

WHAT

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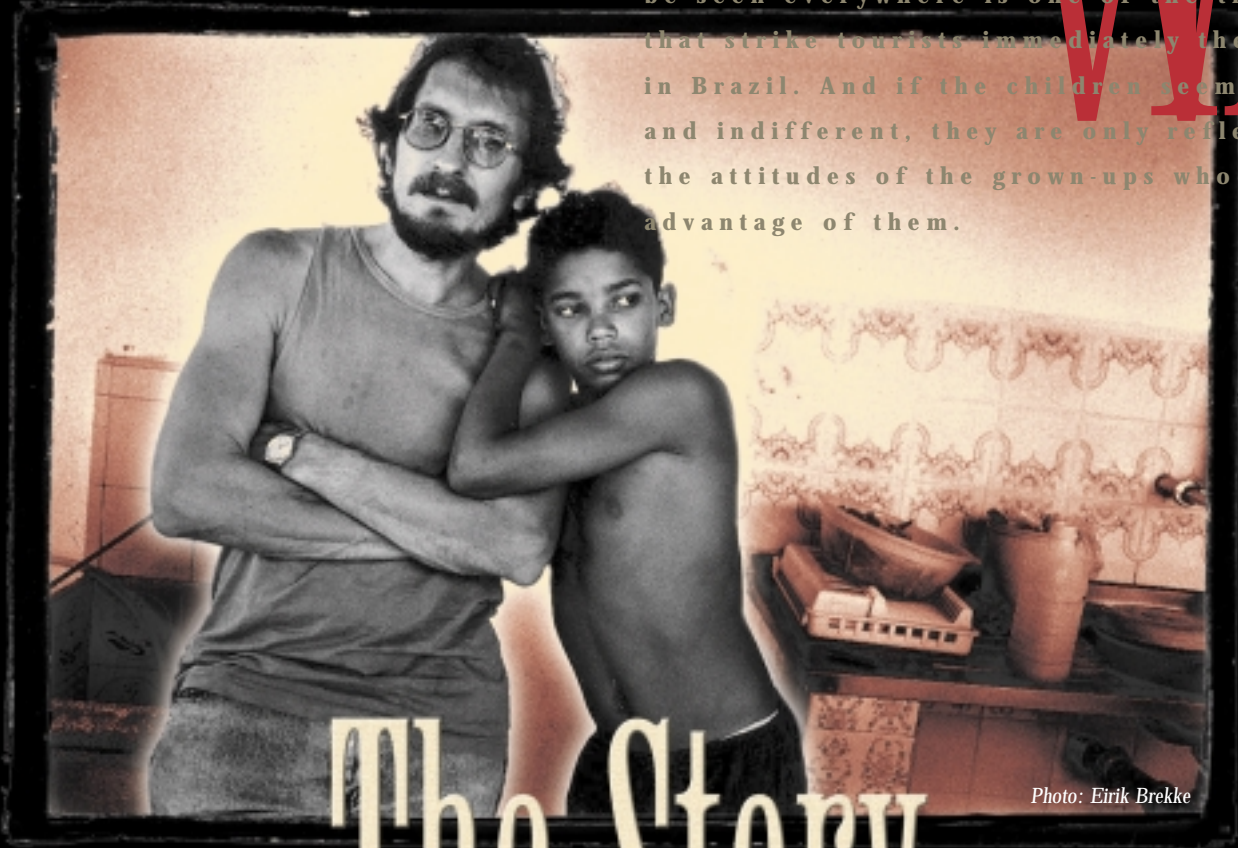


Photo: Eirik Brekke

The Story of Gregory Smith and CARF

The Children at Risk Foundation is an organisation that works among the street children of São Paulo, Brazil.

WHO

Gregory Smith went to Norway from England as an as an exchange student in 1971. But he gave it all up to found the Children at Risk Foundation making a more dramatic mid-life career change than most of us ever dream of, let alone achieve. ent careers, as production designer for the theatre and films, as restorer of pictures and antiques, as a social worker and as an art dealer.

HOW

Brazil's ABANDONED CHILDREN

In the São Paulo area alone, where CARF works in Brazil, it is estimated that there are about 15,000 street children.

This estimate is probably low, but nevertheless shows that the problem of street children is a serious one. Street children are a heart-rending sight in Brazil, and the extent of the problem is greater than any of us can imagine.

There are street children in all corners of the globe. But Brazil's street children have attracted particular attention, mainly because of the brutality and indifference with which they are treated by Brazilian officialdom.

The problem first became well known through Hector Babenco's film "Pixote" in the early 80's, in which street children played the main parts.

Wender was the first child Gregory

Smith rescued from the streets.

He was also the central character in one of CARF's documentary films depicting their work in São Paulo. In 1999 Wender was shot down and killed in cold blood. His role and destiny became a parallel to that of the more famous film star Fernando Ramos da Silva ("Pixote"). Both were street boys, both were probably killed by the police, and both were only 19 years old when they died.

The film about Pixote was a shock to many, mostly because it was a realistic depiction of the lives of young street children in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The problem of street children is a serious one. They are a heart-rending sight in Brazil, and the extent of the problem

is greater than any of us can imagine.

The large numbers of street children everywhere are one of the first things that strike visitors to Brazil when they arrive in the country. And if these children seem cynical, it is only because they are reflections of the grown-ups who exploit them.

In the large cities, street children are used as couriers and pushers for drug dealers, whilst at the same time becoming good customers themselves. Many of the children CARF has taken care of have been active crack users. These are children with no lower age limit. In São Paulo there is a strong suspicion that even policemen are behind a lot of the crack trafficking among street children.

WHO

are the street children?

Due to the lack of records, we do not know clearly when the phenomenon of the 'street child' sprang up. These children only started to attract attention at the beginning of the 1970's.

Who are they?

Are they children without parents? In fact, we can put them into several different groups: some have left their families in exchange for the streets; some still live occasionally with their families; and some make their living on the streets. No matter which category they fall into, these are children who do not share the accepted goals of society or who have dropped out of society altogether.



Sandra, 8, during her last escape from the Humming Bird Recuperation Centre in 1994. She had to spend six months on the streets before she was allowed back. It was a tough lesson for this strong and stubborn young girl.

Photo: Roar Christiansen

Many of the organisations in Brazil's large cities are unsuccessful in getting the children off the streets. On the contrary, they far too often make the street an attractive place to be. When they are offered food, clothes, blankets and short-term activities, the children discover that the streets are a better place to be than at home with their biological families. At the same time, one of their most fervent wishes is to be part of a

happy and united family.

It is time the spotlight was turned fully onto the problem of street children in Brazil.

Through a process of trial and error, CARF has since its inception in 1993 gained vital experience. As a result, today CARF actually gets children off the streets and its methods have aroused interest not only in Brazil, but also beyond the country's borders.

HOW did it happen?

Gregory came to Norway for the first time in 1971 as an exchange student. He enjoyed it so much that he stayed. He followed a variety of different careers, such as production designer for the theatre and films, as a restorer of pictures and antiques, as a social worker and as an art dealer.

After a few years he moved to Os, near Bergen, with his wife and children. There he bought an old school building which he renovated impressively and transformed into his family home.

In 1992 he realised an old dream: to use his resources and work experience to help children in another part of the world. After 20 years he decided to leave Norway to start a so-called recuperation centre for homeless children living on the streets of Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. In 1992 Gregory established the Children at Risk Foundation (CARF) in Norway, and took drastic measures to ensure it had enough money by selling his wonderful house and auctioned off all his furniture and belongings. The idea and the auction generated much media interest throughout the country, and Gregory's was soon a well-known name in Norway.

A short while later Gregory invited fifty of the best-known artists in Norway to donate a work of art each for another successful auction in aid of the

Foundation.

In 1993 Gregory moved to Brazil to start the project. He came to São Paulo with his son Marcus and started the search for a good place to establish CARF's recuperation centre for street children. A benevolent and committed lawyer from the city left him as a legacy a smallholding with a large house and outbuildings, as well as enough land for football and other sports, near a reservoir in the neighbouring community of Diadema, one of São Paulo's suburbs.

But the property had to be completely restored, and Gregory's original training as an architect stood him in good stead. And of course there were the usual bureaucratic difficulties, but Gregory succeeded in getting permission to stay in Brazil, and in 1993 CARF's Brazilian NGO, ACER, was founded and became a reality.

Gregory started by offering shelter to a small group of street children in the Praça da Sé, the old cathedral square where many of the city's street children lived. He soon came to know the brutal lives of Brazilian street children. Drugs like crack and glue, sexual abuse and

police violence are all part of the lives of children even as young as three.

Today, on the property at Diadema, ACER provides support to local at-risk community children which guarantees them a dignified life with schooling and healthy activities.

With Jonathan Hannay, anthropologist and organisation co-ordinator from England at the helm, ACER runs partnership programmes in co-operation with the local and federal government. CARF & ACER have already gained their names locally in São Paulo and Diadema

and Gregory (as CARF's representative) was publicly elected a councillor on the Diadema Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in the autumn of 1997 and was re-elected for a further two year term in the autumn of 1999.

Gregory received other positive affirmations of his work when he was chosen as a Fellow of the world-wide and quality oriented organisation ASHOKA - Innovators for the Public in 1999 and he received the Melvin Jones Fellowship in 2000, the highest award from Lions Club International.



The Hummingbird Recuperation Centre, with its unique atmosphere, is a place of adventure for all visiting children.

The combination of this property with our new ideas about treatment has made it easier to attract these special children. Many of those who participate in our preventive programme express their desire to live at the Centre. Besides the main shelter, there are many other buildings that house different activities on the property. In 2003 the independent Brazilian NGO created by Gregory Smith in 1993 was given full ownership and responsibility for running the centre.

Our aim for the last phase of the Hummingbird Project is to involve a network of specialised foster homes for recuperated street children, which do not exist in Brazil up to now. The project has been approved by the relevant Brazilian authorities but lacks financing. With new facilities and a team who will expedite the process of selecting and preparing foster parents for each child, this will fulfill a key requirement in the further development of CARF's work with street children.

Where else could we place the children that CARF rescues from the streets?

A life in an institution is the only alternative that is offered to these children today in Brazil. CARF hopes that in time the Brazilian authorities will adopt Foster Care Programmes as an integral part of their structure for social welfare.

The view from the main house looking at the Billings Reservoir



Sandra, 14 years old in 2000.

Interests: Theatre, Ballet, Capoeira, Boys, Hair styles

HUMMINGBIRD RECUPERATION CENTRE

The HUMMINGBIRDS Nest



is an activity centre for cultural development and artistic expression against all types of violence in Brazilian society.

Through the activities that it offers, the centre inspires children and young people to discover abilities and talents that most of them possess, but have few chances to develop by themselves. This improves their quality of life and is what we so strongly believe to be an essential factor in our rehabilitation work with street children.

Self-esteem is the key... Those who want to absorb themselves in their newly discovered abilities will, as they pass through the different stages of the activities at the centre, gain skills that can help them find work or develop their own small businesses.

The Brazilian sport of Capoeira is central in CARF's work to bring back drug-addicted children over to a normal life. We still do not know for certain if Capoeira was brought to Brazil by the African slaves when they first arrived about 350 years ago or was developed in Brazil itself. The little documentation that exists however, seems to show that Capoeira was developed in Brazil by slaves which is why it was always repressed. Until the 1930s, Capoeira was punished by jail, and any practitioner of the sport was considered a criminal. Today Capoeira is practised all over the country, from north to south. It has even been adopted by other countries which gives rise to the hope that it will one day become an Olympic sport.

The key activities at the Centre are:

- Computer graphics & Web Design – ICT Centre
- Woodworking Workshop for Crafts & Percussion Instrument Making
- Capoeira Academy
- Hairdressing School specialising in Afro-Brazilian Hair Styling
- Theatre and Drama Workshops
- Dance and Music Workshops
- Painting and Sculpture Workshops
- Hip-Hop Movement "Forevolution"
- Culinary Workshops
- Café, run by the young people

Is it really WORTHWHILE?

CARF is a small organisation in a large world.

A world where poverty has many faces and in a way that most of us cannot begin to understand, we become easily perplexed and then paralysed by all the misery that we see in the media. We ask ourselves whether it is really our responsibility to solve other people's problems, or perhaps we think we just do not have the time, or that we can't as individuals make any difference. Or perhaps many of us don't even have the desire to help.

Yet we can all help change what's happening. How?

As adults, we don't take to changes easily. We can barely learn a new language (even if we do often develop new habits). Our children, on the other hand, can be shaped.

Everything they experience, everything they do affects their development. These stored experiences become character traits.

We have a common responsibility for the world we live in. That is why we must care, both as grown-ups and as children. That is why it is important that we also let our children join in those activities that show we care.

Imagine the basic values a child absorbs through recognizing the suffering of other children and finding that they can help! Especially when that help really works. In this way, giving becomes receiving. A child will never forget. Perhaps in this way children can teach grown-ups something.

By becoming a partner of the Children at Risk Foundation, you not only help children in Brazil. You help your own child and yourself. Your contribution will make the whole world a better place to live in.

Misery DOES have many faces. Every face belongs to a human being. That is what Gregory Smith and his team have seen – and done something about. Because this is not just about children as anonymous statistics. We at CARF know them, to us they are all individuals! Sandra, Eliana, Jefferson, Fabio Eduardo, Robison and Vando; they are our family.

And people still ask if it's really worthwhile!



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CARF's Information & Resource Network at www.carfweb.net - CAPOEIRA Beija-Flor at: www.carfweb.net/capoeira

To receive regular updates by e-mail regarding CARF's work please join our Listserv at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ChildrenAtRisk-GLOBAL-SUPPORTERS-NETWORK>

For general information, regular news, events, resources or discussion regarding street children and other children at risk, please join our Listserv at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ChildrenAtRisk-STREETKIDS>

Visit our online gallery of more than 650 photos with supplementary information at the United Nations WorldVolunteerWeb: www.worldvolunteerweb.org/dynamic/cfapps/photo_lib/search/gallery/gallery2.cfm?GalleryID=16709

ASHOKA - Innovators for the Public: Fellow Profile for Gregory J. Smith: www.ashoka.org/fellows/viewprofile3.cfm?reid=96889

