, both informally as a "caretaker" of other children and youth, but also formally through his work with a community-based organization. The Isaacs Center, a settlement

house based on the tradition of Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, provides social services to residents of the public housing development, ranging from computer training for youth to providing meals to elders with physical disabilities⁶.



Figure 4.13 While his mother allows Brandon to play outside, every 30 minutes he must check in with her in their 23rd floor apartment.

Brandon participates in a variety of programs at the Isaacs, but one in particular – Take Action! – is focused on community improvement projects. In the past, the young people in Take Action have helped to plant trees in the neighborhood, and have done research about who used a neighborhood park to give their ideas for its redesign. Brandon also tutors young children in reading, writing and math alongside his mother and aunt. Together they have helped numerous young people improve their performance at school. Brandon says:

"I make blankets for the elderly and homeless in the community and I gave a speech one time about why I liked the Isaacs Center. Because of me, more parents brought their kids to the Center. I told them they should bring their kids here because the Center will support you and will help your children."

Brandon's work with the Isaacs Center has been recognized by the adults and children he helps. He has written articles for the community newsletter, volunteers for projects without prompting, and shares his knowledge with young people he mentors. Recently, Brandon joined its Youth Management Team, a group of young people who create and implement community projects, in New York and elsewhere around the world. In his new role, he testified at a series of public hearings to oppose the creation of a waste transfer facility in his neighborhood (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14 Brandon and his mom with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg at a public hearing.

Talking about this experience, he says:

"Just think of all the smell and rats and bad things that will come with this facility. Think about the kids that live and grow up here."

Brandon also helps out in the community outside the Isaacs Center, for example, by baby-sitting and playing with Olga's foster children. *"In the future, I hope to be successful and stay in school to get a good education so that when my mom gets older, I can help her out."* While Brandon loves his community, he often wonders if it would be better to live somewhere else. "I want to live somewhere else like Florida, California or even Jamaica when I grow up, in a place that is relaxing." Like many children living in poverty, daily life is riddled with uncertainty and joy, a paradox that often can be stressful and confusing. Despite this fact, Brandon is sure of his future successes and knows one person can make a big difference. *"I want to be a lawyer when I grow up - or maybe the mayor, so I can help other people."*

Endnotes

1. Edited field report prepared by Pamela Wridt. Photographs by Scott Wynn.
2. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), (2006). Human Development Report 2006, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, retrieved on April 6, 2007 from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR06-complete.pdf>.
3. Jacobs, J. (1992[1961]). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 137.
4. City of New York, Department of City Planning. (1992). *Demographic Profiles: A Portrait of New York City's Community Districts from the 1980s & 1990 Censuses of Population and Housing*. New York: Department of City Planning.
5. Wridt, P. (2004). *Childhoods in Place and Placeless Childhoods: An Historical Geography of Young People in Yorkville and East Harlem, 1940-2000*. New York: City University of

Conclusion

As we approach the 20th anniversary of adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2009, these children are our best hope for the future. Their lives represent the potential of people living in poverty, whose empowerment offers what is the single best prospect for improving urban livability in today's world. Their stories hold a message about poverty and prosperity – and the differences between them. They convey despair about wasted and lost lives. But they also show resilience, bring hope and raise expectations for the future of children everywhere.

Indeed, in the words of Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of its Human Settlements Programme:

"...youth are a resource, in fact the most important and strategic resource a country can have. Youth are agents of social change; they take on a very active role in addressing the issues that affect them. We have examples of many youth led processes that are working and making a difference in society even with minimal resources. What is required is to provide these initiatives with an enabling environment that will facilitate their replication".¹⁹

Required, as well, is research to provide evidence-based guidance to the formulation of policies that create the enabling environments for initiatives aimed at eradicating child poverty. Studies, such as being conducted through the Young Lives project in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, are encouraging.²⁰ We need quantitative and qualitative data on

the conditions and effects of poverty, and the evaluation of poverty reduction strategies. We also need to listen to the voices of children themselves in efforts to improve children's well-being. This report seeks to mobilize support for such inclusionary practices.

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Appendix A - COUNTRY PROFILES

	Turkey (Aykut)	U.S.A. (Brandon)	Kenya (Judy)	Brazil (Thiago)
Country Population¹	76 375 182	305 072 714	35 527 559	192 047 523
City Population²	Ankara 3 672 639	New York 8 140 993	Nairobi 3 069 886	Rio de Janeiro 6 193 265
GDP/cap³	\$5,030	\$41,890	\$547	\$4,271
Urban Population⁴	67.3%	80.8%	20.7%	84.2%
Urban growth rate⁵	2.17%	1.39%	3.2%	2.13%
People w/o access to an improved water source⁶	4%	..	39%	10%
Electrification rate⁷	..	100%	14%	97%
HDI rank⁸	84	8	148	70
Under-five mortality rate⁹	29	7	120	33
Children underweight¹⁰	4%		20%	6%
Life Expectancy at birth¹¹	71.4	77.9	52.1	71.7
Literacy Rate¹²	87.4%		73.6%	88.6%
Youth literacy rate¹³	95.6%	..	80.3%	96.8%
Net primary enrollment rate¹⁴	89%	92%	79%	95%
Children reaching grade 5¹⁵	97%	..	83%	73% ¹⁶

1. Calculations for 2008, <http://world-gazetteer.com/>

2. Calculations for 2008, <http://world-gazetteer.com/>

3. For 2005. See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/132.html>

4. For 2005. See <http://esa.un.org/unup/p2k0data.asp>

5. For 200-2005. See <http://esa.un.org/unup/p2k0data.asp>

6. In 2004. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

7. In 2006. See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/210.html>

8. Human Development Index. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

9. Per 1,000 live births for 2005. See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/93.html>

10. Ages 0-5 in 2004. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

11. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

12. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

13. Percentage for those aged 15-24 (1995-2005). See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/111.html>





14. For 2005. See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/113.html>

15. Percentage of grade 1 students in 2004. See <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/117.html>

16. In 1991.

Appendix B

CHILD PROFILES

				
	Aykut Boztas, 13	Brandon Heard, 11	Judy Musyoka, 13	Thiago Santiago, 13
Household Composition	Father, mother, two brothers (8, 18) and two sisters (3.5, 14).	Mother, two brothers (13, 17); large dog, and sometimes aunt.	Mother, sister-in-law, and nephew.	Mother.
Economics/Livelihood	Living on government subsidies for the poor, occasional part-time jobs of father and older brother.	Living in public housing, with government subsidies and occasional part-time jobs of mother.	Mother sells locally made brew.	Mother works for a non-profit organization that helps people get legal title to their homes. Also supervises three teachers and teaches five nights a week.
Housing situation	Rental dwelling on top of another rental unit at street level, consisting of 2 rooms accessible from the street by an exterior staircase. The bathroom/toilet opens to one of the rooms. The landing is used as kitchen. Total living space for seven is 40 m2 (360 sq. ft).	A 17 th storey four-room apartment of 56 m2 (500 sq.ft.) in the Stanley Isaacs/Holmes Towers public housing development. Brandon shares a 10x12 ft. room with his two brothers.	One-room shack of about 10 m2 (90 sq. ft.), made from left-over construction material with a corrugated metal roof. Cold water connection but no toilet.	Two-room apartment with a small bathroom and an entry hall where laundry hangs to dry. It has a book shelf for Thiago who does his homework here or at a small kitchen table where he and his mother have dinner. The 22 m2 (200 sq. ft.) apartment leaks in hard rains.

	Aykut Boztas	Brandon Heard	Judy Musyoka	Thiago Santiago
Fears	Crime.	Gangs and guns.	Violence, personal and family safety.	Gangs, drug dealers and guns, visibly present in the streets. Daily violence.
Hopes	Become a policeman or military officer and help the poor. Tear down bad houses and build beautiful new ones.	Become lawyer or mayor so he can help others. Safer, cleaner and friendlier neighborhood.	Attend and finish high school to become a nurse and treat sick people for free. Safe and clean toilets and light in the community	Complete his education. More jobs for adults and schools for children. Better housing.
Activities	Works in the weekend at the street markets, using a cart to help people carry groceries home. One of the markets is close by, while the other one is an hour and a half away. In the summers, he works five days a week and rests for the other two days because he gets very tired.	Participates at the community center in several community improvement programs. One of them, 'Take Action!', has planted trees and done research on users' ideas for redesign of a neighborhood park. He also tutors young children in reading, writing and math alongside his mother and aunt. Made blankets for elders, testified at hearings, and has written for the community newsletter, and the homeless.	Involved in school and church activities with proceeds benefiting a local orphanage. Leads a dance group. Also, at community gatherings, she leads prayers, recites poems and entertains.	Since age 10 volunteers three days a week after school at the same day care center that he attended as a child and plays with the four-year olds for two hours. He teaches them games and songs, supervises painting and play in the toy room. Also does dance, music and drama performances at public events.