

**Frontline Youth Work with Street Children and Youth in Nepal:  
Edge Work, Boundary Work, Hard Work**

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## **Dedication**

To my grandmother, Jiji, who read me religious texts as bedtime stories. She faced many barriers to education and yet, found ways to learn to read and write in Nepali. I am proud to be her granddaughter.

## **Abstract**

Frontline youth workers are critical to an effective community and organizational response to street children and youth, one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Nepal and globally. As employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these workers engage street young people in both street- and center-based settings to offer services aimed at increasing their “wellbeing and healthy development.” This dissertation explored, examined, and analyzed how NGOs (and by extension their international funders), workers, and young people understood and influenced this frontline youth work practice in Kathmandu, Nepal. The study used a mixed-method qualitative research. Data were collected from 24 frontline youth workers, eight management level staff, and 23 street youth. Workers viewed street young people as both victims and deviants, who were partly responsible for their own victimization and future life-outcomes. A primary approach used to help young people “fix” their problems and themselves as “problems” was “socialization.” In practice, this was a form of social control. As young people transitioned from a street outreach program to a drop-in center and then to a transition home, there was an increase in the workers’ control of these young people’s activities, choices, and even voices. Child rights and their participation were emphasized in theory, while in practice participation was workers’ manipulation and tokenism rather than youth-driven and youth/adult equity (Hart, 1992). These NGOs were the only agencies that offered services to street young people. They worked with little support from government and in an environment of public distrust and financial uncertainty. A powerful influence to their work was their international donor agencies

that, as part of their funding to NGOs, guided and shaped the street level understanding and practice of frontline youth work. At another level, NGOs influenced this work by teaching workers their roles and work and by requiring them to show outputs. At the individual level, unethical practices of some workers further alienated young people from mainstream society and damaged their own and their agencies' reputation. Overall, workers and their agencies were doing good work, particularly in the context of many obstacles. However, no discernable effort was being made to confront the larger, complex, social institutional sources of what is the "street children" social problem. No one, including government, NGOs, and international organizations, had named fully or even begun to take this on. Frontline youth work was not a solution to the "street children problem." It was a small band-aid on a larger, deeper cut.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction and overview.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Nepal: Country background.....	3
Significance of the study.....	5
Why this research?.....	6
Overview of this Dissertation .....	7
<b>Chapter 2 Conceptual framework of the study.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Macro-level: Social structures and culture .....	11
Meso-level: Employing organizations and professional associations .....	12
Micro-level: Individuals.....	13
Summary .....	14
<b>Chapter 3 Literature review .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Overview of frontline youth work with street children and youth.....	16
Youth work goals.....	17
Street outreach .....	18
Drop-in centers.....	20
Residential programs .....	20
Influence of everyday social realities on frontline youth work .....	21
Macro-level: Socio-economic, cultural, and political structures .....	22
Meso-level: Employing organizations and professional associations .....	27
Micro level: Individual youth workers .....	32
Research questions.....	35
<b>Chapter 4 Research Methods.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Epistemological premise.....	36
Research design .....	37
Study Site .....	38
Unit of Analysis .....	38
Sampling .....	39
Research facilitators.....	45
Data collection tools and process.....	45
Individual and group interviews .....	46
Focus groups .....	47
Observation .....	48

Field notes.....	48
Recording and managing data.....	51
Data analysis and interpretation.....	51
Data coding and interpretation.....	52
Strategies for research rigor.....	53
Ethical Issues.....	56
Protection of human subjects.....	56
Limitations of the Study.....	58
<b>Chapter 5 Situating youth work practice in Nepal.....</b>	<b>59</b>
Institutional theory and institutional context of frontline youth work.....	60
Government Agencies.....	62
The Central Child Welfare Board (the Board).....	62
Social Welfare Council (SWC).....	64
Municipal and district governments and local police.....	67
Inter-governmental and International non-governmental organizations.....	69
Non-Governmental Organizations.....	72
Street Children Network.....	78
Educational and professional institutions.....	80
Social cultural contexts of frontline youth work.....	81
Nepali caste system.....	81
Gender-based socio-cultural practices.....	83
Children and their work.....	85
Summary.....	86
<b>Chapter 6 Mapping the system of response.....</b>	<b>88</b>
Service spaces.....	88
Coordination and collaboration between the service spaces.....	91
Summary.....	93
<b>Chapter 7 Frontline youth workers and their clients.....</b>	<b>94</b>
A street child: Observation notes.....	94
Walking with youth workers and young people.....	94
Pathways to frontline youth work.....	96
Workers' education and training.....	98
Nepali street children and youth.....	99
Pathways to the streets.....	100
Life on the streets: Peer groups.....	101
Life on the streets: Work.....	102
Life on the streets: Risk behaviors.....	103
Summary.....	104
<b>Chapter 8 Street Outreach: “Rescuing” young people from the streets.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Observation notes.....	105
Street outreach program philosophy and ethos.....	106
Harm reduction.....	107
Secondary and tertiary prevention.....	108

Staying connected and monitoring street situations.....	112
Frontline youth workers and the young people in street outreach.....	113
Young people as clients.....	114
Youth workers as service providers.....	115
Entering the streets.....	118
Building and maintaining street social networks.....	121
Building street contacts.....	121
Establishing street credibility.....	124
Psychosocial counseling: Helping young people change.....	135
Psychosocial counseling amidst the streets chaos.....	138
From “psychosocial counseling” to rescue.....	141
Rescue: From streets to transition homes.....	149
Rescuing young people from their peer groups.....	151
Assessing young people’s seriousness about leaving the streets.....	153
Summary.....	156
<b>Chapter 9 Drop-in Centers: Preliminary socialization.....</b>	<b>159</b>
Observation notes.....	159
Drop-in center philosophy and ethos.....	160
Harm reduction.....	161
Secondary and tertiary prevention.....	163
Socialization.....	166
Frontline youth workers and the young people in drop-in centers.....	166
Young people as clients.....	167
Youth workers as service providers.....	169
Pathways to drop-in centers.....	171
Co-creating safety at the centers.....	172
Being approachable.....	173
Being supportive.....	177
Psychosocial counseling and assessing young people’s needs.....	179
Connecting to young people.....	180
Assessing needs.....	181
Advising young people.....	183
Socializing and rescuing young people.....	184
Reducing risk behaviors.....	184
Teaching social norms and roles.....	186
Preparation for a transition home.....	190
Summary.....	191
<b>Chapter 10 Transition Homes: “Rehabilitating street addiction”.....</b>	<b>193</b>
Observation notes.....	193
Transition home program philosophy and ethos.....	194
Long-term socio-economic support.....	195
Socialization.....	196
Frontline youth workers and the young people in transition homes.....	198
Young people as clients.....	198

Youth workers as service providers .....	199
Pathways to transition homes.....	200
Helping young people adjust .....	201
Being attentive to young people .....	203
Understanding young people: Case studies .....	207
Socializing young people.....	209
Monitoring “risk behaviors” of children and youth.....	210
Preparing for school or job training centers.....	211
Socialization into “normal” children and youth.....	212
Being patient .....	214
Working with parents.....	215
Reintegration.....	217
Reintegration challenges for young people.....	219
Summary .....	222
<b>Chapter 11 Conclusion and Implications .....</b>	<b>226</b>
Conclusion .....	226
Implications.....	232
<b>References.....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Frontline youth worker interview guide .....</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Management level staff interview guide.....</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Young people interview guide.....</b>	<b>262</b>

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 1:</b> Different conceptualizations and frames for viewing and working with young people.....	<b>25</b>
<b>Table 2:</b> Characteristics of workers and managers sampled.....	<b>42</b>

## **List of Figures**

<b>Figure 1:</b> Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	<b>10</b>
<b>Figure 2:</b> Data collection phases.....	<b>45</b>
<b>Figure 3:</b> The Institutional setting of frontline youth work in Nepal.....	<b>66</b>
<b>Figure 4:</b> The system of response to street young people.....	<b>90</b>
<b>Figure 5:</b> Continuities in services.....	<b>92</b>
<b>Figure 6:</b> Differences and continuities in youth work practice.....	<b>224</b>

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and Overview**

Frontline youth workers are critical to effective community and organizational response to street children and youth, one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Nepal and globally. It is estimated that there are between ten and 100 million street children across the world (UNICEF, 2005), with more than 5,000 in Nepal (Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center, 1998). Aged between seven and 18 years, these young people spend a majority of their time on the streets, in poverty, and unsupervised by responsible adults. They engage in risky behaviors like sniffing glue, smoking cigarettes, and abusing other substance, are at higher risks to mental, physical, and sexual abuse and exploitation, and have limited access to basic needs, such as food, shelter, health, and education (Onta-Bhatta, 2000; Baker & Hinton, 2001; Child Protection Centers and Services, 2007, Child Workers Nepal Concerned Center, 2010; Child Workers Nepal Concerned Center, 2002). In Nepal, as a response, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with support from international donors, offer programs and services to street children and youth. Frontline youth workers, as employees of these NGOs, are the first line of community and organizational response to these young people. These workers engage street young people in both street- and center-based settings and work toward helping them meet their needs and to reintegrate them into their families and mainstream society.

This frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal is one way of doing youth work. There are multiple ways of thinking about and doing work with young

people (Smiths, 1988; Smith, 1999/2002, Banks, 2010; Krueger, 1998, De Oliveira, 1994). This variation is in part due to the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic conditions, places, and spaces within which youth work is practiced (Blacker 2010). Therefore, what is effective in one context may not be so in others. This means that expertise in frontline youth work and how to evaluate and train for such expertise is also contextual (Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 2000). All this suggests the importance of examining frontline youth work more specifically and closer to the ground so as to understand the differences, the variation, as well as the similarities in youth work.

However, little is known about youth workers and their youth work practice in developing countries like Nepal. Research thus far has focused on describing and examining the problem of street children, but there is little guidance on interventions that effectively address the needs of these young people (Dybicz, 2005; Huang, 2008, Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kidd, Miner, Walker, & Davidson, 2007). Also, many studies focus on youth workers from developed countries (for example, see Thompson, 1999; Karabanow, 2004; Kidd, et al., 2007). Moreover, very little work has been published on how larger social structures, contexts, and other factors influence a worker's direct practice with these young people. All of these issues are consequential for how frontline youth workers engage these young people and for the effectiveness of their work. Given this knowledge gap, this qualitative study focused on these workers and how they do their work within the larger institutional and socio-cultural contexts of Kathmandu, Nepal. To better understand the local contexts of this work, this study begins with the description of Nepal's economic and political situations.

## **Nepal: Country background**

Nepal is situated in South Asia. It is a landlocked country, with India on the east, west, and south borders and China on the north. Nepal has three ecological belts running east to west: the mountainous north, hilly terrain in the center, and plains in the south. The country is mostly rural, with more than four-fifths of the population living in rural areas (World Bank, 2006). Kathmandu, located in the hilly region of the country, is its capital and the major urban center of the country. It is also this study's site.

Nepal is one of the poorest nations in the world. The country's GDP per capita in 2009 was USD 435.9 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2012). Nepal's economy is primarily based on subsistence agriculture, with 50.4% of the country's GDP derived from agriculture (World Bank, 2006). Thirty-one percent of its total populations live below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2006). There is a rural-urban disparity, with higher poverty level in rural areas (World Bank, 2006). Nepal is one of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the United Nations' category (UN-OHRLLS, 2008). It is also a post-conflict country.

In the last two decades, there have been internal armed-conflict and major political changes in Nepal. In 1990, the country transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a multi-party democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Six years later, in 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) declared a "People's War" - an armed conflict - against the State that socially and economically marginalized indigenous people, people from lower castes, and women (Robins, 2010). This conflict ended a decade later in 2006 with a comprehensive peace agreement between the Maoists and the government

(Shakya, 2006). In 2008, the monarchy was abolished and Nepal became a federal democratic republic. However, this did not end the political turmoil, which continues in Nepal with frequently changing governments and on-going tensions between political parties over a new constitution.

This armed-conflict and political instability affected the household economy and social lives of many Nepali people. During the armed-conflict, the overall incidence of poverty decreased but income, consumption, and asset inequality widened (World Bank, 2006). These inequalities manifested along caste, gender, and geographical divisions (World Bank, 2006; Sharma, 2009). Moreover, the effect of the armed-conflict was more in rural areas, with many losing their lives and livelihood. Both the Maoists and government regularly abused, threatened, and extorted money from people in rural areas, forcing many families to migrate to urban areas (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2009). Also leaving their homes and villages for urban areas were young people who feared forceful recruitment into the Maoist army (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2009). This led to increased squatter settlements in many cities, including in Kathmandu (Poudyal, 2005). There is anecdotal evidence of this leading to the increase in the number of street children and youth in Nepal, but no rigorous study confirm this. These economic and political realities of Nepal comprise the larger country context in which frontline youth work with street children and youth was practiced. These were also the context for this study.

### **Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the gap in knowledge about youth work with street children in developing countries, including Nepal. It illustrates what frontline youth work with street children means, how it is practiced, and how the larger social and institutional structures influence this work in Nepal. By doing so, this research contributes to youth work and social work knowledge in Nepal and more generally. As one of the Least Developed Countries, Nepal relies heavily on support from Western international organizations for its local development activities (UN-OHRLLS, 2008), as do other developing countries. These countries could be informed by this study, which looks at the influence of international donor organizations in frontline youth work practice and how this work is organized and understood.

This study also contributes to the discourse and practice of youth work with street young people in Nepal and elsewhere. Its findings could promote new ways of thinking about youth work, facilitate a sharing of skills, practices, and knowledge among youth workers, and offer guidance for developing educational and training programs for frontline youth workers, their supervisors, and managers. It could also offer ways to evaluate frontline youth work, especially in developing countries.

Ultimately, this study contributes to better youth work practice with street children and youth in Nepal first, and then elsewhere. Findings of this study could facilitate creating spaces for youth work that are better aligned with and supportive of the needs and wellbeing of street children and youth.

## **Why this research?**

Outside a local restaurant in my neighborhood, there were about ten street young people who regularly hung-out in a group. Seemingly happy, they laughed, played games, or just talked. Their activities changed the moment somebody walked out of that restaurant, or passed by that street. Their facial expressions turned to sadness, and they extended their hands out and begged, “I am hungry. Can you please give me some money?” They were persistent and annoying, and they harassed people by following them and touching their hands or feet when they begged. Many people gave them money, if not out of sympathy then to just get rid of them. With a few rupees, these young people returned back to their hang-out place, and back to being happy and playing with friends.

This and other such images come from back home, growing up in a middle-class family and noticing these young people on my street corner living lives so different from my own. These informal observations and experiences of being approached by street young people for food and money seeded my research interest on them. Over the years, my research interest on street young people grew as I read and learned more about their everyday lives on the streets.

My research interest on frontline youth workers and their work is an outcome of my work with and for frontline youth workers employed by Saint Paul Park and Recreation. This work was a part of an on-going professional development training provided to these workers by Professor Baizerman, my doctoral advisor. Listening to workers’ practice stories and practice wisdom intrigued me, and I wanted to learn more. Yet, few studies had focused on youth work practice in a setting like the one I grew up in. This study on frontline youth work with street children allowed me to bring together my two research interests, as well as fill in the knowledge gap.

## **Overview of this Dissertation**

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research. This study was guided by an integrated approach to the study of work, which views work as existing in a broader context and as influencing as well as being influenced by its broader context (Ritzer, 1989; Watson, 2009). Following this approach, the chapter presents a conceptual framework of macro-, meso-, and micro-level influences on frontline youth work with street young people in Nepal.

Chapter 3 reviews literature on frontline youth work. This review is organized into two parts. The first part reviews the literature on frontline youth work with street children and youth and with homeless youth, and the second part examines various aspects of the everyday realities that influence frontline youth work practice, beginning with macro-level influences, moving next to the meso-level, and the last to micro- or individual-level influences.

Chapter 4 presents the research methods used in this study. It begins by describing the study's epistemological premise and is followed by a description of the study's qualitative research design, data collection tools and processes, data analysis, strategies used to maintain research rigor, and ethical issues in studying this population. The conclusion presents the study's limitations.

Chapter 5 situates frontline youth work in Nepal. Examined here are the institutional and socio-cultural environments in which this work is embedded. It begins by describing agencies present in the institutional environment of frontline youth work with street young people. The second section explores Nepali socio-cultural practices,

including the caste system, gender-based practices, and local views of children and their work (child labor).

Chapter 6 maps the system of response to street young people. This system of response included three service spaces: street outreach programs, drop-in centers, and transition homes. The first section briefly describes these three service spaces, and the second discusses coordination and collaboration between and among these service spaces.

Chapter 7 is about who frontline youth workers and their clients are. The first describes workers' pathways to work and how they learned this work, while the second sketches portraits of street young people's everyday lives.

Chapter 8 illuminates the everyday practice of street outreach work, beginning with the philosophies and ethos underpinning this work. Presented next are characteristics of workers and young people as perceived by both the young people and workers. This is followed by descriptions of the various approaches used by the workers to build street social capital and descriptions of "psychosocial counseling," crucial for the "rescue" of young people from the streets. Finally, the "rescue" process is explained.

Chapter 9 shows how frontline youth work is done at drop-in centers. It begins with the philosophies and ethos underpinning this youth work. Next, a brief portrait of young people using these services and of the workers providing services in drop-in centers are presented. This is followed by descriptions of the various approaches used by workers to invite young people to use drop-in centers, to build relationships with them,

and to “motivate” them to leave the streets. The final section focuses on two basic frontline youth work processes - “socialization” and “rescue.”

Chapter 10 looks at youth work in transition homes, beginning with the philosophies and ethos underpinning youth work there. The characteristics of young people and of the workers living and working in these homes are reviewed. This is followed by a discussion of the approaches used by workers to help young people adjust to these transition homes. Workers descriptions of doing case studies of individual young people are presented, and these are followed workers ways of understanding and teaching young people to become “normal children and youth.” To achieve this, workers engaged the parents of these young people. The concluding section describes young people’s family reintegration process.

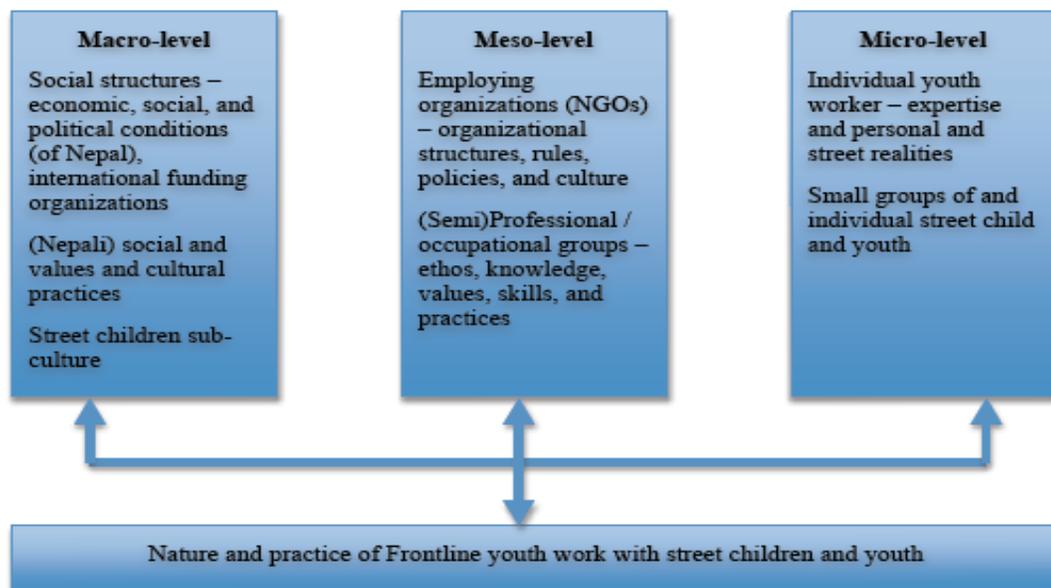
Chapter 11 presents the study’s conclusions and derived implications for work with street young people in Nepal, in other developing countries, and for social work in those societies.

## Chapter 2

### Conceptual framework of the study

This study was guided by scholarship in the sociology of work. Within this field, there are various approaches to the study work and workers (Ritzer, 1989; Watson, 2009). In an integrated approach, which was chosen, one argues that work must be understood as existing in a broader context and as influencing as well as being influenced by this broader context (Ritzer, 1989; Watson, 2009). This approach to understanding the nature and practice of the work examines complex relationships between the macro-level influence of social structures and culture, the meso-level influence of employing organizations and professional associations, and the micro-level influence of individuals (Ritzer, 1989), and on the linkages between and among these levels. Thus examined are the strategies of individual professionals, the dynamics of organizations, and the specific character of the larger social and cultural context (Ritzer, 1989).

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**



## **Macro-level: Social structures and culture**

Macro-level social structures directly and indirectly influence the nature of work (Ritzer, 1989; Watson, 2009; Sweet & Meiksins, 2008). Such social structures include a society's economic, political, and social institutions and organizations. They determine the kinds of jobs available in a society, who has access to, or are excluded from, these jobs (for example, exclusion on the basis of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, etc.), and the salaries given to these jobs (Watson, 2009; Sweet & Meiksins, 2008). These structures also control and regulate, with their laws, policies, and funding, what and how work is to be done (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These social structures are closely intertwined with the cultural values and practices that give meaning to work for individuals and for their culture and society.

The culture of a society guides the way people think about and make sense of their work, as well as how work is organized (Watson, 2009). While in some societies work plays a central role in the lives of people, in others work may be just a way of "making a living" (Watson; 2009). For example, Weber's study of the Protestant ethic shows that Protestant societies embraced work as a calling (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008). On the other hand, anthropological and historical studies have found that in many subsistence economies, people viewed work as a way of making ends meet (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008). A society's cultural values and practices also influence how jobs are managed, how workers' set their role boundaries, and workers' attitudes toward their work, employers, and clients (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008).

In the current context of globalization, international social structures and Western values and practices also influences the nature of work in developing countries (Watson, 2009). International governmental and non-governmental such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Commission, Save the Children, Care International, Oxfam, and the like are major actors in international development. These organizations provide development aid and influence the nature and practice of the work, especially in our areas of interest, social work broadly (including youth work), and development work and education. Through their funding, these international organizations also influence local organizational rules and practices (Herman & Renz, 1997; Wallace, Bornstein, & Chapman, 2007).

### **Meso-level: Employing organizations and professional associations**

Employing organizations shape work by conceiving, executing, and regulating work and their workers (Watson, 2009). Employers outline the nature and practice of the work by drafting job descriptions and job responsibilities, identifying skill-sets necessary for a particular job, and recruiting people with requisite qualifications. Employer organizations regulate work closely through their policies and rules, and workers are required to comply with these when doing their jobs. Also, employers use supervision, as well as rewards and punishments, to ensure that work gets done in ways that they want.

As a part of this regulation, employing organizations also regulate workers' emotions. This type of regulation is called "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 1983). Organizational rules and policies often require its workers to engage clients in certain ways. In doing so, the workers manipulate and control personal feelings to portray

emotions and behaviors that the employers consider suitable for interactions with clients. Such emotional labor is manifested in the workers' use of language, tones of voice, facial expressions, and other body languages (Hochschild, 1983). It is not only the employer organizations that control the workers' emotional labor.

Occupational groups and professional associations also regulate emotional labor and the nature of work, including expertise (Freidson, 2001; Eraut, 1994; Payne, 2001). These occupational groups and professional associations include formal educational institutions and occupational associations (Pavalko, 1988). They socialize individual workers into certain ways of doing work. In doing so, they not only teach individual workers specific work skills and techniques but also the values and norms of that specific occupation. These occupational groups and professional associations regulate the work and workers by licensing and certification and with norms and rules on how work can be done (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

### **Micro-level: Individuals**

Youth workers are members of a society that conceptualizes street children and youth in certain way. This conceptualization influences what youth work is, as well as who youth workers are and how they should practice. Youth workers are also employees of youth serving organizations with their policies, funding sources, and organization cultures, and all of these also influence actual youth work practice with young people. Variations in youth work practice not accounted for by these structural and cultural elements can be assigned to individuals and the way they do their work.

This means that individual workers not only respond to patterns established by macro- and meso-level structures but sometimes may modify the nature and actual practice of their work (Trice, 1993; Sweet & Meiksins, 2008). Individual workers bring to work their expertise (skills, knowledge, craft, etc.), vocation (Baizerman, 1997), and values and attitudes, all of which are shaped by their personal history and biographies (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008) and all of which partly influence how they approach their work (Watson, 2009). Thus, each worker is an agent with her/his own ability, wants, and desires, and contributes to the nature and practice of how she or he does her or his work (Watson, 2009). This sense of agency also operates at a collective level, where groups and associations influence the nature and practice of their work (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008).

Finally, clients also shape the actual practice of the work. Programs, activities, and approaches are developed to respond to the needs of a particular population. The nature of work and its practice is often modified, changed, or redefined as a response to formal and informal feedback received from focus clients (Turnbull et al., 2009). These interconnected sets of power relations –political, economic, and social structures, youth serving organizations, service users, professional groups, and individuals, including the youth – provide the contexts for understanding frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal.

### **Summary**

In summary, the integrated approach of the sociology of work is the study's conceptual framework. This multi-level frame embedded in the sociology of work was

presented as the contexts for understanding frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal. The distinctions made here between macro-, meso-, and micro-levels contexts for understanding youth work will be carried into the literature review and will be used to structure the presentation.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature review**

This literature review provides an overview of frontline youth work with street young people, along with young people in general. There are two parts of this review: first, a literature review on frontline youth work with street young people and with homeless youth, and second, literature review of various aspects of the everyday realities that influence frontline youth work, beginning with macro-level influences, moving next to the meso-level, and last to micro or individual-level influences. Also examined are relationships between and among these levels. The second part of the review mostly draws on literature about youth workers in general because of the relative paucity of professional, scholarly, and programmatic literature on frontline youth work in developing countries. The review concludes by proposing research questions for this study, which flow from the literature review.

#### **Overview of frontline youth work with street children and youth**

In this section, the focus is on youth work with street young people and with homeless youth in developed and developing countries. First, the ultimate goals of youth work are discussed. Then, philosophical assumptions and approaches used to work with these young people are examined. Finally, youth work with street children in three different settings – street outreach, drop-in centers, and residential homes – is discussed. This literature review is presented as a general overview of frontline youth work with street young people.

## **Youth work goals**

The goals of youth work with street children and youth are similar across the world. A primary goal of this work is getting young people “off the streets” and “mainstreaming” and “reintegrating” them both into their family and into the larger society (Volpi, 2002; Teal, 2004). This means “motivating,” “convincing,” or “persuading” young people to leave the streets and to return to their biological families, to long-term transition homes, or in the case of older youth, to learn job-skills and find a job so that they can “leave the streets” (Volpi, 2002; Teal, 2004). A secondary goal is to promote young people’s wellbeing by offering them basic services, connecting them to other opportunities and services available, and educating them about living a “healthy life” (de Oliveira, 1994; Volpi, 2002; Thompson, 1999; Frattaroli, Pollack, Jonsberg, & Croteau, 2010; Dybicz, 2005). Various programs and service approaches are used to achieve these goals.

Dybicz (2005), in a review of interventions on street children, categorized intervention approaches into primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. In the public health framework, a primary prevention takes its focus on preventing the onset of the problem and works with at-risk groups, while secondary prevention focuses on those who have been recently affected by the problem, and tertiary prevention focuses on those affected by the problem and aims to rehabilitate or reduce the problem and prevent relapses (World Health Organization, 2004). In work with street children, the primary prevention focus is on young people who live in poverty but are not yet spending a majority of their time on the streets. At this level, work is done with the families and

communities of these young people to help them enhance their socio-economic conditions (Dybicz, 2005). Work with families and communities includes awareness-raising activities to change a community's attitudes toward street children, working with community members to monitor new children joining the streets, connecting street children and their families to community services, developing micro-credit programs for street children, and the like (Volpi, 2002). In secondary prevention, the focus is on young people who have recently come to live on the streets but they still have regular contact with their families. Secondary prevention approaches include increasing these young people's opportunities to legally earn income, increasing their safety by providing them information on health and risky behaviors (drug use, HIV/AIDS, gangs, conflict resolution, etc.), and increasing their wellbeing by providing for their basic needs through drop-in shelters and outreach programs. Tertiary prevention focuses on young people who live on the streets and have severed contacts with their families. Here, intervention approaches focus on residential and/or rehabilitative care and on reintegrating these young people into their families. These approaches categorize young people based on their connections to their family and offer them services thought appropriate to that status. Using these and other frames, approaches, and practices, frontline youth work is practiced in three different settings: street outreach, drop-in centers, and transition homes.

### **Street outreach**

In street outreach, workers meet young people where they are, that is on street corners and in other public places (Vopli, 2002). This outreach work is used in a variety of programs, including those related to homelessness, disease prevention, drug use, and

violence (Frattaroli et al., 2010; Decker, Bynum, McDevitt, Farrell, & Varano, 2008).

This approach is considered important in working with “hard to reach” and marginalized populations, including street children and youth, since these young people typically do not use the available services (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2009).

Therefore, workers go to the streets and connect with these young people by engaging them in conversation and by informing and encouraging them to use available training and other opportunities and services (Gibson, 2011; Rosseter, 1987; Fontaine, 2009; Frattaroli et al., 2010). By so doing, workers enhance the wellbeing of these young people while they continue to live on the streets.

In street outreach, it is important for workers to build and sustain “trusting relationships” with the young people (Thompson, 1999; Gibson, 2011). For young people to trust workers, the workers must be “real” or credible. Workers establish their credibility by “hanging out” near and with the young people and talking to them (Thompson, 1999; Gibson, 2011). They do this over time, typically over months. Once a relationship is established, workers strengthen and sustain these relationships in various ways by following through on their commitments to the young people, maintaining confidentiality of shared information, using discretion in informing police or other government agents about violence, people, or activities that may be caused by or harming these young people, and connecting them to services to enhance their wellbeing (Decker et al., 2008; Thompson, 1999). In this ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships, workers also negotiate “appropriate ethical boundaries” and their roles as

an advocate, mentor, educator, friend, and so on (De Oliveira, 1994). This street outreach is one type of outreach work. A second type of outreach work is done in drop-in centers.

### **Drop-in centers**

Drop-in centers are center-based outreach. Here, young people are offered services to meet their immediate basic needs (De Rosa, Montgomery, Kipke, Iverson, Ma, Unger, 1999). These include food, shower, laundry and other personal hygiene, social support to reduce high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, and vocational programs like mentoring, job training, and the like (Ferguson & Xie, 2008, De Rosa et al., 1999). These are offered during the day in a safe environment (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). As outreach, these centers are more accessible to young people than residential programs. Most drop-in centers have flexible rules and require young people to give little information to gain entry into the center (De Rosa, et al., 1999). Young people can walk-in and receive services and then return to the streets. This is a looser and more open space than the residential programs.

### **Residential programs**

Residential programs are another setting in which frontline youth work is done. Here young people stay for extended periods and receive services, such as education, socialization, and job skill training (Volpi, 2002). Residential programs are resource intensive and have a fixed number of beds available (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). There are rules and policies for living there, and these may not be very flexible (De Rosa et al., 1999). Many of these programs are grounded in the society's and the implementing agency's idea of "help" and "rehabilitation" (Turnbull et al., 2009).

Often, young people use these services in ways that they view as benefitting them. In doing so, they redefine the rules of the programs (Turnbull et al., 2009). For example, Southon & Dakhal (2003) found that street children in residential programs smoked cigarettes even when it was prohibited and came to the shelters later than the time set by the program. Here, frontline youth work involves being flexible and “versatile in their approach” and finding constructive ways to work with these young people, such as modifying rules and structures, making programs engaging and responsive to everyday realities of the young people, gaining trust, and negotiating power and responsibility with them (Kidd, et al., 2007, p. 18). All this focuses on changing young people so that they come to live healthy lifestyles. Viewed from this lens of “changing individuals,” youth workers are change agents and their agencies as people-changing or people processing organizations (Street, Vinter, & Perrow, 1966; Hasenfeld, 1972; Lefton & Rosengren, 1966).

This section is a general introduction to frontline youth work with street children and youth. Discussed was different prevention approaches used in direct work with street children and the three different service settings for youth work. To understand this work at a deeper level, it is crucial to examine the various realities that shape it.

### **Influence of everyday social realities on frontline youth work**

Frontline youth work is embedded in historical, social, cultural, political, and economic conditions within which youth work is practiced (Blacker 2010). It is an agency-based practice, meaning workers do this work in the context of work for their employer non-government organizations (NGOs). As employees, they bring personal

values, attitudes, and expertise to their practice. How the macro-level structures, meso-level agency-based practices, and micro-level individual characteristics influence everyday work is the focus of the literature review in this section.

### **Macro-level: Socio-economic, cultural, and political structures**

Macro-level socio-economic, cultural, and political structures directly or indirectly influence local-level youth work practice. Embedded in these macro-level structures are certain values, understandings, and views about young people. These guide the understanding of what young people need and the goals of the frontline youth workers, their agencies, and others. In many places, primarily Western and upper and middle-class societies, children and youth are viewed as dependent, vulnerable, and needing protection by adults until “ready” for the vast variety of everyday social, economic, political, and other realities (Jenks, 2005). This notion of “protective childhood” is used as the touchstone to assess the lives of children and youth in diverse cultures and socio-economic contexts (Shanahan, 2007). By doing so, it problematizes and/or pathologizes children and youth who do not have the characteristics of the life of the protected child or youth. Hence, working young people, those who drop out of school, and street children and youth become youth “problems” – individuals and conditions needing protection, “help,” and “repair” (Klienman & Klienman, 2009).

In this notion of protective childhood, the child (and the young person) is seen also as a potential delinquent or social deviant when their particular childhood differs from this “universal childhood” (Lee, 2001). This view prescribes social control, supervision, and social regulation to repair these differences (James, Jenks, & Prout,

1998). Preventive and curative social control is exercised over children and youth – for example, how they use time and spaces, what they should do, and how they should do this at home, school, play, and in other places. While one way of understanding young people is from a protectionist view, another way is from a constructionist view.

In the constructionist views, in contrast, young people are seen as persons, as beings – always in context (Jenks, 2005; James & Prout, 1997). This view regards young people as agents of their own childhood and youth-hood. This is a new paradigm for understanding, working with, and studying young people (James & Prout, 1997). Here, young people are read and studied as individuals exercising agency within particular contexts (James, et al., 1998). They are given places and roles in/through which they can engage their lives with children, parents, and other adults, and with adult institutions (VeLure Roholt, Hildreth, & Baizerman, 2008).

These concepts and images give legitimacy to what youth work is and how youth workers do their jobs. De Oliveira and Edginton (2004) identify three youth work paradigms that reflect these concepts and images of youth: the remedial, the prosocial, and the integrative. In a remedial paradigm, youth are seen as being “at risk,” and youth work as seen as an intervention to “fix” at-risk youth so that they can “fit” into their society. In the prosocial paradigm, youth are viewed as competent individuals with the potential to become responsible adults, and youth work is seen as helping youth become competent individuals with good morals and character. In the integrative view, youth are perceived as potential collaborators and contributors to society and youth work as a dynamic process driven by young people and in which youth build healthy relationships

with adults and peers and co-create activities for individual, community, and social development. These three paradigms can be viewed as complementary rather than as being in opposition (Smith, 1988). These three paradigms are also reflected in three broad ways of viewing street young people and society's response to them.

In youth work with street children, there are three different ways of viewing these young people, which in turn shape community and organizational responses to them (Carizosa & Poertner, 1992; Karabanow & Clement, 2004). In the first view, street children are seen as a threat to the safety of the community, and interventions for these young people use a correctional approach, such as removing young people from the streets and putting them in correctional institutions. Here, the individual young person is seen as responsible for being a "street child" (Karabanow, 2004). Another view of these young people is as individuals needing socialization and protection from street life. Here, a rehabilitative approach is used. This approach, too, emphasizes the individual as responsible for her/his street life (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). In the third view, these young people are seen as needing education to be empowered to make choices to fit into mainstream society. This approach links the situation of street children to larger social, political, and economic structures that pushes young people to the streets (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). These concepts of children and youth are embedded in larger historical, political, social, and cultural frames, and all this is grounded in the realities of the sociopolitical and socio-economic conditions of a society.

**Table 1: Different conceptualizations and frames for viewing and working with young people**

<b>Conceptualizations of young people</b>	<b>Youth work paradigms (De Oliveira &amp; Edginton, 2004)</b>	<b>Public health model for working with young people (Dybicz, 2005)</b>	<b>Community and organizational responses to street youth (Carizosa &amp; Poertner, 1992; Karabanow &amp; Clement, 2004)</b>
<b>Classical:</b> Young people are a universal, natural, bio-psycho-social category	<b>Remedial paradigm:</b> Youth are “at risk,” and youth work must “fix” at-risk youth so that they can “fit” into their society.	<b>Primary prevention:</b> Focus is on young people who live in poverty but are not yet spending a majority of their time on the streets; work is done to help family and society enhance their socio-economic conditions.	<b>Correctional approach:</b> Street youth are a threat to the safety of the community, and interventions use approaches, such as removing young people from the streets and putting them in correctional institutions.
<b>Constructionist:</b> Young people are social constructs with bio-social reality and have age-graded social roles that vary by place, historical time, society, and culture	<b>Pro-social paradigm:</b> Youth are competent individuals, and youth work is helping youth become competent individuals with good morals and characters.	<b>Secondary prevention:</b> Focus is on young people who have recently come to live on the streets but have regular contact with family; work approaches include helping them legally earn income; increasing their safety and wellbeing	<b>Rehabilitative approach:</b> Youth need socialization and protection from street life.
	<b>Integrative paradigm:</b> Youth are potential collaborators and contributors to society, and youth work is a dynamic process driven by young people.	<b>Tertiary prevention:</b> Focus is on young people who live on the streets and have severed contacts with their family; work approaches focus on residential and/or rehabilitative care and on family reintegration	<b>Education approach:</b> Young people need education to be empowered to make choices to fit into mainstream society.

Local political and economic conditions provide opportunities for, as well as constrain, youth work. They shape the nature and practice of youth work. For example, historical studies of youth services in the US and UK have found that youth programs

increased in these countries as a response to changes in the labor market and to the changes in the conception of children and youth (Edginton, Kowalski, & Randall, 2005; Davies, 2009). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the US and UK, an increase in youth unemployment resulted in the presence of more youth on the streets. This was perceived as a moral panic (Cohen, 2002), a threat to social order. In response, many philanthropic organizations offered programs for youth (Edginton, et al., 2005; Davies, 2009). These programs used a “targeted approach,” offering social and job skill development, recreation, and other activities to unsupervised, unemployable, and unemployed youth from low-income families (Edginton, et al., 2005; Davies, 2009). Similar patterns of response to larger social changes and youth programs was seen in recent years in the U.S. when an increase in the number of mothers entering the labor force, along with the view that children and youth need to be protected and guided by adults, increased the demand and funding for youth programs (Hollister, 2003). These larger political, social, and economic structures also influence youth work in developing countries.

In developing countries, if “program” is a category of response, there may be few funds to develop, sustain, and improve programs. If “youth work” is a category, there may be little money for salaries and training. Thus, creating jobs for youth work and professional development of youth workers may be a society’s priority and/or may be beyond a society’s interests or resources. The priorities of many developing countries center on addressing the immediate needs of its people for food, clothing, and shelter. Hence, youth work tends to be a lower priority (Kuriakose, 1976). Moreover, the lack of

resources compels many countries to rely on international funding to assist in their development activities.

International governmental and international non-governmental organizations (IGOs and INGOs) are integral to development activities in many developing countries (Wallace, et al., 2007; Elbers & Arts, 2011). These organizations provide technical and financial support to developing countries for their development activities, mainly for issues and activities that the IGOs/INGOs or the country itself view as priorities (Elbers & Arts, 2011). By doing so, IGOs/INGOs regulate local-level development work in these countries. In regard to young people, this may mean advising or guiding local NGOs in developing youth workers' role and responsibilities (who gets hired), defining who they work with (are street children and youth target beneficiaries), and what approaches to take, and how program effectiveness is measured (indicators of success) (Ansell, 2005).

In short, political, economic, and social structures along with culture influence the nature of youth programs and youth work in a given context, including who gets served (disadvantaged youth, youth involved in gangs, all youth, etc.), how (social and job skill development programs, education, recreation programs, civic engagement, etc.), where (clubs, detached street work, recreation centers, etc.), as well as by whom (both men and women, community members, semi-professionals, etc.). These larger, macro-level realities influence in turn the meso- and micro-level structures.

### **Meso-level: Employing organizations and professional associations**

At the meso-level are organizations and professional associations that directly guide or regulate youth work. Youth serving organizations hold certain philosophies of

youth development, which in turn guide the type and style of youth work practiced by its employees (Edginton, et al., 2005; Karabanow & Clement, 2004). The remedial (interventions to fix at-risk youth), pro-social (interventions to building good morals and characters), and integrative (collaborating and co-creating activities with youth for youth) paradigms reflect different philosophies of youth work (De Oliveira & Edginton, 2004). So do the corrective, rehabilitative, and educational approach to working with street children (Carizosa & Poertner, 1992, Karabanow & Clement, 2004). These reflect assumptions that organizations make about young people and how to plan, develop, implement, evaluate, and improve programs. For example, the difference between viewing youth as an “asset to society” and viewing them as “in need of being controlled” can direct how youth workers include young people’s voice, interests, and needs in youth programs and activities (Edginton, et al., 2005). As employees, youth workers are trained and are required to follow, as well as to promote, their organizations’ goals, which in turn shape their youth work practice (Karabanow & Clement, 2004).

The employing agency’s policies, rules, and expectations for youth workers directly influence how they do their work (De Oliveira & Edginton, 2004; Edginton, et al., 2005; Karabanow & Clement, 2004). Youth serving organizations often emphasize program outputs, rather than outcomes, to meet the requirement of their funding agencies. In developing countries, many NGOs sustain their work primarily through funding from international organizations. To establish their credibility with IGOs/INGOs, these NGOs may need to demonstrate effectiveness of their work. To do so, local NGOs may pressure their staff to meet their program goals (Herman & Renz, 1997, Wallace, et al., 2007).

These goals become expectations for workers' performance, which directly or indirectly pressure how youth workers actually work with young people. Thus, these program goals and outcomes, and pressures to achieving them, become a strong influence on how youth work is practice (Deschenes, McDonald, & McLaughlin, 2004). In frontline youth work with street children and youth, this may mean that youth workers have to report the number of street children "served," "rescued," "rehabilitated," or "reintegrated." This requirement may lead to the emphasis of youth work on showing program outputs more than on building long-term trusting relationships with these young people. Employing organizations assign roles and tasks, and regulate their workers' everyday practice (Davies, 2010). They also train and supervise workers to do their work in certain ways.

Youth workers are also socialized by their organizations into youth work (Jenkinson, 2009; McNamara, Lawley, & Towler, 2008). This is particularly so in countries where there is no external training, for example in post-secondary institutions, such as an institute or a university. One way of socializing youth workers is through supervision. Agencies have different organizational structures and policies for supervision. While some agencies have formal and regular forms of supervision, others view supervision as being necessary only when problems arise (Jenkinson, 2009). In both supervision structures, supervisors intentionally and unintentionally socialize youth workers into the organizations' way of practicing youth work. Supervisors may do this by helping youth workers respond to issues that come up in their everyday practice, as well as by giving workers space to reflect on their work and learn from their experiences (Jenkinson, 2009; McNamara et al., 2008). Supervisors may also encourage youth

workers to adopt their agency's ways of practicing youth work through rewards that may be in the form of support, appreciation, or promotion (Jenkinson, 2009). Training by the employing agencies is another way of socializing workers into particular directions and styles of youth work.

Employing organizations socialize youth workers through formal professional development training (Nicholson, Houchin, & Stegall, 2004). Youth workers come from diverse academic and professional backgrounds. While some have formal training in youth work or a related field, such as social work, education, public health, and community education, many learn this work on-the-job (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006). When youth work training programs for these diverse groups of youth workers are developed by the employing agencies, training tends to be focused more on promoting the agency's ways of practicing youth work and on advancing its agenda and goals (Nicholson, et al., 2004). Youth work agencies may also hire external consultants to deliver professional development training, and such training can focus on teaching core competencies identified by external professional groups and associations. In developing countries, professional development training for frontline youth workers may be offered by "experts" from international organizations, who may train youth workers on "universal skills and approaches," mainly based on child rights (Ansell, 2005). This can lead to a diffusion of Western approaches and practices in these countries. These agency practices are one form of meso-level influence on youth work, and professional associations are another.

Professional groups or associations can regulate youth workers and their practice, but youth professional associations are in an emergent state. Youth work practice is generally framed by a ‘knowledge-base’ that youth workers develop through study, practice, supervision, and socialization into youth work (Blacker, 2010). However, in the last few decades, agencies and teaching institutions have advocated for (or against) the professionalization of youth work (Baizerman, 1994; Fusco, 2011). In the U.S., groups such as the National Research Council, Forum for Youth Investment, Chapin Hall Center for Children, Academy for Educational Development, National Collaboration for Youth, and the Youth Development Institute are in consensus on the essential knowledge and core-competencies and guidelines for youth workers (Quinn, 2004). Internationally, organizations like UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) emphasize the need for professional development of youth workers (UNICEF, 2005; ADB, 2003). In many developing countries including Nepal, youth work professional associations do not exist. Those graduating from social work and similar fields may work as frontline youth workers and their practice may be influenced by their academic backgrounds, but even social work is a relatively new discipline in countries like Nepal (Nikku, 2010). Moreover, many developing countries approach social work from a social development perspective that focuses on broader socio-economic issues (Payne, 2001). This suggests that in many parts of the world there are no professional associations to influence the practice of youth work.

Thus, service organizations, as meso-level structures, exercise greater influence on youth work practice through their policies, supervision, and training. Of course, these

are influenced by macro-level structures and vice-versa. Also influencing frontline youth work are the individual workers themselves.

### **Micro level: Individual youth workers**

There are different types of youth work practice, and these could be seen as family of practices (Baizerman, 1997; Fusco, 2011). Within this family of practices, there are distinctive ways of approaching and working with young people (Davies, 2010). These include developing and sustaining trusting relationships with young people; co-creating with young people some normalcy in their lives; creating opportunities and possibilities that young people might not have considered; managing power differential and setting and maintaining culturally appropriate ethical boundaries; negotiating with youth on program activities; and the like (Baizerman, 1997; Davies, 2010; Blacker, 2010; Walker & Larson, 2006)). How youth workers do these can vary depending on the individual youth workers' levels of expertise (Dreyfus, 2001), as well as on an agency's, and supra agency's normative practices.

Differences in the levels of expertise can be seen more clearly when examining how youth workers manage problem situations and those involving ethical issues. Youth workers frequently experience ethical tensions and dilemmas in their work (Anderson-Nathe, 2010). Some of these include dilemmas between respecting individual choice and promoting the public good, between empowering and controlling, and in the balancing of youth workers' roles of mentor, friend, advocate, etc. (Banks, 2010). A study that collected and analyzed 250 dilemma situations experienced by skilled leaders identified

three main factors that distinguished experts from novice in youth work services (Larson, Rickman, Gibbons, & Walker 2009):

- The experts generated more possible responses to the presented situation.
- Their responses were youth centered, and youth workers engaged youth in solving the problem, turning the situation into opportunities for positive youth development.
- The experts' responses were nuanced, and they drew on multiple sources of knowledge and expertise to address the situation.

Another study found that novice youth workers had difficulty in dealing with power differences between them and the young people, while expert workers used rules and set limits in ways that did not escalate a situation and allowed youth to maintain a sense of control, thereby allowing youth to avoid being humiliated in front of friends (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000). Findings of these studies show how practical expertise influenced practice of individual workers.

How individual workers perceived their work also influences their practice. Youth workers are diverse groups of professionals and semi-professionals who become youth workers for various reasons (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006). Many youth workers are part-time employees or volunteers who work as outreach workers, prevention specialists, youth leaders, recreation workers, and so on, and they perceive their work in different ways. They may see their work as a vocational calling, a way to supplement their income, a stepping-stone, a way of giving back to their communities, and so on. Accordingly,

youth workers may construct their roles differently and bring different strengths, possibilities, and limits to their work (Halpern et al., 2000).

This perception of their (semi) professional selves and their work may change over time, with experience, skills, and relationships. As workers become more experienced, their levels of expertise may increase, and youth workers may take on newer roles and responsibilities or do their everyday work differently (Baizerman, 1997). They may also come to see their work as more than a job, as their calling, or a way of “being” in the world (Baizerman, 1997; Thompson, 1999). At the same time, more experience can increase the risk of stress and burnout in youth workers (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006). This may in turn influence how they approach their work and practice every day.

In addition to expertise and perception of their work, other individual characteristics and everyday realities also influence youth work. This includes the sex, age, race, caste and ethnicity, personal histories and biographies of workers. For example, the social construction of gender roles across cultures can lead to differences in youth work practice (Spence, 1989). Although family patterns are changing globally and more women are entering the labor market, it is still generally the case that women take on most household and child rearing responsibilities. Adherence to these traditional gender roles affects women’s engagement in youth work and differences in the level of expertise, as this work often requires working at odd hours, in the streets, with “problem” youth (Spence, 1989). Other realities that influence youth work include the age of youth workers, their years in youth work, the youth workers’ personal identification with the

youth, and youth workers connection to the community in which they work (Halpern et al., 2000).

In summary, this review took as its focus the three levels of influences – macro, meso, and micro – that have clear and direct consequences on the perceptions and realities of whom children and youth are, the understanding of what youth work is, and how it is practiced. In the previous section, the review looked at youth work approaches to, as well as youth work settings for, working with street children and youth. Understanding how all these came together in Nepal was the goal of this study.

### **Research questions**

Drawing on the literature review and personal experiences of frontline youth worker and the multiple contexts and influences on their work, the following research questions focused this study:

1. What is frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal?
2. How is it practiced?
3. What accounts for how it is practiced?

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Methods**

This chapter presents the research methods used in this study of frontline youth work in Nepal. I begin with the epistemological premise of the research. Then I present the qualitative research design used. Next is a description of the study's data collection tools and process, the data analysis process, strategies for rigor, and ethical issues. Study limitations end this chapter.

#### **Epistemological premise**

This study used an interpretive frame to examine and analyze the nature and practice of frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal. In this frame, one cannot completely understand a reality, but can only understand a range of meanings that individuals give to a reality (Smith, 1992/2008; Schwandt, 2003). Furthermore, these meanings are not “discovered.” They are negotiated in the process of interpretation (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2008; Schwandt, 2003). This interpretation process involves individuals drawing on the historical and socio-cultural contexts within which actions and interactions take place and on their own experiences and biases (Schwandt, 2003). In doing so, the researcher becomes the main instrument for data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (Paisley & Reeves, 2001).

This interpretive frame was a useful guide in understanding the community and organizational response to street children and youth in Nepal. It was used to examine, analyze, and interpret worker's, management level staff's, and young people's understanding of frontline youth work and everyday practice. This interpretive frame

guided the selection and use of research methods, including the data collection and data analysis methods, and strategies used to maintain methodological rigor.

### **Research design**

This study used a mixed-method qualitative social science research design. This design was selected because it fit the study's research questions and epistemological premise. This study set out to critically examine, describe, and interpret stories, meanings, lived experiences, and taken-for-granted understanding of the nature and practice of frontline youth work. These could be best approached using qualitative research methods because they provide value orientation, tools, and techniques for studying particular phenomena in-depth and with careful attention to details, contexts, and nuances (Patton, 2002). A mixed-method qualitative study was used because it enabled a triangulation of this youth work practice using different data sources and different data collection tools.

This study's research design was emergent. The proposal specified initial focus, sampling method, data collection tools, and data analysis plans. These were modified during fieldwork as the research progressed (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Data collection and the analysis processes were modified and came to include three phases, rather than the one proposed phase. In the first phase, data were collected from youth workers and management level staff as planned. The study was modified to include a second phase, in which emerging themes from the collected data were shared with research participants individually for feedback. Also, non-participant observation was done of frontline youth work practice on the streets, at drop-in centers,

and in transition homes. It became clear that it was important to collect information from street children and youth, the recipients of services. A third phase of the field trip consisted of interviews with young people and the sharing of preliminary findings with workers, management level staff, and government representatives for further feedback. All this provided a better understanding of the larger system of response to the young people from multiple levels and multiple perspectives. It revealed complexities of the practice and also discrepancies between youth work values described and everyday youth work practice, suggesting that local interpretations of practices were influenced by external international agencies, socio-cultural practices, and individual workers. These changes in research design meant seeking approval from my committee and the IRB. Also, a grant made these multiple field visits possible.

### **Study Site**

This study of frontline youth work was done in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. This site was selected because a majority of Nepali street children and youth lived in Kathmandu. A majority of NGOs working with these young people and frontline workers were also in Kathmandu.

### **Unit of Analysis**

Frontline youth work practice was the unit of analysis. This is because the primary goal of the study was to understand the nature, meaning, and influences on frontline youth work practice in Nepal. Following this, the study collected descriptions and lived experiences of youth work practice from frontline youth workers, management level staff of the employer NGOs, and the young people.

## **Sampling**

### **Sampling method**

This study used purposeful sampling method, one often used in qualitative research. In purposeful sampling, the researcher purposefully selects data sources, such as respondents and informants, who can provide in-depth information about the issues central to the study's purpose (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 1998). Frontline youth workers, management level staff, and young people were purposefully selected based on their experiences of supervising and practicing this work and being recipients of services. Sampling was done in a way to ensure that workers practicing in three settings – street outreach, drop-in centers, and transition homes – were represented. Sampling also focused on including women workers to understand their perceptions and experiences of this work. The young people included in the sample were from four different locations of Kathmandu and from different age groups. This was done to understand a greater diversity of experiences in using the services and their knowledge about youth workers.

### **Sample size**

The study had a total of 55 participants (24 youth workers and 8 management level staff (28% women and 72% men); 23 young people). It is important to note that there was an overlap in the roles of management level staff. Most management staff also directly worked with street young people, and some were promoted to this position from frontline youth work and had extensive frontline youth work experiences. Women were overrepresented in the sample, given that a majority of the workers and management

level staff were men. The study had not specified the exact sample size because qualitative research does not use a rule for sample size (Patton, 2002). Since the goal was not to generalize to a larger population, the purpose of a sample here was to include information-rich cases to maximize information about frontline youth work practice. Therefore, sampling was terminated when “saturation” occurred with a pattern emerging and new information not significantly adding to the knowledge about the nature, practice, and influences on frontline youth work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria varied for the young people and for workers and their managers. For workers and management level staff, there were several inclusion criteria for the sample. These were:

- Sex: Both male and female workers were included to explore the similarities and differences in their practices. Nine female and 23 male workers and managers participated in the study.
- Years of youth work on the streets: Youth workers in different stages of their careers were included. Workers and management staff’s years of experiences ranged from one to 20 years. This criterion was used to include richer and varied experiences of frontline youth work.
- Frontline youth work settings: Frontline youth workers who worked on the streets as well as those who worked in agency-based settings - drop-in centers and transition homes –were included. In the sample, there were five street outreach workers, five drop-in center workers, and five transition home workers. Nine

workers worked in both street outreach and drop-in centers. Eight management level staff worked in central office.

- Working with street boys and girls: The goal was to include frontline youth workers who worked with street boys and those who worked with girls or who worked with both. Only 10 workers and managers sampled worked directly with girls. This is because most workers were employed in organizations served only boys.
- Working with different age groups: Frontline youth workers who worked with older or younger street children and youth were included in the sample, allowing an examination of what youth work practice was like with different aged street young people.
- Working in same and different organizations: Frontline youth workers employed in 10 NGOs were sampled.

For the young people, the inclusion criteria required they lived on the streets or spent a majority of their time there, and self-identified as street children. This was how local NGOs defined street children. A majority were boys, as was also found in studies about street children in Nepal (Government of Nepal, 2008). It was not possible to purposefully include girls in the sample because they were not seen on the streets like the boys. So, only boys were interviewed.

**Table 2: Characteristics of workers and managers sampled**

No.	NGO	Position in their NGOs	Primary Work Setting(s)	Years in this work	Level of education	Age (years)	Sex
1.	A	Coordinator	Transition home	8	Bachelors	<40	Male
2.	B	Deputy director	Central office	10	High School	<50	Male
3.	B	Street outreach program officer	Central office and streets	7 approx	Bachelors	< 30	Male
4.	B	Outreach officer	Street & drop-in	5	Not known	<30	Male
5.	B	Program manager	Drop-in	5 approx	Not known	<30	Male
6.	B	Non-formal education teacher	Drop-in	3 approx	Not known	<30	Female
7.	C	Outreach program officer	Center and streets	15 approx	High School	<50	Male
8.	D	Program officer	Central Office	6	Not known	<30	Female
9.	D	Outreach worker	Streets & drop-in	1.5	Bachelors	<30	Male
10.	E	Director	Central Office	15 approx	Not known	<50	Male
11.	E	Program Officer	Central Office	20	Not known	<50	Male
12.	E	Outreach officer	Central office	7	Bachelors	<30	Male
13.	E	Peer Educator	Streets	7/8	Not known	<30	Male
14.	E	Peer Educator	Streets	7/8	Not known	<30	Male
15.	F	Social Worker	Central Office	11	Masters	<40	Female
16.	F	Care taker	Transition home	5 approx	Not known	<40	Female
17.	G	Program manager	Outreach department	7	Not known	<40	Male
18.	G	Coordinator	Center & streets	1.5	Not known	<40	Male
19.	G	Peer educator	Streets	2	High school	<30	Male
20.	G	Transition home manager	Transition home	7	Not known	<40	Female
21.	G	Care taker	Transition home	7	Not known	<40	Female
22.	H	Program manager	Drop-in	7	Not known	<50	Male
23.	H	Program coordinator	Street and drop-in	7	Not known	<50	Male
24.	H	Non-formal educator	Drop-in	7	Not known	<50	Female
25.	H	Outreach worker	Street & drop-in	9	Not known	<50	Male
26.	I	Social Worker	Transition home	1	Bachelor	<30	Male
27.	J	Training officer	Center	2/3	Bachelor	<30	Female
28.	K	Program manager	Street & drop-in	5	Not known	<40	Male
29.	K	Teacher	Drop-in center	3	Not known	<30	Female
30.	K	Program coordinator	Street & drop-in	5	Not known	<50	Male
31.	L	Social Worker	Drop-in center and streets	1	Bachelors	<30	Female
32.	L	Social Worker	Street & drop-in	1	Bachelors	<30	Male

\* I did not directly ask education background of the participants because it seemed inappropriate to do so. Some voluntarily gave this information.

## **Participant recruitment**

The sample was recruited in Kathmandu Valley. I started by using my social network to contact NGOs and their staff. During my previous visits to Nepal, I had consulted about my research with frontline workers and management level staff of NGOs offering services to street young people. Therefore, I knew many NGOs and staff when I went to collect data for this study. They referred me to a national alliance of organizations working with street children, which was also sampled in this study. This alliance supported and facilitated the recruitment by sending emails to its member organizations explaining the study. When I visited the NGOs, many were already familiar with my study. I sought approval from senior management staff to interview their frontline workers. Upon receiving this, I contacted workers. In some cases, management level staff introduced me to the workers.

There was a different recruitment process for the young people. Street children and youth congregated on the streets in small groups. Thus, to recruit a group was to recruit individuals. Since street children and youth congregated non-randomly and were regulars at certain geographic areas, going to these areas was, in effect, selecting specific groups that were more or less stable in membership. Therefore, recruitment was done in three geographic areas of Kathmandu, but it included young people from four geographical areas. Recruitment was done with the help of two youth workers facilitating data collection.

Twenty-three young people were recruited after multiple field visits by workers who were not directly working these young people at the time of data collection. To

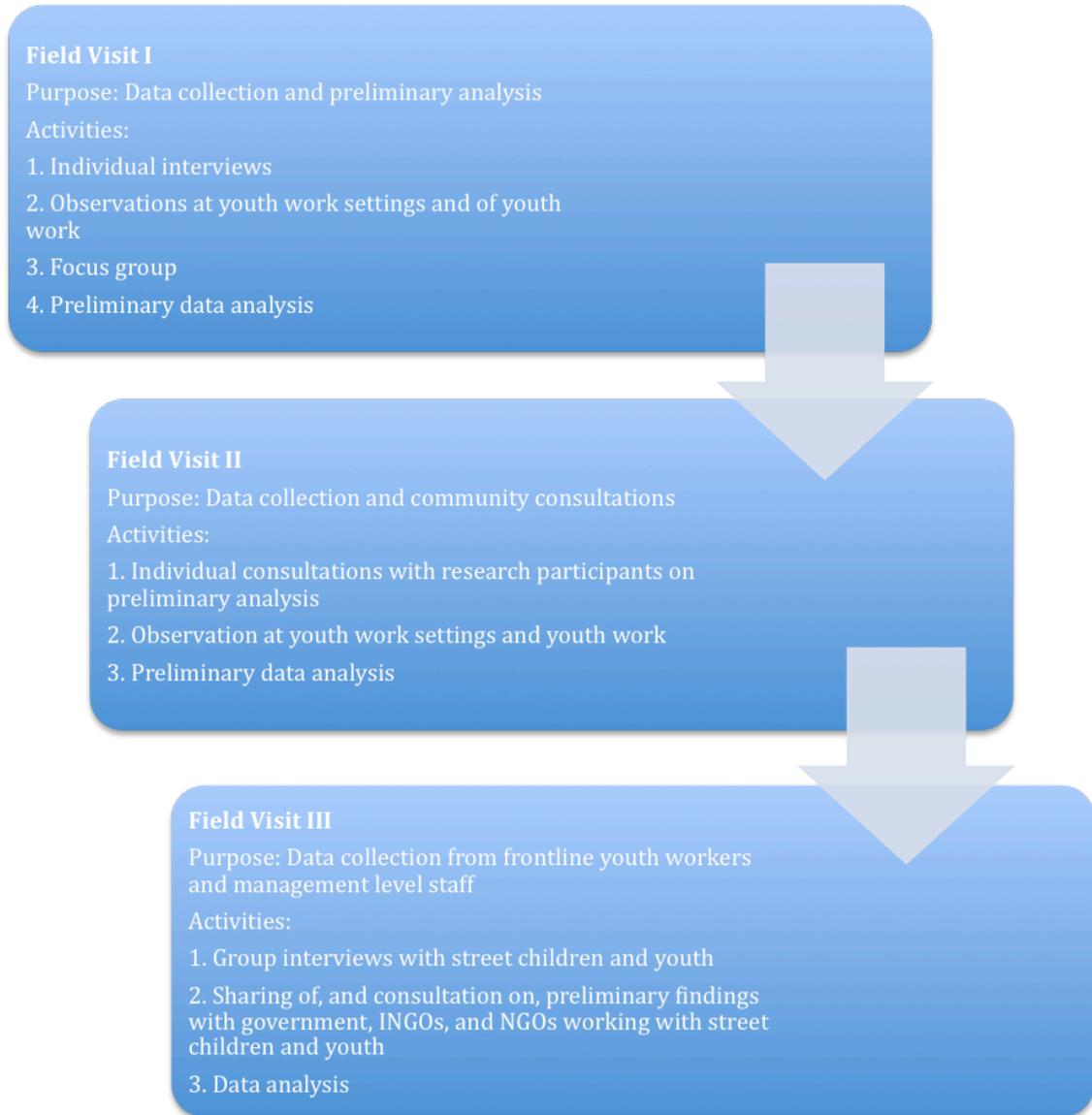
protect the identity of these young people and to encourage young people to participate in the study, they were not asked any personal information, such as name, age, and length of stay on the streets.

While all workers and management level staff read and signed a consent form, young people were explained the study orally, and they orally agreed to participate. Because most street children and youth neither read nor wrote, oral consent to participate in this study was reasonable. Before the interviews, the study was explained to the young people, allowing them to ask questions and to consider their participation. Since street children and youth lived on the streets in small groups and not with their parents or guardians, they individually and collectively made their own everyday life-choices and decisions. This was recognized by the local practice of NGOs offering services to street children and youth without adult or parental consent. I conformed to this local practice by seeking informed oral consent only from street children and youth.

### **Compensation**

Each youth worker participant received NRS 150 (approximately USD 2.5) as compensation for participating in each in-depth interview, and another NRS 150 for participating in a focus group. Young people were offered snacks at local teashops during preliminary recruitment as part of building contacts and were given a meal after the interview.

**Figure 2: Data collection phases**



**Research facilitators**

Two youth workers experienced in working with Nepali street children were contracted to facilitate data collection with the young people. They were selected based on recommendations from youth workers and my interactions with them. At the time of data collection, these two workers were doing youth work but not with street children and

youth. Also, these two workers were known by street children and youth to be no longer working with them, thus eliminating a potential conflict of interest for the workers and for the children who could have wondered if their participation in the study was linked in some way to services for them.

### **Data collection tools and process**

The purpose of the study determined the data collection tools. The study's purpose required me to collect descriptions, lived-experiences, and the meanings of youth work to the workers, management level staff, and street young people. To collect data, I used individual and group interviews, a focus group, and observations.

#### **Individual and group interviews**

An in-depth semi-structured interview was used to collect data from workers and management level staff. This data collection tool allowed me to “dig below the surface” to examine, explore, and collect detailed account of the study participants' experiences and understanding of youth work (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 141; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). One individual interview was conducted with all adult research participants; of these, five participants were interviewed twice for more information. The interview guide (see Appendix 1 & 2) lists the general questions explored. The interview questions were open and adaptable, which allowed me to “dig deeper” and collect rich data.

Street young people were interviewed in their natural occurring peer groups. The interviews were conducted in their groups because this was how these street children and youth spent time on the street. In addition, workers said that street children were generally reluctant to participate in individual interviews. It was also assumed that

interviewing in such groups likely reduced the power imbalance between the researcher and the young participants, likely making it more comfortable for young people to freely answer questions and express opinions. Group interviews provided safety and opportunities for street children and youth to participate in this research. Some who only wanted to listen to the interviews were able to say so, and some who said they would only listen decided to talk after a few minutes of listening to the questions and also listening to their peers' responses. The interviews focused on street young people's perceptions and experiences of youth work and youth workers. Because the interviews did not focus on their lives on the streets, these young people – both leaders and group members – seemed to be comfortable frankly talking about youth workers and NGO services. Seven group interviews were done, and the number of participants in each group ranged from three to six.

### **Focus groups**

Only one focus group was done with frontline youth workers. Given their work hours, it was challenging to schedule this. The workers did not want to do the focus group during weekends or after work on weekdays, and their managers were reluctant to send their staff to a focus group during work time. In the end, a compromise was reached. The interview was conducted on a Friday, at 4 PM. This allowed the workers to use one hour of work time and contribute one hour of their personal time to this. The meeting lasted about two hours. There were 14 participants and all actively participated. The discussion focused on emergent themes of youth work practice in street outreach, drop-in centers, and transition homes. This focus group provided space for the workers to collectively, as

well as individually, articulate their perspectives and experiences and also allowed me to explore the depth and breadth of their everyday youth work practice (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

### **Observation**

Participant observation of actual frontline youth work practice was done in all three settings. In my second field visit, I went with two workers on street outreach at night. We visited two locations. In one location, young people were not there. In the second, the workers engaged a large group of young people for about two hours. One worker offered medical services, while the other joined the group and talked with the boys. I spent time helping a youth worker who was offering first aid services. While doing so, I observed interactions between and among youth workers and young people.

I visited drop-in centers and transition homes several times in the first and second phase of the study. I “hung-out” in these places before or after the interviews. During my second phase of field visits, I went to two drop-in centers and a transition home to consult with workers and spend time there. Workers invited me to watch young people practice dance, to sit and chat in areas where the youth were washing clothes, and to listen to a worker sharing her hiking experience with young people. These observations were additional sources of data for triangulation.

### **Field notes**

During data collection, I maintained a notebook in which I wrote reflection notes on the research activities and research process. In this notebook, I wrote down reflections on the interviews, and ideas and questions that emerged. This notebook was used also to

keep records of participant recruitment and sampling. These notes were data that facilitated my understanding of the settings and the study participants (Patton, 2002).

These notes also helped me reflect on my own identities and how they influenced the research process (Hammersley, 2003). In this research, I was an insider as a Nepali and I was also a woman. Being an insider facilitated participant recruitment and interviews. It was easier to contact potential research participants and explain them the study. When people did not keep their appointments and refused to answer phone calls, I understood they did not want to participate. During the interviews, when participants evaded a question or said, “This is probably not important,” I sensed their discomfort and knew not to pursue the question. This happened mostly when I brought up questions about donor agencies. Many participants did not want to talk about their donors. Given the financial uncertainty in which these workers worked, I understood that they wanted to be cautious about what they said about program funders.

As an insider, I easily gained interview participants’ trust and support for my study. Management level staff viewed this study as useful to their community. Workers seemed comfortable talking to me. They called me, “Sheetal Miss,” a local way of addressing a female colleague. They were also supportive because I was a Nepali woman and about to get a PhD. One worker spent an afternoon trying to convince me that I should return to Nepal upon graduation. Another management level staff introduced me to a colleague as a “future consultant.” The young boys on the streets seemed accustomed to people interviewing them, and it helped that I talked to them in Nepali.

As a woman, I occasionally experienced some level of discomfort during interviews or in scheduling interviews. Male workers did not mention sexual activities or sexual abuse of street young people until I brought up the topic. Even then, they seemed to assess my comfort level when they talked about it. And, there was a slight misunderstanding when setting up interviews. In the initial phase, most interviews were being done inside the agency. To me, this did not feel like a relaxed environment. Therefore, I started to invite people to a coffee shop for the interview. While many agreed and came to the coffee shop, a couple of workers misinterpreted this invitation. A worker who had agreed to participate in the study made excuses to not come, while his colleague casually asked me if I would go out for a coffee with him.

As a woman, I was also protected. In interviews with street children, facilitators explicitly set ground rules with them about not using “dirty language” during conversations. In one site, some young people were playing football near the interview site. The football hit me on my back. It was not clear if this was an accident or intentional. A couple boys we were interviewing started to argue with those playing the game, as one older youth tried to dust off the dirt from my clothes. He may have done this out of care, but I found it to be culturally inappropriate and had to step back as a way to stop him. These were experiences of local socio-cultural gender norms and gender-based practices. It also helped my understanding of how women workers may experience this work.

### **Recording and managing data**

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in Nepali language and tape-recorded with the interviewees' consent. A data transcriber was recruited and trained on human subject protection. The transcriber was asked to sign a contract agreeing to maintain confidentiality of the participants. This transcriber transcribed voice data verbatim in the Nepali language. I spent months translating the interviews into English. Voice and text data were saved in my computer. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. A folder was created for each participant and voice and text data were filed there. These folders were password protected.

### **Data analysis and interpretation**

Analysis of the data collected for this study began during the fieldwork, as is typical in qualitative field studies (Patton, 2002). In many qualitative studies, the ideas for making sense of the data emerge during data collection, and the researcher continuously engages in testing if an interpretation makes sense (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, data analysis was a part of the fieldwork and guided sampling and data collection. Evolving interpretations, themes, and contradictions in interview data were shared with subsequent interviewees and follow up questions and clarifications were asked. Emergent themes were discussed in a focus group with 12 participants and individually. Data coding and analysis were done using qualitative data analysis software, HyperRESEARCH.

## **Data coding and interpretation**

In qualitative research, coding is a systematic process of condensing raw data into analytical themes, patterns, categories, and concepts in a way that helps in organizing and interpreting the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In interpretive research, concepts, categories, and relationships between categories are not predetermined; rather they emerge from data analysis (Cote, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). In this study, data analysis began in the field. After returning to the U.S., data were analyzed using open coding and axial coding methods proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990), since these two coding process facilitate interpretive data analysis. Coding was done using the qualitative data analysis software, HyperRESEARCH.

Open coding is an interpretive process by which large sets of textual data are broken-down analytically into manageable categories and sub-categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This is done by reading textual data line by line and assigning conceptual labels. In this study, the translation of textual data into English was one process of open coding. Upon completing the translations, I re-read and coded the data. In doing so, I looked for similar concepts across the three youth work settings. And then I coded for differences in youth work in these settings. Also, I coded for agreement and discrepancy in the data. This process required me to go back to the data multiple times. Through this process, similar codes were grouped together to form categories and subcategories. These were shared with six research participants for feedback during my second field visits. These workers judged my analysis to be on the “right track” and offered additional explanations.

The second stage of coding was axial coding. In axial coding, categories and sub-categories were further developed. Using data from second field visit, I modified existing codes and developed new ones. I continually read and re-read data and codes to identify patterns and relationships. I started writing down my interpretations of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). At this stage, a third field visit was done. In this visit, preliminary findings were shared with government, NGO, and INGO representatives for feedback, and data were collected with street young people. These additional data required me to go back to coding data again. Subcategories and categories were re-developed, and agreements and discrepancies between different data sources were identified and coded. These and literature review were used to develop relationships between the categories and subcategories. Through this process, data was analyzed and interpreted.

### **Strategies for research rigor**

The criteria for judging research rigor vary according to the epistemological base of the research. Research based on interpretive epistemology focuses on meanings and understanding of an action, interaction, or a phenomenon as it occurs in a particular context. These understandings and interpretations of a reality vary depending on the contexts and on the participants' personal histories and biographies (Smith, 2008). Therefore, findings from such studies are framed as interpretations of a reality, and there is no one true or valid interpretation, only more or less reasoned and useful interpretations for one's practical purpose-at-hand.

In such qualitative studies, “rigor” is determined by establishing the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data, researcher, and the interpretive community used. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe four aspects of trustworthiness: 1) Credibility, which examines whether or not the research findings represent as closely as possible the experiences of the study participants; 2) Transferability, which examines the extent to which there is thick descriptions of the population or phenomena being studied that enable others to make judgments about whether the findings can be applied to other contexts and other populations; 3) Dependability, which is an assessment of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation to ensure that if the study were replicated with the same or similar participants in the same or a similar context, findings would be consistent; and 4) Confirmability, which is the extent to which the findings emerge from data and not researcher bias. This proposed study established trustworthiness and authenticity in the following way:

Data translations: There may be more issues related to meaning and interpretation when someone other than the researcher translates the data. To minimize these issues, I translated all data from Nepali to English. Data translation took more than two months. Other than this, there was little problem in translating data, as Nepali is my native language.

Triangulation of the data: Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to collect data central to the study’s research question to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2002). To guard against biases and inaccuracies in the self-reported information, data was collected from three respondent groups – frontline

youth workers, their managers, and street young people. Also, data was collected using different methods: individual and group interviews, focus group, reflection and observation notes.

Using an interpretive community: To help me analyze the data and check my interpretation, I sought guidance from two interpretive communities –my doctoral committee members and Nepali colleagues who were doing this work. One youth worker became my field guide. I talked to him regularly in all phases of my data collection about ideas, confusions, questions, and emergent themes.

Conducting member checks: Evolving interpretations were shared with participants in individual interviews and focus groups. Broad themes were shared with government, INGO and NGO representatives for feedback. This way of asking for direct feedback has been described as one of the best ways to avoid misinterpretation.

Negative case analysis: During data collection and preliminary analysis, I searched for data that were inconsistent with the emerging general pattern. The inconsistencies were found particularly between data from workers and from young people. These inconsistencies were used to revise, broaden, or confirm variations in emerging patterns from the preliminary data analysis.

Audit trail: Data collection and analysis processes were documented in detail. This included raw data, notes on data collection, and notes on the process of data analysis. Reflection notes on data collection and data analysis processes were also a part of the audit trail.

## **Ethical Issues**

During fieldwork, as researchers enter study participants' lives through in-depth interviews, observations, and other qualitative data collection tools, it is likely that researchers come across a range of ethical issues (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Because of this, it is important to develop strategies to prevent and effectively and respectfully manage ethical issues arising in the fieldwork. This section presents strategies used in this study to ensure high ethical standards.

### **Protection of human subjects**

Potential risks to study participants were minimal in nature and included inadvertent and unauthorized disclosure of the study participants' private information, potential problem, or barrier to their work or to receiving services. The following measures were taken to protect the study participants from such risks:

Recruitment and informed consent – Participants for this study were recruited only after their consent to participate was given. The consent form was translated into Nepali and was given to potential study participants. Before handing out the consent form, I orally explained in Nepali the contents and purpose of the form, including: 1) the purpose of the study, 2) study sample and sample selection process, 3) data collection process, 4) type of questions that will be asked, 5) measures to ensure privacy of the data collected, 6) monetary compensation, 7) their rights to agree or refuse to participate, and 8) if they agree, their rights to drop out of the study.

From the young people, oral consent was sought. The consent form was simplified with language easy to understand and this form was explained to the young

people. They were asked to nod yes or no. The facilitators explained to all participants that their participation is entirely voluntary and that their refusal to participate in the study will not have any consequences. Some young people wanted to remain in their group and only listen to their peers talk. Since the interviews took place in their “home” environment, it did not seem ethical to ask them to leave their group. They stayed and were compensated with a meal like the others who did the interview.

Confidentiality – To maintain the participant’s confidentiality, their names were changed to pseudonyms and all other identifiers were removed from the data. In the interviews, participants were asked to not mention their names or agencies. Pseudonyms were used in all written records. Only the researcher and data transcriber had access to voice data. The data transcriber was contractually obligated to maintain confidentiality. Data have been saved and stored in my computer in password protected folders.

Protection from discomfort - At the beginning of each interview, study participants were informed that they can refuse to answer any questions, they do not have to discuss events and experiences that make them uncomfortable, and they can end the interview session whenever they wish. During the interview, some workers evaded the question by talking about something other than the question asked, or by saying, “this may not be important to the study.” I understood these signs as discomfort and changed the topic.

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Minnesota approved these measures. Any contacts with research participants and field visits were made only after receiving the IRB approval for the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I note three limitations of this study. First, this study examined frontline youth work of only NGOs. There were many churches also offering street outreach and transition home services. The work of these two types of organizations could vary, but examining and exploring such variations was beyond the scope of this study. Second, data were not collected from street girls. During data collection with young people, we found only boys in the locations visited. Because data were to be collected in naturally occurring groups, the facilitators and I did not attempt to seek out individual girls. A final limitation is related to issues of generalizing the findings. The focus of this study is situating frontline youth work practice in the specific context of Nepal. Findings are limited to the research site intentionally and by the research design.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Situating youth work practice in Nepal**

It is crucial that a study of the nature and practice of frontline youth work examine the institutional and socio-cultural environments within which this work is embedded (Ritzer, 1989). This is important because work exists in a broader context and influences, as well as is influenced by, this broader context (Ritzer, 1989; Watson, 2009). In Nepal, present in the institutional environment of this frontline youth work were government organizations, international governmental and non-governmental organizations (IGOs and INGOs), and local NGOs. These organizations were positioned at different levels of the inter-organizational hierarchy and worked directly or indirectly for street young people. The socio-cultural environment included the caste system, traditional gender roles, and socio-cultural views of children and young people. These aspects of the institutional and socio-cultural environment influenced, guided, and gave meaning to frontline youth work as a field, and as practice.

In this chapter, these various components of the institutional and socio cultural environment are described. I begin by describing the institutional environment of youth work in Nepal. To do so, I use institutional theory as a guide, and first illustrate core elements of this theory. Then, I examine various types of organizations that are working for (and with) street children and youth and illustrate the linkages between these organizations. Next, I briefly present aspects of Nepali socio-cultural practices that directly or indirectly influence the workers and their everyday practice. All this situates frontline youth work practice in Kathmandu, Nepal.

### **Institutional theory and institutional context of frontline youth work**

Institutional theory examines the influence and roles of organizations in an institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, Scott, 2007). According to this theory, an institutional environment has a group of organizations that share certain common characteristics, like goals, focus beneficiaries, or services offered. These organizations co-exist and are interrelated in ways where some exercise power and control over the others. These controlling organizations are called “authoritative bodies of an institutional environment,” and they could be government agencies, intergovernmental agencies, and professional associations. One way these authoritative bodies control other organizations is by imposing on them via policy, funding, and licensing, and with certain rules and norms regarding what, when, how, and where work can be done (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The non-authoritative organizations follow these rules and norms because doing so can increase their legitimacy, as well as access to financial and other resources from the institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2007).

One outcome of non-authoritative organizations conforming to the rules and norms of authoritative bodies could be that these non-authoritative organizations become similar in terms of their values, characteristics, and practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1993; Scott, 2007). For example, in Nepal, NGOs adopt values and approaches of the international governmental and non-governmental organizations because doing so increased their chances of securing funding. Perhaps because of this, these NGOs offer similar services with similar philosophies, ethos, and approaches, as

will be shown. However, this does not mean that all organizations in an institutional environment are the same. There are also complementarities, differences, and even conflict between and among them.

The institutional theory guides in accounting for this variation in the practices of organizations within an institutional environment. According to this theory, differences between organizations arise when authoritative bodies have diverging policies, values, goals, and practice models (Scott, 2007). In such situations, organizations can choose from, align with, or negotiate with the authoritative bodies on their rules and policies. For example, in frontline youth work with street children in Nepal, government standards and policies existed, but these were not rigidly enforced. This gave flexibility for non-governmental organizations to adopt rules that most benefit them. At the same time, international organizations had varying rules, philosophies, and ethos, which the NGOs followed as part of their funding agreement. Additionally, these organizations and their leaders may not always passively respond to the rules and norms of their environment. Instead, they may use a range of strategies to compromise, avoid, defy, or manipulate the rules and norms (Oliver, 1991).

This institutional theory is of specific relevance to situating youth work practice in Nepal because the rules workers comply with, the formal and informal support they receive, and the materials and resources they have access to profoundly influence their everyday youth work practice. This institutional theory is used to examine the roles of, and relationships between and among, organizations working directly and indirectly for street children and youth.

## **Government Agencies**

In Nepal, many government agencies directly or indirectly influenced local NGOs' work with street children and youth. Of these, two government agencies in particular acted as “authoritative bodies” in the institutional environment of frontline youth work: the Central Child Welfare Board (the Board) and the Social Welfare Council (SWC). Other government agencies also a part of this institutional environment included the municipal government and the local police of the study site, Kathmandu valley.

### **The Central Child Welfare Board (the Board)**

The Central Child Welfare Board was a statutory body created by the Children's Act of 1992 and was administratively under the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare (the Ministry) (Central Child Welfare Board, 2012). This Board was responsible for promoting and ensuring the rights and wellbeing of Nepali children as specified in the Children's Act (1992) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC). To do so, the Board, and by extension the Ministry, nationally coordinated children-related policies and programs of all other governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental agencies. For example, the Board collaborated with various international organizations, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Plan International to ensure and protect the rights of Nepali children (Central Child Welfare Board, 2012). At the local level, this Board coordinated with its local branches, the District Child Welfare Boards, to monitor local-level development programs for children. In addition to coordinating children-related policy and programs, the Board collected data on the situation of Nepali children and monitored as well as evaluated Nepal's progress towards

achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Government of Nepal, 2006).

In practice, the Board seemed weak in implementing their policies and other responsibilities. There were reports of the Board not adequately and regularly monitoring the NGOs adhering to policies and standards of practice related to protecting child rights. For example, a 2005 report by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that the Board developed guidelines on the minimum standards for children's homes, but there was weak monitoring of its implementation (UN, 2005). Also, children living in these homes did not have appropriate and safe ways to file complaints to responsible authorities (UN, 2005). This has direct implications for work with street children because many live in these homes as a way to transition off the streets. In regards to working with street children, NGO workers and management level staff said that the Board had limited expertise and experience in responding to the needs of street children and youth.

The Board's responsibilities for child welfare also extended to street children and youth, making it one of the authoritative bodies in the institutional environment of frontline youth work. The Board prepared The Ten-Year National Plan of Action for Children (2004/5-2014/15), which identified street children as one of the "marginalized groups" and highlighted the need for the prevention of the larger "street children problem" and for their "rehabilitation" (Government of Nepal, 2004, p. 71). In the Plan, these young people were prioritized for education, health, and other services. To address these needs, the Board worked in partnership with local and international organizations. In the last few years, the government through the Board allocated funding to NGOs for

“reintegration” of street children into their family and society. However, the focus of the Board was “elimination” of the “street children problem” and it “failed to understand” that these young people could not be “forcefully reintegrated,” said NGO workers. For example, Rohit, NGO management level staff, explained:

Street children need long-term support. The government does not understand or try to understand that. We cannot round them [children] up and institutionalize them or forcefully send them home. We cannot reintegrate street children by force. That is not a solution. There should be timely response from different communities, government, and non-government agencies. The government should take the lead, and there should be coordination between government offices. But this is not happening.

Furthermore, the government did not seem to recognize that family reintegration does not always mean that these children are safe and protected, particularly considering that many young people chose the streets because of family abuse or because their families were economically unable to provide for them, or may even be economically dependent on them.

The Board’s work was directly related to promoting the wellbeing of street children and youth, but it was a weak authoritative body. It provided little guidance and support to the NGOs on how to work with these young people. But the Board was not the only agency in the institutional environment of frontline youth work in Nepal. Other government bodies also regulated this work. One such government agency that in theory could play a prominent role was the Social Welfare Council.

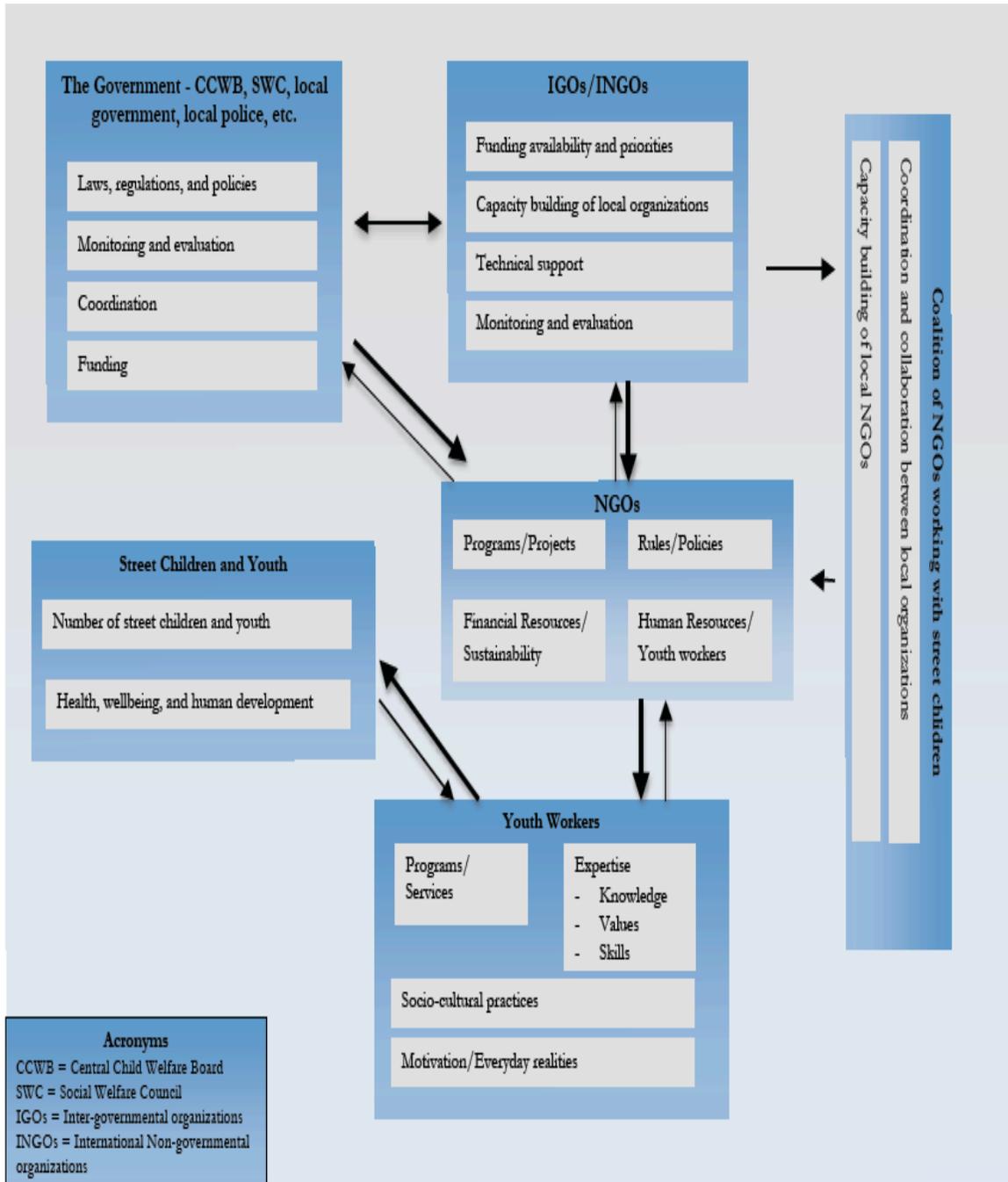
### **Social Welfare Council (SWC)**

The SWC was established under the Social Welfare Act of 1992 to promote, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the activities of NGOs and INGOs in Nepal. Any

INGO interested in working in Nepal had to obtain a permit from, and sign an agreement with, the SWC. The SWC had the authority to grant or reject an INGO's project proposal based on the SWC's assessment of the project as fulfilling the "national development interest." If the project was approved, SWC helped the INGO establish connections with relevant government ministries and agencies and offered it guidance and administrative support, such as help with obtaining work permits and visas for INGO employees (Social Welfare Council, 2012). In addition to coordinating the work of INGOs, the SWC regularly monitored their work. As per the SWC-INGO agreement, all INGOs had to submit to the SWC bi-annual project reports. This report needed to include financial status of the INGO's projects. Moreover, the SWC required the INGOs to implement their project in partnership with local NGOs. This last point was crucial for this study, as local NGOs offering services for street young people had INGO partners.

The SWC also coordinated the work of local, domestic NGOs. These NGOs could register either with the SWC or with their Chief District Officer's office. However, the SWC required domestic NGOs to submit them their project details and seek SWC's approval if they were seeking financial, technical, or commodity support from Nepali government, or from IGOs, and INGOs (Dhakal, 2007). In turn, the SWC helped local NGOs develop partnerships with IGOS/INGOs to implement local-level projects and programs. As of March 2012, the number of NGOs registered at the SWC was 30,284 (SWC, 2012).

**Figure 3: The Institutional setting of frontline youth work in Nepal**



The SWC was an “authoritative body” that coordinated the activities of NGOs and INGOs. But in practice, its work was ineffective, as reflected in local NGOs coordination problems in their work with street children and youth. In part, this SWC’s ineffectiveness was attributed to internal conflict and the political instability of Nepal over the last two decades (Dhakal, 2007). Irrespective of the reasons, both the Board and the SWC, as authoritative bodies, in the institutional environment of frontline youth work, weakly controlled and weakly regulated the work of local NGOs and INGOs. In addition to these two large government bodies, local NGOs worked with municipal and district governments. These, too, had the authority to regulate NGOs.

#### **Municipal and district governments and local police**

The municipal and district governments, along with the police, were also a part of the institutional environment of frontline youth work. Several aspects of NGOs’ work and local government’s work intersected. In work with children, given the Ten-Year National Plan of Action for Children (Government of Nepal, 2004), both local governments and NGOs could be working on similar programs, particularly those focusing on education and health for “vulnerable and marginalized children.” These local governments could also play key roles in the prevention and early response to children and youth who run away from homes. However, NGO workers and managers talked about local governments as not being involved in their work. As Sabin, a frontline youth worker, said:

Whose responsibility is it to address the root cause of this problem? Local governments should be playing the main role, but they do not give importance to this issue. The government does not prioritize this issue. They are not addressing the root cause of this problem. The root cause is their families. Families should be

responsible for their children. And if the families are unable to take on their responsibilities, then the government should intervene. Right now, all the responsibilities lie in NGOs that work with street children.

On the other hand, NGO workers viewed the local police as becoming more supportive of their work with street young people. The local police sometimes worked with local NGOs on issues related to street children. For example, one NGO said that it submitted to police a copy of the profile of all young people living at their centers to help the police keep track of these young people, in case their parents looked for them. This was viewed as important because parental consent to work with these young people was neither required by law nor practiced by local NGOs. Workers noted that there was an increased level of awareness about street children among the police. For example, two workers described the changes in the police's perceptions of their work in the following way:

Bijay: The police used to say we are encouraging the kids, or taking cuts from their income. I used to tell them, "You must not think that about us. We need your help. Street kids are not only our responsibility; they are also our society's and government's responsibility. We should work together to make sure they change themselves." I think the police understand now, and they've known me for a while now.

Anita: In the beginning, it was very difficult for us to explain to the police about street children. Now, they have more awareness about this phenomenon. They used to call our organization "a place that supports thieves." When I went to the police station, they used to say, "Oh, you are back again?" We have to go there because our kids often get locked up. When we go there, the police used to say we are encouraging kids to engage in criminal activities. It was difficult because the police did not understand street children or our work. But now they understand our work because media has written so much about street children, and there are many NGOs and INGOs working with government to address this issue. So there is more awareness now among police about the problems of street children.

Although the police were becoming more responsive, the government's overall response to these young people was inadequate and that posed challenges for NGOs trying to work effectively and in sustainable ways. This resulted in ad hoc implementation of programs and projects, duplication of work, and NGOs both competing and coordinating with each other. Furthermore, this situation indirectly empowered NGOs and INGOs to set their own policies and rules regarding how to work with street children, what services to provide to them, when or who to reintegrate to their families, how much control should be given to parents to make decision on behalf of their children, and the like. More importantly, this situation made IGOs/INGOs influential authoritative bodies in the institutional environment of frontline youth work.

#### **Inter-governmental and International non-governmental organizations**

IGOs/INGOs were an integral part of work with street children and youth, and they were “authoritative bodies” in this institutional environment. Through their funding, these international organizations controlled the type of projects that were implemented, the population focused on, and the models and approaches used in implementing these projects. In doing so, IGOs/INGOs diffused their knowledge, philosophies, ethos, and practices to NGOs' work and practices.

To understand IGOs' and INGOs' role in work with street children and youth in Nepal, it is important to understand the overall nature of their support to developing countries. Across the world, in developing countries, many IGOs and INGOs are actively involved in various types of “development work,” including policy and program formulation and implementation. They provide financial and technical assistance,

including money and expertise. By doing so, these international organizations gave impetus to local development activities, and they also directly and indirectly controlled the larger development agenda of these countries (Wallace, et al., 2007; Elbers & Arts, 2011).

One way of maintaining control was through the IGOs/INGOs' funding priorities and prerequisites. Historically, the priorities of international agencies have shifted frequently and this has tended to change international assistance given to developing countries and how they were to be used (Justice, 1986). As funding from international agencies become available to address specific issues for a specific time-period, many local NGOs apply for those funding, even when the funding is not directly related to the NGOs' primary mission and goals (Elbers & Arts, 2011). This is done because chances may be low for receiving funding on issues that do not fit the interests of these international organizations. Thus, in their efforts to secure funding and financially sustain their organization, NGOs often compromised their own interests and priorities (Herman & Renz, 1997, Wallace, et al., 2007).

In these and other ways, international organizations influenced local NGOs – their focus, priorities, and practices. One of the ways local NGOs increased their credibility with IGO/INGO was by using programmatic and practice approaches promoted by these international agencies. Often, a part of IGOs/INGOs' assistance is capacity building of the local NGOs and monitoring progress of the funded projects (Hinton & Groves, 2004; Wallace, et al., 2007; Elbers & Arts, 2011). In this, international funding agencies provide capacity-building training to staff from government agencies and NGOs. They

may even assign expert staff to their partner NGOs to oversee and supervise the NGOs' work, as was found in NGOs working with street children in Nepal. Occasionally, some of these international organizations conduct studies to assess specific social situations and to monitor progress toward certain development goals. These practices can shape the work of local NGOs, including those working with street children and youth.

In Nepal, many IGOs/INGOs funded NGOs' programs and services to address what is seen as the problem of street children and youth. Some INGOs maintained long-term partnerships with local NGOs and closely supervised and monitored the work of these NGOs, in addition to financially supporting them. These particular NGOs included in their top management staff, foreign nationals assigned by their partner INGOs. Other NGOs brought in project-based funding for different programs from large IGOs/INGOs, like UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International, ECPAT, Street Kids International, and the like. These international organizations mostly funded short-term projects with specific foci and working toward specific results, and they tended to overlook sustainability of the NGOs' work with these young people.

In addition to funding NGOs' programs and services for street young people, IGOs/INGOs supported capacity building of NGOs and their staff. Workers stated they were trained on various topics related to working with street children and youth, such as child rights, sexual abuse, psychosocial counseling, and the like. Some INGOs provided capacity building training specifically to their partner NGOs, while others focused more broadly and offered training to all NGOs workers. On another level, there was IGO support for creating and sustaining a national alliance of NGOs working with street

children, and this alliance offered training to staff from different NGOs. Such training in part led to a common understanding of, as well as skills for, frontline youth work practice among youth workers across NGOs.

In summary, IGOs and INGOs were influential organizations in the institutional environment of frontline youth work with street children and youth in Nepal. They led, taught, and controlled work with street children and youth and directly or indirectly shaped direct youth work practice.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

In the institutional environment of frontline youth work, NGOs were the implementing agencies and frontline youth workers were NGO employees. These workers and their work were directly influenced by policies and practices of their employer NGOs. To understand these employer NGOs and their work, I first examine Nepali NGOs in general.

Local Nepali NGOs were relatively new to the country's development field. Their number and roles in local development increased only after 1990, when the country transitioned from absolute monarchy to a multiparty democracy (Chand, 2000; Bennett, 2005). This means that these NGOs were also relatively young in their understanding and practices of local development, including working together or in coordination with other organizations, as will be shown. These NGOs were diverse in their mission, scope, client base, and activities (Chand, 2000). Crucially, as the government's development partners, they were supplementary as well as basic to filling the vacuum left by the absence of government services, as is reflected in their work with street children.

These NGOs worked in an environment of financial uncertainty. They relied heavily on funding from international sources, mainly IGOs/INGOs, and international private charities. As discussed, IGO/INGO funding shaped much of local NGOs' work. This funding determined NGOs' project activities, as well as their outputs and outcomes. To be able to secure future funding, NGOs focused on demonstrating their value and effectiveness more to their donor organizations and not so much to their beneficiaries, it was said. Perhaps, this was partly the reason for a widespread distrust of NGOs and their work by the general public.

These Nepali NGOs worked in an environment of public distrust. A common understanding of these NGOs among the general public was that they were fraudulent and corrupt. They were said to be formed and staffed by relatives and friends, who take home as salaries a majority of funds received by the NGOs. They were viewed as not doing what they say or report. To the general public, NGOs represented "dollars." These perceptions may be realities for some NGOs, but there is no research in Nepal to support this. Furthermore, the absence of a standard way to track NGO activities, expenditures, or administrative costs further contributed to perpetuating these perceptions and/or realities (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011). This view of all Nepali NGOs also extended to local NGOs working with street children and youth, which in turn influenced the public's and the young people's understanding of frontline youth work.

Many Nepali NGOs offered, or included in their future activities plans, programs, and services for street children (Southon & Dakhal, 2003). The exact number of NGOs offering services to street children and youth was not known. What was known is that

these NGOs were diverse, and could be categorized into three broad types: those with fairly long histories of working with street children and youth, those that offered services to orphan children or children living in poverty, and as part of this, also offered services to street children and youth; and those seemingly opportunistic NGOs, that worked with street children when they were able to get funding to do so. Being driven by funding was a common characteristic of the work of all these NGOs. This had several implications for their work with street young people.

All three types of NGOs programs and services were offered if and when funding became available and terminated their work when funding ended. For example, during my first field visit, a worker interviewed was employed in an NGO that had been established six months ago. He said that his employer agency had funding for only one year, and yet, one of its services was long-term transition home for street children. In my third field visit for this study, this NGO had re-directed its work to children living in slum areas and no longer operated the transition home. A staff of another NGO reported that her agency had scaled back its programs for street children because program funding ended and it was unable to secure funding from other international donors. It must also be noted that there were other NGOs that worked closely with their international partners and were consistently providing services to the young people over five years. Yet, the ad hoc programs of most NGOs was read by the young people and the general public that the NGOs' primary concern was more on securing funding and sustaining their agencies than sustaining their commitment to the young people. Also, this suggests that programs were offered in response to funding availability and not so much in response to young

people's needs. In this, Nepali NGOs may not be much different than those in other countries. However, the Nepali interpretation differs from elsewhere, likely because of public frustration with governmental turmoil and corruption.

This funding-driven work also meant that NGOs had to demonstrate to IGOs/INGOs that their work was effective if they were to secure further funding. In this, program outputs were seen as an important measure of effectiveness, even though outputs do not guarantee positive outcomes for the young people. Moreover, in this work both outputs and outcomes are hard to achieve (Scanlon, 1998). As Padam explained:

If we mention in a project proposal that we will work with certain number of children, we have to show in the project report that we have reached our target number. Sometimes that is not possible. For example, there was a youth who lived in our organization for almost five years. He received vocational training, and we were working on reintegrating him. But he dropped out. After staying in our organization for almost five years, he returned to the street. He is now on the street and doing drugs. This is a reality of our work. They (young people) can relapse at any time. Even those who we say are "reintegrated" can relapse. Success in this work is uncertain. But we have to show that we have achieved our targeted outputs in our reports to donors.

Most often, program outputs were measured in terms of the number of people "reintegrated." Perhaps as a way to increase their output, NGOs prioritized secondary prevention. This meant serving those young people who had recently come to the streets. These young people were viewed as "easier to work with" and as having "higher likelihood of leaving the streets." This again shows that at least some of the NGOs' accountability was to their donor agencies.

Another aspect of this funding-driven work was the similarities found in the NGOs' program models and approaches. For example, the workers and management level staff interviewed were employed in NGOs offering services that included, in

different combinations, street outreach, drop-in centers, and long-term transition homes. These service similarities could be an outcome of IGO/INGO support. Given that the government was marginally involved in this work, the INGOs became stronger “authoritative bodies” in the institutional environment of frontline youth work, and models and approaches used resembled those used in Western countries. That is, what the frontline youth worker did and how he did this may be more driven by the funding agency than by the actual children and youth he was serving.

This funding-driven work also led local NGOs to collaborate, as well as compete, with other local NGOs. Youth workers and management-level staff reported referring young people to other NGOs when these young people needed services not offered by their NGOs. For example, most NGOs offered services to street boys, and they referred girls to NGOs offering services to them. At the same time, management level staff talked about distrust between NGOs because there was competition for international funding. Workers reported that NGOs were “secretive” about their funding. It was also learned in the interviews that a majority of workers and their managers did not want to talk about their donor agencies. Also, workers and managers talked about how their own programs and services were more effective than those of other NGOs. According to workers, the competition and minimal coordination led to duplication of work, duplication of reporting, and distortion of the realities of street children and of direct work with them.

As Rohit explained:

Our biggest problem is coordination. We implement whatever project gets funded. The government also does not have any policy that requires NGOs to coordinate. We all have food program. We all go to the streets. We are making it easier for

children to remain on the streets. This is our fault. We don't accept that. Instead, we blame the young people for not wanting to leave the streets.

Important to note here is that NGO programs were project-based, making it financially challenging to allocate staff time for coordination work. Also, the emphasis was on producing outputs and securing future funding, and inter-agency coordination did not bring any financial incentive to the NGOs.

These NGO practices could have further promoted the public's, and young people's views of NGOs being fraudulent. Workers explained that the young people viewed NGOs as selling their photos and personal stories to bring in money, most of which NGOs used as staff salaries. This is likely a fact. The NGOs were seen as wealthy, this leading the young people to make demands for food, money, and other things from NGO staff. Parents of these young people also asked NGOs for money, and some requested the NGOs to provide support to all their children, even to those who were not on the streets. For example, Asmita explained:

They [parents] think we [NGOs] bring in "dollars," and we are rich. Parents will tell us their problems, hoping that we will give them money. They want us to fix the roof, buy them rice or livestock, things like that. They think we can fix their problems.

This demand for services could be because they held more and higher expectations from these NGOs than from the governments, since they were used to receiving little support from the government.

In summary, Nepali NGOs working with the young people relied on international organizations to fund their work. These international organizations in turn guided their local work. In doing so, they diffused Western models and practices of working with

homeless and street youth to work with Nepal's street children. In their effort to sustain their agencies, NGOs directed their accountability primarily to their program funders, which may in part have perpetuated the general public distrusts of NGOs. Collaboration between NGOs was limited, although there were sporadic efforts to do that. One such collaboration effort was the Street Children Network.

### **Street Children Network**

The Street Children Network (SCN) was an initiative of local NGOs. This network was formed with the goal of “building capacity” of its member NGOs and of increasing “collaboration” between local NGOs. This, it was assumed, would increase the opportunities and the quality of services to young people, said management level NGO staff. The SCN had 12 NGOs as members. To become a member, an NGO had to include in its constitution that it worked with street children. These NGOs also needed to be approved for membership by the SCN board members. Most member NGOs worked with street children, but some had scaled back their work because of funding limitations. There were many other NGOs that were not a part of the SCN, yet were actively working with street young people. These NGOs received limited support from the SCN. This controlled membership and member benefits in a way gave SCN member NGOs “elite” status among NGOs working with street children.

The SCN provided a space for its member NGOs to come together and collaborate in their work. The members held regular meetings to talk about their work and to plan staff training. However, both frontline workers and management level staff said that the SCN was not effective in increasing collaboration between and among the

agencies. A management level staff explained that the general environment of competition and distrust between NGOs continued in the SCN and acted as a barrier to sharing information about agencies' funding, projects, and activities. Another management level staff said that the SCN members focused more on the funding brought by the SCN and how this money was going to be allocated among the SCN members. This reflects that the SCN had little effect on increasing inter-NGO collaboration in the institutional environment of frontline youth work in Kathmandu.

On the other hand, the SCN seemed to influence youth work practice. A major SCN focus was "capacity building" of its member NGOs. For this, the SCN had received a grant from an international organization. The SCN used expertise from their member organizations and also invited experts from outside their members to offer training to staff at various levels of the NGO hierarchy. The SCN members said that about two training per month were offered. In some of these training, SCN also invited staff from non-member organizations. The SCN training covered topics such as child development, child participation, child sexual abuse, psychosocial counseling, drug addiction and glue sniffing, and documentation and report writing, said NGO staff interviewed. These topics reflect what this institutional environment viewed as priority in youth work with street children. More crucially, these training in a way guided the workers in how their work was to be done. For example, in describing their practice, workers listed the SCN training they had participated in, almost as a way to legitimize and validate their work. This could have led to common ways of doing youth work in Nepal.

Through training, the SCN helped build “a community of practitioners” (Wenger, 1999). The training provided opportunities for workers to meet workers from other NGOs. Those working in street outreach programs said that they met other workers during field visits, but meeting and learning together in the training strengthened their contacts with their colleagues. This helped workers coordinate their work. Again, important to note here is that most training participants were SCN member NGOs only. Nevertheless, even with these few NGOs, this practitioner community-building was crucial, particularly since there was no professional association in Nepal for youth workers, nor was there any other neutral, formal, common space to meet, discuss the work, and the rest.

### **Educational and professional institutions**

Missing in this institutional environment were professional associations of youth workers and educational organizations like universities and institutes. Educational institutions had recently started to offer social work courses, while youth work was not taught in any educational institution (Nikku, 2010). This had implications for youth work practice, since academic training and the level of professionalization of an occupation also means standards and regulations of practice. All youth workers who participated in this study identified themselves as “social workers,” and few had academic social education.

In summary, explored here were the roles and relationships between and among organizations within the institutional environment of frontline youth work in Kathmandu, Nepal. This was done to show how individual organizations prioritized and adopted

different policies, programs, and practices. In this institutional environment, the government's role was important but limited. Very few government policies and programs were in place to guide this type of youth work. At another level, the IGOs and INGOs, with their funding, set certain standards and rules for frontline youth work. Nepali NGOs complied with the standards and rules of IGOs/INGOs to establish their own credibility and to increase their chances of securing future funding. IGOs/INGOs standards and rules became more prominent also by the absence of youth educational and professional institutions that could set standards and regulate youth work practice. In addition to these institutions, local socio-cultural contexts also influenced youth work practice.

### **Social cultural contexts of frontline youth work**

Socio-cultural values and practices are a part of taken-for-granted everyday lives. A myriad of these socio-cultural practices influences everyday work with street young people. Described here are three prominent practices and their influence on this youth work.

#### **Nepali caste system**

The traditional caste system pervades many aspects of the everyday life of people in Nepal. This makes it crucial to examine its effect on frontline youth work practice. In Nepal, there are 103 caste and ethnic groups who are not a part of the caste system (Government of Nepal, 2010). The ethnic groups co-exist with the caste groups and experience this caste-based discrimination. Therefore, both these groups need to be taken into account when discussing the caste system. The various castes are organized into four

broad hierarchical categories with Brahmins at the top, followed by Chhetris and Kayastha, and the formerly the 'untouchable' castes, who are now known as Dalits. Historically, the Brahmins and Chhetris, along with an urban-based ethnic group, Newars, were dominant groups, and other caste and ethnic groups were marginalized socially, economically, and politically (Pradhan & Shrestha, 2005). This was reflected in poverty headcounts of Nepal, which was lower among Newars (14%) and Brahmins and Chhetris (18%), compared to hill ethnic groups (44%) and Dalits (46 %) (World Bank, 2006). This pattern of caste and ethnicity-based inequalities was found also in educational attainment, employment in high-paying jobs, and land and livestock asset ownership (World Bank, 2006). In most cases, this caste-based hierarchy also corresponded with the class system (Pradhan & Shrestha, 2005).

In work with street children and youth, NGO staff did not seem to exercise caste-based discrimination, but individual young people often concealed their caste, perceiving the likelihood of caste-based discrimination. A majority of young people were Dalit, according to NGO workers and managers. While the NGOs did not discriminate against these young people on the basis of their caste, many young people reported non-Dalit caste to the NGOs. According to workers, these young people hid their actual caste also on the streets. Workers understood this practice as individual young people trying to avoid discrimination on the streets, which is a reflection of the prevalence of the caste system and caste-based discrimination in Nepali society.

Caste is important in Nepal. Concealing their actual caste and reporting themselves as being from another caste could create future complications for these young

people. One problem was in gaining citizenships when these young people became adults. Under the current law, children gained citizenship through their fathers. These young people had to use their fathers' caste to get citizenship. If these young people hid their caste, then NGOs would be unable to help them with citizenship when they became adults. Workers explained that citizenship was required for Dalit caste to receive government welfare. Workers said they usually found out about these young people's caste from their friends, and that they used various ways to help individual young people tell their actual castes. While this caste-system was one aspect of the Nepali socio-cultural practices, another important aspect was gender-based practices.

### **Gender-based socio-cultural practices**

Gender and socially constructed sex roles were another reality of Nepali society. These had consequences for who worked with which street children and youth, how they worked, as well as how workers perceived their work. To understand the influence of gender in this work, briefly described here are women's role and social status in Nepali society.

In Nepal, the status of women and girls generally was inferior to men and boys. In 1991, Nepal ratified the United Nation's Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Yet, socio-cultural, economic, and political inequalities between woman and men continued to exist. Women's participation in political, economic, and professional domains remained lower than that of men (Bennett, 2005). For example, a study found that only 15% women in Nepal had completed eight or more years of school, while 31% men had similar education (World Bank, 2006). Pant

and Standing (2011) note that women in Nepal did not head any single public or constitutional body, except for the National Women's Commission. This inferior status of women is further reinforced by socio-cultural practices, such as dowry, son preference, social acceptance of domestic violence, and the like.

This gender inequality and traditional gender roles were also reflected in frontline youth work with street children and youth. A majority of the workers were men. The few women who were frontline workers mainly worked in center-based programs, which were indoors and could be viewed as a more appropriate and safe workplace for women. They worked as non-formal educators and caretakers, which seemed to resemble traditional mothering and care-taking roles, and which many workers, both men and women, viewed as being more appropriate for women. There were fewer women doing street outreach work. These women challenged the traditional gender roles, arguing that they were just as capable as male workers. On the other hand, many male workers viewed the streets as inappropriate places from women to work. For example, Madan, a male youth worker, said:

This work requires visiting children on the streets at night or any time in case of emergency. Because of this, there is a tendency to not trust women workers. Their family may not allow them to go to the field at night. It is hard to completely rely on women to do this work.

This meant that mostly male workers did frontline youth work, particularly street outreach work. This traditional gender role also influenced with whom the work was done.

There were very few girls living on the streets (Government of Nepal, 2008), this leading youth work to focus mostly on boys. Workers explained that this was in part

because girls faced additional gender-based barriers in coming to live on the streets. The gender norms of protecting women and girls meant that local people became concerned when they saw young girls travelling alone or walking alone on the streets. On the streets, girls faced sexual abuse and exploitations, more than the boys, thus making street life and street survival harder for girls. Because of this, workers said that they prioritized girls for “rescue,” which sometimes meant strongly persuading or forcing them to use services at NGO centers. It was not only these gender-based views and roles that influenced frontline youth work. Also important were the socio-cultural views of children and their work.

### **Children and their work**

Two broad types of childhood and youth-hood characterized Nepali children and youth, and these reflect the inequalities of Nepali society. In the first type were young people from the upper and middle-class families. They grow up in a protective childhood and youth-hood. They assume relatively little household responsibility and do not contribute to the household economy. Instead, they spend their time mostly studying and playing. As Leitchy (2003) reports, many of these young people go to private schools and are considerably influenced by Western material goods and lifestyles. The second type of childhood and youth-hood were lived by young people from low income and rural families. These young people engage in income-earning and household work at an early age. Many of them go to the public schools that typically have poor education standards. Because of economic necessity, some are sent by their parents to urban centers to work in factories and to upper and middle class homes to work as domestic workers (Baker & Hinton, 2001). Many in Nepali society accept these two types of childhood and youth-

hood as everyday realities. This in part could have created a sense of ambivalence by the general public toward young people who were seen working on the streets (child laborers).

In the NGO world, however, the presence and use of the streets by these young people created a “moral panic” (Cohen, 2002). In part, this could be because as “social change” organizations, these NGOs were committed to changing societal views and practices regarding street children, their work, and their lifestyles. The government’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and IGO/INGO funding may have given these NGOs further impetus to do this work. Another reality contributing to NGO staff viewing the presence of street children and youth as a social problem could be their socialization into thinking this way through formal education, and also through IGO and INGO training and supervision. All these socio-cultural values, norms, and practices were background for frontline youth work and became foreground in the everyday practice of direct hands-on street youth work.

### **Summary**

In summary, the institutional environment of frontline youth work in Nepal was comprised of government organizations, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and local NGOs. The regulating macro-structures were government and international organizations. Government, however, had limited influence on policies and programs for street youth. At the same time, international organizations, with their financial and technical support, had a stronger influence in programs, approaches, services, and standards for practice for work with street young people.

The socio-cultural practices influenced whom the work was done with, how work was done, and who did the work. The continued presence of caste-based discrimination was reflected in youth people's practice of concealing their caste, which had implications for how work was done. Gender-based norms, in part, were seen as the reason why fewer women worked with street children and fewer girls on the streets. The socio-cultural view of children and their work may have been the reason for the public's ambivalence toward street young people. The NGOs – with their orientation to Western values and standards – viewed the presence of these young people as a social, youth, and street children problem. How the NGOs system responded to these young people is taken-up in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Mapping the system of response**

Within the larger institutional and socio-cultural environment existed a system of response to street young people. The underlying philosophy of this system of response was that support to young people must be provided continually, at different stages of their “change process,” and until they successfully “reintegrated” to mainstream society as “normal children and youth” or as “responsible” adults. A lack of such support meant fragmented services that negatively affected young peoples’ (and NGOs’) reintegration outcome. Following this philosophy, NGOs, alone, and in coordination with others, offered services aimed at increasing the wellbeing of street young people and helping them leave the streets. These services were offered in street outreach programs, in drop-in centers, and at transition homes. These were the elements of the country’s system of response to street young people. This chapter describes this system. The first part briefly describes the three service spaces, and then coordination and collaboration between these service spaces. Also discussed is the influence of international funding on this system of response.

#### **Service spaces**

There were three main service spaces for frontline youth work. Streets outreach programs were the first service space. In street outreach programs, work was done on the streets, which were the “homes” of these young people. This was the space where most young people first came to know and learn about workers and their employer NGOs. In this space, workers built contacts and networks with young people, told them about their

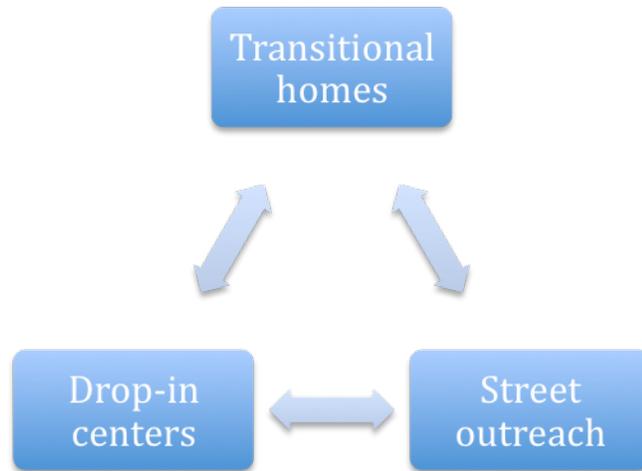
own NGOs, and encouraged them to leave the streets and to adopt “healthy lifestyles.” Street outreach workers also referred young people to drop-in centers and transition homes. Compared to other service spaces, in street outreach fewer services were offered, mainly emergency and first aid. If young people needed other services, they went to drop-in centers.

Drop-in centers were the second service space for frontline youth work. These were also outreach programs, but they were center-based. Drop-in centers provided a range of services aimed at meeting the needs of young people, as defined by agencies and workers. Young people walked-in these centers to use the services and then returned to the streets. These centers’ focus was to motivate young people to leave the streets by offering “attractive” services, a safe space, and positive relationships with responsible adults. Many who wanted to leave the streets stayed in the centers as a way to experience, as well as become aware of, what it would be like to live in a transition home.

Transition homes were the third service space. Transition homes provided long-term socio-economic support to help young people successfully reintegrate into mainstream society. This service space was the final step in leaving the streets. To live here, young people needed to make a commitment and give up “street behaviors and habits,” cut off connections with the streets and their friends, and follow rules of the home. When they did so and learned new ways of being and doing a young person, they were viewed as “rehabilitated.” Transition homes were also a space from where most young people were “reintegrated” into family and the larger society.

These services were offered at no cost but they required varying levels of commitment from the young people. The young people chose to use (or not use) these services. Choosing to use these services meant they needed to fulfill certain criteria. On the streets, accepting food or first aid services often required young people to talk to or listen to the workers. In drop-in centers, young people were required to follow rules to enter the centers and to use their services. To live in transition homes, young people needed to make a long-term commitment to staying there and to following these homes' rules and activities.

**Figure 4: The system of response to street young people**



These three service spaces represented the structure of opportunities available to young people. These spaces not only existed in Nepal but are found in many developed and developing countries, as shown in the literature review. Such similarities in response to the young people reflect global sharing and diffusion of ideas and approaches, perhaps facilitated in part by international agencies. Not all NGOs offered services in all three service spaces. Some NGOs worked in collaboration with other NGOs and developed a

referral system, while others only offered one or two of these services. Broadly, young people moved through these three spaces to meet their everyday needs. There was coordination and collaboration between and among these three spaces.

### **Coordination and collaboration between the service spaces**

Workers in these three service spaces coordinated as well as collaborated with the other spaces in their everyday work. Within an NGO, street outreach workers met or worked in collaboration with workers from drop-in centers and/or from transition homes. In many cases, street outreach workers also worked part-time in drop-in centers, as a way to continue their street work in the center with the same young person. If an NGO did not have a drop-in center, street outreach workers collaborated with transition home workers in “rescuing” young people from the streets. Street outreach workers and transition home workers also worked together to bring back young people who ran away from the home. Drop-in centers often acted as preparation center for transition homes. Here, young people selected were trained and made “ready” for the transition home. Drop-in center workers and transition home workers coordinated for the “recue” of young people from the centers. At times, there was inter-organizational collaboration for referrals and to find information about individual street youth.

Moreover, these three service spaces had complementary philosophies and used similar approaches. As outreach programs, both street outreach and drop-in center services were offered with “harm reduction” philosophies, that is helping young people give up the streets and street behaviors gradually and incrementally. These two service spaces also focused on “rescuing” young people from the streets. “Socialization” was one

of the main foci in both the drop-in center and transition home, although with different levels of flexibility for young people to follow what was taught to, and required of, them.

**Figure 5: Continuities in services**

System of response		
<b>Street outreach philosophies:</b>  1. Harm reduction 2. Secondary and tertiary prevention 3. Staying connected to the streets	<b>Drop-in center philosophies:</b>  1. Harm reduction 2. Secondary and tertiary prevention 3. Socialization	<b>Transition home philosophies:</b>  1. Socio-economic support 2. Socialization

These service spaces were set up for street youth, but not by street youth and in most cases, they were not set up with street youth. These spaces represented the NGOs and their international funding agencies’ idea of supportive environments to help young people leave the streets. As will be shown, young people often created their own spaces within these spaces, or used these spaces in their own ways, showing their agency.

The presence of these spaces and services offered depended on funding received from international donor organizations. When funding ended, many of these service spaces closed down, resulting in “gaps in services.” For example, during data collection for this study, one organization had terminated its outreach programs – both street outreach and drop-in center – because its funding had ended. Another NGO was doing street outreach in the first phase of the data collection but had re-directed their program focus to slum areas in my final phase of data collection. Another organization had recently closed down clinic services. Because of the uncertainty and ad hoc nature of

international funding, these service spaces were continually being created, dissolved, modified, and recreated. This process could have lead to duplication of services in the same geographical areas and limited coordination between NGOs.

### **Summary**

In summary, three different service spaces with overlapping and complementary philosophies and approaches existed in the system of response to street children. These services emerged and dissolved depending on funding availability from international organizations, reflecting that services were influenced more by international organizations than by the needs of the young people. Often, these spaces were within a single NGO. In these service spaces, workers from diverse backgrounds worked in different roles. Their characteristics are presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Frontline youth workers and their clients

#### A street child: Observation notes

I was on my way to interview a worker and was inside a *tempo*, a three-wheel auto-rickshaw used for public transportation. After riding a while, I noticed a young person hanging on to the tempo. He was outside the tempo, his hands held on to the door, and his feet were on the doorstep. In Kathmandu, many children working as tempo conductors rode like that. So, I thought this young person was a tempo conductor. A few minutes later, the tempo stopped randomly. This was not unusual. What was unusual was the tempo driver telling the person sitting next to him, perhaps a friend, to go and slap that young person.

Hearing this, I became alarmed and watched the young person closely. I noticed that he was very young, maybe around ten years old. His sweater was black from dirt and so big that it made his pants unseen. His slippers were also big for him. He had earphones plucked in his ears. From the way he shook his head, it was clear that he was listening to music. Another rider commented that he was “high.”

The man, the tempo driver’s friend, went around the tempo and asked the young person where he was going. The young person did not respond. Instead, he took out his earplugs and walked inside the tempo and gave a “thumbs up” to the driver. The driver sternly said, “Get off my tempo.” This made me feel bad, and I intervened by telling the driver that I will pay for his ride. The young person did not seem to care about my offer. But the driver replied, “It’s not about the fare. If you let him sit next to you, he will steal your money.” The young person did not seem to care about that either. He had walked out of the tempo while we were talking and hung at the door like before.

The driver gave up and started driving the tempo. Every time the tempo stopped, the young person got off to let the passenger in or out and then again hung at the door. Later, in one of the stops, he got off and walked away. It seemed like he had reached his destination for that part of the journey.

July 11, 2011  
Kathmandu, Nepal

#### Walking with youth workers and young people

After the interviews, we headed to a local restaurant where a group of street young people was going to eat their dinner, a compensation for participating in the interview. While some young people ran in front, three walked with the two interview facilitators – Kirtan

and Girish – and me. Kirtan and Girish were no longer working with street young people, but they had continued to maintain their relationships with these young people.

The restaurant was a bit far from the interview site, which was where we were. So, I asked Kirtan, “Why are we walking so far? Can we not eat somewhere here?” Kirtan replied, “It’s because these children are not allowed to eat in any restaurant.” To this, a youth responded, “No. It’s because we are saving you money by eating in a cheap restaurant.” His response came so fast that it made us all laugh.

We continued walking. Along the way, one of the young people walking with us showed his new pair of jeans to Girish. He told Girish that the jeans cost him Rs. 700. Girish commented, “Oh, you “hero.”” “Hero” is slang for stylish youth. That young person smiled back, indicating that the compliment was well taken.

This “hero” youth then asked Kirtan, who was carrying a motorcycle helmet, if he could carry it. Kirtan replied, “I’m not giving you my helmet.”

Youth, “Why?”

Kirtan, “What if you sniff *den* (dendrite glue), get high, and throw it away?”

Youth, “Won’t do that.”

Kirtan then handed this youth his helmet, who carried it like a trophy.

After a while, Kirtan’s cell phone rang. He took out the phone from his pocket and answered it. When he hung up, another young person asked to see his phone. Kirtan replied, “This is where I draw the line. I don’t give my phone to anyone.” The young person seemed to understand and did not insist further.

Next, the other youth walking with us began to talk to Kirtan. He was telling Kirtan about needing money to apply for citizenship and for a license to drive rickshaw. He said, “When I get the license, I am going to leave all these people (his friends) and drive rickshaw all day.” This was probably his way of convincing Kirtan, who did not respond for sometime. That young person, however, continued talking about money for the citizenship and the license. Finally, when we reached the restaurant, Kirtan promised that he would help him with his citizenship paper. This seemed to satisfy the youth.

In the restaurant, those who had run ahead of us were already eating. Others sat down to eat. Kirtan and Girish made sure everyone got his meal. We paid for the food, said goodbye to everyone, and left.

July 21, 2012  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Frontline youth workers were employees of NGOs that offered services to street children and youth. Their job titles, roles, and responsibilities varied depending on their work, work settings, and their employing agencies. They were social workers, outreach workers, field workers, wardens, caretakers, non-formal education teachers, and so on. Some worked in a fluid street environment, others in semi-structured environment of drop-in centers, and others in the highly structured environment of a transition home. In these settings, they offered a variety of services, including food, clothes, first aid, non-formal education, recreation activities, psycho-social counseling, and so on. Common to all of this was that they worked directly with street young people. It is them I sketch in this chapter, beginning with their pathways to this work and then their “socialization” into this work. Following this, I present these workers’ descriptions of their clients – street children and youth.

### **Pathways to frontline youth work**

There were two main pathways to this work. The first was through a job search. For many workers, working with street children was not their career goal. Rather, their life circumstances led them to choose this work. Many “stumbled” into this work in the process of finding work to sustain them and their family. As Padam described:

I was looking for a job, and they were hiring. I applied and got the job. When I started, I did not know anything about this work. I learned mostly from street brothers while working with them. Now, seven years later, I am a manager.

When they began this work, some workers were students and were beginning their career, while others came to this work experienced in working with children in other contexts. Prabin, who was relatively new to this work, said:

I am a student at the University. I am working to get a degree in social science. I started working here a year and a half ago. I take morning classes, and work during the day.

Many frontline workers were teachers in non-formal education. Prior to working with street young people, they taught “normal children” in formal schools and did not know “anything about street children” when they began their work. As Prabha said:

I was used to teaching in a formal school, and teaching non-formal education was very difficult. I would be teaching and young people would do something else, or would not respond. Then I got to attend training on participatory approaches, and this training helped in my work.

Another pathway to this work was related to street youth’s transition from the streets to mainstream society. A few workers were “former street children” who did this work as a way to give back to their NGOs and to help street youth. When they were young, these workers had received help from their current employer agencies to leave the streets. The NGOs hired these workers because they represented the effectiveness of their work, and also because they viewed these workers as better able to connect to street young people. Of these, some were doing this work part-time and were pursuing academic degrees not related to this work. For others, this was their vocational calling.

Many workers talked about this work as their calling. When they started this work, this was only a “job” for them. With work experiences and knowledge, the job became for them a calling. This was Madan’s story:

After tenth grade, I needed money to study further. I looked for a job and found one in another NGO that works with street children. I took this job for money. In this work, I had chances to participate in training and learn about street children. The more I learned about this work and about street children, the more I began to realize that this is what I want to do.

Another worker Bijay told a similar story:

I came to the city to go to college. To support myself, I needed a job. I found one working with children in difficult situations. I worked there for a few years and then, I found this job. My academic background and work do not match. I studied commerce in college. And now I have a long experience working with street children and don't think I can leave this work.

These workers had different educational backgrounds.

### **Workers' education and training**

There was a wide variation in the workers' educational background, reflecting this was not the career they had planned. Not all workers talked about their educational backgrounds. Those who did noted having college or university degrees in unrelated disciplines like journalism, business management, physics, and commerce. There were only a few young workers from somewhat related disciplines like social work and education. Not surprisingly, most workers learned to do this work on-the-job and through training provided by their employer NGOs, donor organizations, and the SCN.

The NGOs trained workers to take on youth work roles and responsibilities, while some learned this work from having been a street youth. Many workers talked about the multiple training received on various topics. Most also spoke about learning this work by doing it, through supervisor guidance, and from experience. Employer agencies with funding from international partner organizations also provided training to their workers. Workers from two NGOs talked about training that was provided two days a month for a year by their international funding organization. The SCN offered at least two training sessions a month free of cost to its member organizations, and for a fee to non-member organizations. Workers cited these training on various topics – such as child participation, first aid, report writing, psychosocial counseling – as helping them learn more about this

work. These training also seem to have helped workers form their professional identities as NGO workers.

Many workers' professional identities were connected to their employer NGOs, and not to their work. They were NGO workers, and this was how they introduced themselves to others, including the young people. This suggests their accountability and commitment was mainly to their employer NGOs, rather than to their actual work with young people. For example, Bijay said:

I will not leave this organization. I learned this work here. You know, I wasn't born with the skills I now have. I learned these skills here. They trust me here, they believe in my work. And I cannot break that trust. I won't betray this organization. I will not work in any other organization. If I go to the field tomorrow and tell the brothers that I'm working for another organization, what will they think? I will look bad and this organization will look bad. I cannot do that.

Bikash also talked about working for his NGO:

I have to show output. Isn't that why my organization employed me? Isn't that why I'm here? Nobody wants an employee who does not work. I have to show my organization that I am smart.

Training provided to these workers also influenced how they saw and worked with young people, as will be shown in later chapters.

### **Nepali street children and youth**

Around 800 street young people lived on the streets of Kathmandu, 95% of who were boys (Government of Nepal, 2008). These young people were a heterogeneous group, with common ways of being and doing street child and youth. In this section, I draw on descriptions of workers, managers, and young people to sketch these young

people's portraits. I begin with various pathways used by young people to come to the streets and then describe their life on the streets.

### **Pathways to the streets**

While some young people's pathways to the street were direct from home, others got there in stages. Workers explained that among those coming directly to the streets from home were young people who left their home because of family abuse and neglect. Others left their home to experience city life in Kathmandu. More troubling was a practice of street youth going back to their village to recruit their peers and younger children to come to the streets. Once on the streets, these "recruiters" controlled young people, sent them to work, and lived off their income. Roshni described this:

On the street, they have something like a "recruitment agency." Older children go home and bring four or five young people with them. These older children will then become a leader and make those new children work from them.

Keshab talked about his experience with one young person:

He used to go home to give money to his family. One time, he brought his brother with him to the street. He thought they could make more money. We worked with the brothers to sent the younger one back.

This practice shows that "the street children problem" is related to at least poverty and family abuse and also to internal child trafficking.

Some young people got to the streets gradually, as various realities pushed and pulled them there. For young people whose families lived in slums, this process began as they spent time on the streets playing, working part-time, or just "hanging-out." Over time, they developed close relationships with the young people already there, learned street lifestyles and street survival skills, and eventually lived on the streets, going home

only occasionally. And then there were young people who came to the city to work as domestic workers, dishwashers in teashops, bus conductors, and in other such petty jobs. They did this to support their family economically. Workers said that many of these young people came to the streets after experiencing abuse from their employers. When they ran away from their employers' home, rather than returning home, they came to the streets where they could make money and continue to support their family.

### **Life on the streets: Peer groups**

On the streets, the young people, ranging in age from seven to 18 or older, lived in a peer group who became their family. According to workers and as was also found during data collection, most peer groups were composed of boys. Some girls also formed their own peer groups, and other joined boys' peer groups. Workers described that these groups were organized, protected, and controlled by leaders, usually older youth. These peer group leaders sent young people to work, collected their earning, and provided for their needs. They also took care of their group members when they were sick. Prabin described:

If a group member is sick, the leader makes sure that one of them stays behind to take care of him, while others go to work. Sometimes, the leader will call NGO staff for help. They take care of their group members.

At the same time, workers said that many leaders abused, physically and sexually, their group members when they did not follow their instructions. Chetan described:

Usually, the leaders set an amount that each member must earn in a day. If a child fails to do that, the leader will hit him and sexually abuse him. He does this to show that he is in-charge and to make sure that everyone follows his instructions.

Workers added that this risk of abuse was one of the reasons that rescue was prioritized for those new to the streets.

### **Life on the streets: Work**

These peer groups engaged in different kinds of income earning activities. Many young people said they saw themselves as workers, earning an income like any other people. In general, their work varied by geographical areas in which they lived. Young people living near junkyards, and also many others, collected plastics and metal scraps and sold them at recycling. Workers described that many young people were engaged in this work. Some young people living around tourist areas made money by begging from tourist. There was a group of young people living around Pashupati (a temple) area whose work was primarily helping in chores related to cremation. Kumar described this pattern:

Those living near Pashupati area are hardworking children. They work for their livelihood. In tourist areas, children cash on the sympathies and good will of tourists. Even older children do that. Brothers from this area dressed up well and have more money. There are many working in junkyards, picking plastics.

These differences were also found during interviews in different areas of Kathmandu.

Some young people engaged in criminal activities. Some engaged in petty crimes like picking pockets. Others planned and went to steal items from homes. Padam said:

They call going out to steal night walk. They walk around and find opportunities to steal things from homes. These brothers dress up stylishly. Many of them are drug-addicts.

This was also found in an interview with a group of young people. They described how they got caught stealing metal scrap and other things from houses under construction.

While girls also engaged in these different kinds of work, many were in sex work. Roshni described:

It is very difficult for girls. Soon after coming to the streets, they get sexually abused by street boys and other adults. Then they get into sex work. They are also harassed physically and verbally, but boys also experience verbal abuse. Once their community knows that they are living on the streets, these girls cannot return home. This forces them to continue living on the streets and make money through sex work.

Padam also said:

Sisters, who are as young as ten years old, are in sex work. Street boys force them into having sex. That is why many sisters are infected with HIV. We have been counseling brothers regularly during field visits and in mobile clinic and many have started using condoms. These days there is a gang on the streets who recruit street girls into sex work. I heard that this gang has started using girls in pornographic movies.

### **Life on the streets: Risk behaviors**

Another common aspect of these young people's everyday life was "risk behavior." Both workers and young people said that glue sniffing, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking was common on the streets. Some also used other chemicals and intravenous drugs and many engaged in unprotected sex. Many young people engaged in self-cutting. Kumar described why some young people do this:

Boys cut themselves when they are high. They cut when they fight with friends or break up with girls. They also cut out of frustration. When they are high from drugs or glue, they remember their lives and get frustrated. Sometimes I ask them why they take drugs or drink alcohol. They tell me that they do that to forget their troubles. They cut so that the pain from the cut would make them forget other things that hurt them.

These portraits of young people show how they lived on the streets and also how they were seen and understood by workers who offered them services. Many aspects of these street young people's lives, such as peer group dynamics, work, vulnerabilities, and

risk behaviors, were similar to those found in street children and youth in many countries (Kilbride, Suda, & Njeru, 2000; Panter-Brick, 2000; Veale, Taylor, & Linehan, 2000; Turnbull, Hernandez, & Reyes, 2009; Orme & Seipel, 2007). How the workers and agencies responded to these young people is described in the next chapter.

### **Summary**

Workers came to this work from diverse backgrounds. Many started this work with little knowledge about street young people and how to work with them. Their employer NGOs taught them their roles and work. This in turn seemed to direct workers' accountability to their employer agency and not as much to their "clients," street young people.

Their "clients," street young people came to the streets from different pathways. On the streets, their peers became their "family." This family was controlled by peer leaders who cared for and also physically and sexually abused their family members. Furthermore, this family collectively engaged in various work and risk behavior. This street presence and lifestyle on the streets were seen as "social, moral, and youth problem," and workers and their employer NGOs worked to address this problem.

## Chapter 8

### Street Outreach: “Rescuing” young people from the streets

#### Observation notes

Around a bonfire sat a group of street youth, about 14-15 of them, some huddled in blankets. In the flickering light of the fire, they looked like shadows, grayish and unrecognizable. Sunil, a youth worker, had joined this group and was chatting with the boys. Their conversation was not audible from where I was. Krishna, another worker, and I were a few feet away, squatting under a temple light. Krishna had opened up his medicine box, perhaps as a way to indicate that his “shop” was now open. I was observing the environment, the moment, and the activities.

Young people with wounds came out of their group to see Krishna. They had minor cuts, bruises, and skin infections – some new, some old and healing, and a few infected. Krishna began attending to these wounds and injuries, cleaning and dressing them as needed. The young people talked to Krishna and seemed to ignore my presence there – no one looked, smiled, or tried to talk to me.

Then came Hari. He had a swollen, white finger. He had cut his index finger and to stop the bleeding, he had put a thick layer of toothpaste on the cut. I had not heard or seen anyone applying toothpaste on a wound, but Krishna seemed familiar with this local remedy. He got to work right away and started wiping off the toothpaste. While doing so, he casually asked Hari if he and his friends ate their meals. Hari replied, first with a big grin and then, “We just drank cold tea.”

Hari’s response made Krishna pause momentarily from his work and explain to me that “cold tea” is alcohol. I had guessed that. But this gave me a chance to smile at Hari. He smiled back. Krishna did not seem bothered that these young people had consumed alcohol. He continued the conversation, but on another topic. He was inviting Hari to the drop-in center.

Krishna, “You should come to the center tomorrow.” Tomorrow was Saturday. Every Saturday, the center organized a special recreation program for street children and youth. Hari knew that, clearly. Hari, “What’s tomorrow’s program?”

Krishna, “I don’t know. Why don’t you come to the center and find out?”

Hari, “Ok, I’ll see.”

By then, Krishna finished dressing the wound. Hari walked back to the group.

- Street outreach with youth workers  
January 20, 2012

Street outreach is a critical component in the system of response to street children and youth in Kathmandu, Nepal. It takes place outside NGO buildings and in various geographical areas where young people work, play, hang out, and sleep. This work is proactive in nature and workers physically go to the streets, engage there with street children and youth, and connect them to available services (Gibson, 2011; Strike, O’Grady, Myers, & Millson, 2004). Workers do so because many young people are reluctant to use services offered by the NGOs at their centers. This street outreach work is one context for understanding frontline youth work.

This chapter illuminates this street outreach work. In describing this complex and multifaceted work, I begin with the philosophies and ethos underpinning the work. Next, I briefly portray the characteristics of workers and young people as perceived by both young people and workers. This is followed by descriptions of the various approaches used by the workers to build street social capital. I then focus on the process of “psychosocial counseling,” a crucial for the “rescue” of young people from the streets. Next, the rescue process is explained, and this is followed by a brief conclusion. All this together describes and analyzes frontline youth work on the streets – its service setting.

### **Street outreach program philosophy and ethos**

“The means by which services and programs are offered is inevitably embedded with various moral assumptions about the nature of the problem and the ways in which to deal with it; about the relationships between the “helpers” and the “helped;” and about the organizational setup in which the “help” occurs.” (Karabanow & Clement, 2004, p. 94). It is not only the life-world conditions and social realities of the young people that

shape how the workers do their work. Their work could also be shaped by the philosophy and ethos of implementing and funding agencies. This philosophy and ethos are linked closely to a program's structures, processes, beneficiaries, and expected outcomes (Conrad & Miller, 1987). They guide program implementation because the staff employed by the program are supposed to embrace, embody, and advocate for the program's philosophies and ethos, or at least must be seen to conform to these. Thus, program philosophies and ethos influence and direct everyday practice with clients. This is most crucial, and highlights the need to examine the philosophies and ethos of street outreach programs as a way to better understand the nature and practice of frontline youth work with street children and youth. In Nepal, most street outreach programs were based on the philosophies and ethos of harm reduction; secondary and tertiary prevention; and maintaining NGOs' connections to the streets and these young people.

### **Harm reduction**

Street outreach programs were based on the philosophy of "harm reduction," a commonly used approach in the field of substance abuse reduction (Tatarsky, 2003). This philosophy gives clients (young people) a space to gradually reduce and ultimately eliminate "risky-behaviors" (Tatarsky, 2003). In street outreach, this meant providing opportunities to young people to "choose or decide" to positively change their lives and lifestyles in small, incremental stages, while still living on the streets. These programs focused on helping young people reduce and ultimately give up risky behaviors, such as addiction to glue, cigarettes, and other substances, intravenous drug use, unprotected sex, and the like. A primary goal was to "rescue" young people from the streets.

Street outreach services offered as part of a harm reduction philosophy mostly focused on awareness education and emergency health and legal support. Awareness education programs were mostly offered on the streets with topics including the negative effects of glue sniffing, sexual abuse and where to seek for help for it, child rights, negative consequences of street life, and the like. These were adult-led programs that focused on what the adults, mostly NGOs and their funding agencies, viewed as “necessary” and “important” for these young people.

Health services offered on the streets were limited to first aid and other emergency health responses, in which workers took young people to the hospital when they over-dosed from drugs, if they were very ill, or if they had serious injuries. Legal support on the streets mainly included helping young people if they were wrongfully locked up in jail, according to the worker’s judgment. For this, some NGOs had staff legal expertise, while other NGOs sent their frontline youth workers to assess and help young people in legal problems. In addition, workers also encouraged young people to use their center-based services. Offering services along with harm reduction was one philosophy guiding street outreach; a second and perhaps more influential philosophy was secondary and tertiary prevention of the larger street children and youth phenomenon.

### **Secondary and tertiary prevention**

Secondary and tertiary prevention of the larger street children and youth “problem” were also based on public health approaches (World Health Organization, 2004). In the public health framework, secondary prevention focuses on those who have

been recently affected by the “problem” and aims to minimize the effect of the problem as well as to prevent the “problem” from becoming chronic, while tertiary prevention focuses on those affected by the problem and aims to rehabilitate or reduce the problem and prevent relapses (World Health Organization, 2004). In work with street children and youth, secondary prevention programs and activities focused on those who have recently come to the streets and younger children, and tertiary prevention programs and activities focused on young people commonly referred as “hard-core” or “addicted to the streets.” Prevention was called “rescue” from the streets.

Prevention, framed as “rescue,” was a moral rescue, as much as a physical rescue. To rescue was to “protect and prepare” young people to become “responsible adults.” This involved helping young people give up “risky behaviors” that threatened their wellbeing and caused them to become a “nuisance” in public places. This also meant teaching these young people “proper” ways to be normal young people and live in mainstream society. More importantly, this meant being committed to removing young people from the tough and risky streets. This rescue involved the workers taking or referring young people from the streets to their employer agencies’ drop-in centers or to transition homes, where they could receive necessary “support, guidance, and socialization” to change their lives and “be able to fit in their families and mainstream society.” In some programs, “rescue” meant offering advice and guidance on the streets and then making arrangements for young people to return home directly from the streets. This “rescue” was basic to all street outreach programs, and it was prioritized by NGOs, their funding agencies, and government.

Crucial to work with young people, this “rescue” or prevention philosophy drove opportunities, choices, and decisions about the kinds of services offered in street outreach programs. Services were designed to “rescue” young people from the streets and to not make street life “easy” or “comfortable” for them. Workers and management level staff said that this was the reason most street outreach programs did not distribute food or clothes to young people. Workers added that such practices, mostly by churches and temples, not only made street life comfortable but also made the streets attractive to other young people, encouraging yet other young people to come and remain there. Furthermore, workers explained that free food enabled young people to use the money they earned for harmful substances, like drugs, alcohol, and glue. These workers added that not giving food did not compromise the young people’s wellbeing, since they could go to a drop-in center for free food. Embedded here is a type of worker perception of street youth, one realistic, and with a tinge or more of suspicion about their motives and actions.

At the same time, food played an important role in the rescue process. Some NGOs offered young people food during street outreach as incentives to talk to them and also as compensation for their time spent talking to workers. These workers pointed out that there was a difference between simply distributing food and using food as a means to increase the possibilities of building relationships. Food attracted the young people to workers and created social space for workers and young people to talk. However, some NGOs maintained a rigid rule against giving food to the young people on the streets, leading to tensions in street outreach work as young people demanded or expected food

from all workers. While there were differences in NGOs' practices and understanding related to offering food on the streets and its implications for "rescue," NGOs seemed to hold a common view and practice related to "who" got rescued from the streets.

Most NGOs prioritized secondary prevention over tertiary prevention. This meant those new to the streets and younger children were chosen for "rescue." As Uday described:

We make extra effort to rescue those who are new to the streets. When they are new, they struggle to survive on the streets. They are not so much attached to the streets or to their peers. We have to rescue them before they experience physical and sexual abuse and before they get into the habit of sniffing glue. Also, it is easier to rescue them because they are more willing to take our advice.

Workers and management level staff viewed younger children and those new to the streets as more likely to change their lifestyles and with higher prospects of successfully "reintegrating" into mainstream society. Included in this priority group were girls, whose rescue was a moral responsibility also from the stance of socio-cultural gender norms. Although not explicitly mentioned, this group of young people could have been prioritized also because doing so increased the potential of the NGOs to demonstrate higher outputs, leading to increase in their credibility among local and international NGOs, higher chances of program funding from international agencies, and ultimately, to their sustainability (Wallace et al., 2007).

On the other hand, their low priority on tertiary prevention resulted in further marginalization of older youth from services. Workers viewed these older youth as "hard core," "addicted to the streets," and "difficult to work with." These older youth were viewed as "trouble" and more likely to bully and abuse younger children in transition

homes. Thus, as young people grew older on the streets, services and opportunities for them to leave the streets lessened, and ultimately after age 18, they were excluded from services. However, these older youth were important to the workers because they helped them “rescue” younger children and also helped them stay connected to and monitor the streets.

### **Staying connected and monitoring street situations**

Also underpinning street outreach programs was the philosophy of maintaining the NGOs’ connection to the streets and their monitoring of street situations. This helped the agencies develop and implement programs that responded more effectively to the needs of the young people, according to management level staff and workers. Continued connections and monitoring of the streets and street children’s activities were necessary because street situations and street children’s subcultures changed continuously and overtime. Many management level staff talked about the differences in the street children’s subcultures and street situations between ten years ago and now. They said that now young people were more likely to sniff glue and take other drugs and practice self-cutting, sexual abuse by peers and other adults had increased, as had pedophilia, and more recently, recruitment of young people for pornographic movie making. Thus, programs and practices from ten years ago were seen as insufficient.

In practice, this philosophy of staying connected and monitoring the streets formed the basis for collecting agency useful data from street children and youth. Workers, as part of their street outreach work, collected names, ages, home addresses, and other information from the young people. Collecting this information was the

workers way of demonstrating accountability for their work – that is, the number of people served (or talked to) during field visits. The NGOs could use this information not only to show outputs but also for preparing project and program proposals to donor organizations. Street children and youth interpreted this practice as NGOs using their names, stories, and photos to “ask for dollars” from Western countries and NGO staff “taking home all the money that came for them.” The young people disliked this practice also because they did not trust the NGOs and were cautious of not wanting to be traced back to their biological families. This hesitation varied by individuals, of course.

In summary, these overarching program philosophies and ethos guided the social and moral landscapes of street outreach work. They helped street outreach workers conceptualize their roles as connectors between the NGOs and street children, as service providers, as psychosocial counselors, and as change agents. To help understand how these philosophies guide and influence frontline youth work practice in street outreach programs, I begin by describing workers and their employer NGOs’ views of the young people as clients, as well as the young people’s views of workers and their employer agencies.

### **Frontline youth workers and the young people in street outreach**

Everyday interactions between workers and the young people on the streets led both groups to form certain images and understandings of the other. These understandings helped the workers determine how, with whom, and in what ways street outreach work “must be done.” They also guided the young people on when, how, and in what ways they should interact with the workers to get what they could from them.

## **Young people as clients**

The NGOs and their workers described of this heterogeneous group of young people as belonging to one of the three broad groups, and these seemed to be formed on the basis of the NGOs' rescue priority. In one group were young people who had recently come to the streets. The workers and their NGOs prioritized them for urgent rescue. This was because these young people were seen as more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation on the streets. They had not fully learned the survival ways of the streets, did not have many street peers, and were learning to adapt to street situations. Workers described this group of young people as being in the process of "becoming street children." This was also a group that viewed as was "easier" to work with and to bring to the NGO's drop-in centers and transition homes.

In the second group were younger children – pre-teens – who had been living on the streets for more than six months. They were also the workers' rescue priority because they were young and needed "protection and guidance" from responsible adults. Workers also saw these young people as having more potential to remain in school and to be successfully "socialized" into "normal childhood" and "reintegrated" into family and society. But this was a group of young people who were willful, knew the "ways of the streets," engaged in risky behaviors, and could not be easily convinced to leave the streets.

The third group included older youth, some over 18 years of age. These youth were no longer a rescue priority. They were young people who had been living on the streets for several years, engaged in risky behaviors and were highly skilled in street

survival. Workers said that many of these young people also had extensive experiences with NGO services. As mentioned, these were “hard core” street youth with a “street addiction.” They could be more aggressive and “unruly.” Moreover, they were viewed as too old for formal school and as having little chances of leaving the streets. Yet, they were important to street outreach work because many of them were peer group leaders who controlled other young people.

These categorizations reflected NGOs’ and workers’ understanding of who “can” and “should be” rescued. In this, the age of the young people and the length of time spent on the streets were important realities. Here, the much-discussed three categories of street children by UNICEF - “children on the streets,” “children of the streets,” and “children from the streets” (Espert & Myers, 1988, p. 22) were less important. This could be because in Nepal, families (on which the latter global categories are based) and communities of these young people were not a major focus of the NGOs’ work with street children. The major focus was individual young people and changing them to reintegrate into mainstream society. Also, it was not only the workers and their employer NGOs who understood and categorized the young people into different groups. The young people too held certain notions and understanding of the workers and their employing agencies.

### **Youth workers as service providers**

To the young people, the workers were *sanstha-ko manchhe* (NGO staff) who came to the streets because their NGOs had to show the donors that their “dollars” were being used to help young people. As mentioned, the young people viewed the NGOs as

using their names and stories to bring in money and then not using that money on them, the street children. These workers were “sirs” and “misses”- as young people called them – who worked for “dollars” and visited the streets for their own personal benefits. They did not really care, nor were they concerned about the young people. They came to the streets when they needed the young people to “show their work,” and troubling to young people was that these youth workers did not come when they were called-on for help.

Young people voiced such views in their interviews, as shown in the following excerpts:

Youth 1: They come so that they can take home “donor” money. Why else would they come?

Youth 2: They only think about money. That is how their brain works.

Youth 3: I like people from church better. They are not like NGO people. They come here because they care for us. They bring guitar and football and play with us. They take us on picnics. They don’t bring money from outside like NGOs; they give money from their pocket to help us. They are not like sirs from NGOs. NGO sirs are only concerned about money.

These perceptions and understanding of the workers and their employer NGOs were based on the young people’s lived experiences of using NGO services and the relationship they had with workers. Some young people also developed these understandings from the street “folktales” told by their peers and from general Nepali social-cultural views of the NGOs as corrupt and ineffective.

Furthermore, this perception of the workers as NGO staff was intentionally encouraged and promoted by the workers themselves. These workers did not wear an NGO uniform or carry badges to identify themselves as workers. But they visited the streets regularly, typically once or twice a week at each place where young people hung-out. There, they introduced themselves to the young people and to other adults as NGO

staff, as they perceived themselves and as they were trained to do so by their employing NGOs. By presenting themselves this way, these workers embodied their NGOs and translated their agency's philosophies and ethos to their everyday practice with young people. As Keshab, an outreach worker, explained:

I represent this NGO. What I do reflects on this NGO. If I let a child down, he will blame not only me but also my NGO.....I go to the field and listen to what brothers are talking about. If I say, "Brother, come to my organization, I will give you this and that," it is not only me making all that promises. They [young people] will take this as an NGO making them promises. So, the NGOs' reputation depends on how we treat street children.

In practical terms, workers were primarily agency workers and seen as such by the young people. This perception was a part of the street culture and hence preceded the entry to the streets of any particular worker.

Since the young people knew the workers as a "category," they were not total strangers to these young people. The young people were used to seeing and being with these workers, and were aware of why they visited, what and how they talked, and what could be "gotten out of them." They too had their purpose and knew the limits and ways of living-out this relationship with workers. For example, the young people did not ignore workers who visited regularly, even if they did not trust them. On the contrary, they "entertained" their "visitors" by listening to them and answering their questions, even if it meant making up colorful stories. Similar to Hecht's (1998) findings of street children in Brazil, in Kathmandu too, many young people viewed the workers and their NGOs as part of "the street world." They used the services selectively and in ways that they saw as benefitting them. Many used these services to survive on, rather than as a way off the streets. For them, these workers were their social capital or connections that could be

“cashed in” when needed. It was not only the young people who needed the services, the workers too needed the young people to do their work more effectively and to justify their work and funding to their NGOs and the donors.

Thus, workers knowingly played along with young people’s stories, actions, and games. In these, the workers saw an opportunity to look deeper into the young people’s world, a step toward “rescuing” them. Both the workers and young people seemed aware of the usefulness of their connections with the other and intentionally maintained and used these for their own ends. Their everyday interactions reflected not only an exchange but also a cat-and-mouse game, where workers continuously worked to “trap” young people into the center-based services and young people strategically evaded these traps. These on-going practices and pre-existing understandings of the young people and youth workers brought a familiarity that eased the workers’ entry into the street world. But entering the streets was not a simple act. Workers had to learn to read and respond to the streets and to do so each time they went there.

### **Entering the streets**

Expected unpredictability characterized workers’ street visits. That is, workers knew that “anything could happen” during their street visits and went there prepared to “accommodate” their street outreach agenda to respond to emergent and present street situations. Moreover, this context of unpredictability had a familiar pattern. Workers described that on some visits, street young people would be at their regular “hang-out” places, simply “hanging-out,” playing cards or other games, working, or getting ready to sleep. Such “conditions” increased workers’ possibilities to talk to or work with these

young people. Then there were times when these young people would not be at their regular places, or even if they were present, they would be in a state of intoxication from glue or other addictive substance, fighting, injured, or sick. Situations like these usually offered little space or time for “regular” street outreach work because workers had to protect themselves and if possible also protect the young people. Furthermore, the workers said that young people’s responses to their visits were often influenced by their previous interactions with them. This meant that these young people could be friendly and welcoming or they could curse, spit, and throw stones at the workers. Given all this, workers went to the streets prepared for the unpredictability of the streets and for the possibility that they would be able to do their work.

Being prepared for the unpredictability of the streets meant that workers had to be responsible for their own safety. Although NGOs had safety policy guidelines for street outreach, workers viewed these guidelines as insufficient to self-protection. Workers described that these policies as mostly related to engaging (or not engaging) young people when they were high from glue. But threats, confrontations, and violence occurred in many forms and in many situations, and workers said that they mostly relied on their own skills and “practice experiences” to manage these. In most cases, workers said they walked away from such situations. Padam, who used to do street outreach, said that when they walked away, they had to make sure that they did not “close the door behind them.” He added that walking away “must not be viewed by young people as workers running away,” and said that he sometimes tried to calm the young people who were being violent and talked to them about why they were angry.

At times, workers also had to ensure the safety of the young people. Workers said that they sometimes found young people fighting among themselves. In such situations, the outreach workers often approached group leaders and other street children who were not fighting and talked to them about breaking-up the fight. Occasionally, workers walked into situations where older youth or adults were beating younger people. In these situations, workers had to work to protect both themselves and the young people. For example, Sabin described one such situation:

An older man was hitting a young brother with a big metal chain. I saw it but did not stop him right away. That would have made the situation worse. That man had consumed alcohol. Trying to stop him would have been like adding fuel to the fire. It would have made him more aggressive. I was with other co-workers, and we did not say anything. Gradually, he stopped hitting the brother.

The risks to personal safety were viewed as even greater for female street outreach workers, reflecting the influence of traditional Nepali gender roles. Most street outreach workers were men, and many workers viewed outreach work as being risky, difficult, and not suitable for women. This was because street outreach work was done on the streets, often in the evenings, and young people used vulgar language and cursed frequently, all of which in Nepali society women should be protected from. Women outreach workers too noted the inconvenience and risks in doing their work but said that gender became less important when a worker had appropriate skills and experiences and built street contacts.

As these women workers mentioned, basic to street outreach in this dynamic and unpredictable street world was “getting in.” The streets were youth workers’ workplace, but they were the homes of the street children and youth, and workers had to negotiate

their entry into these homes. If the young people did not allow the workers' in, then no work could be done. Viewed this way, the young people controlled this space, and by extension, street outreach work. This necessitated workers to negotiate with the norms regarding how and when to visit and work with these young people. To be able to do this, workers needed to build and maintain contacts with the young people.

### **Building and maintaining street social networks**

In Nepal, youth work was done in the context of distrust between workers and the young people, and the nature of worker-young people interactions was characterized mainly by exchange. This practice differed from much of general youth work practiced internationally where youth work usually relies on healthy and meaningful relationships between workers and young people (Banks, 2010). In Nepal, both the workers and young people were intentional about building and maintaining contacts with the other for mutual benefit. That is, workers did so to be able to “rescue” young people, while the young people were more interested in getting material benefits and help when needed. A starting point for negotiating such social exchanges with young people was building street contacts.

### **Building street contacts**

Building street contacts was a step toward moving beyond knowing the other as a category – “street children” and “youth workers” – to knowing the other as an individual. Here, street contacts meant knowing “who is who.” This was the first step in working on the streets and also an on-going activity. In street outreach, knowing others was not a simple activity. Often, workers could not walk up to the young people and introduce

themselves. This was because most of these young people had many experiences of “being told” by adults what to do and how to live, and did not like adult interruptions or interference in their lives. Therefore, workers had to co-create opportunities or use different strategies to meet young people and build contacts with them. These approaches or strategies largely depended on the nature and size of the agency’s street outreach programs and the workers’ experiences in doing this work.

In many cases, workers initial contacts with young people were facilitated by the services offered by their street outreach programs and their colleagues. Some outreach programs offered food and first aid that many young people liked and used. To get these services, young people had to talk to workers. This presented an opportunity to workers to “get to know” the young people, learn their names and hang-out places, and also give young people their names, organization, and contact information. Workers new to street outreach also built contacts by visiting the streets with colleagues who were already known to the streets. This was possible only in street outreach programs that were relatively large in scope and employed many workers.

Workers also built contacts through other young people. The young people, particularly those who had been on the streets for several years, had established wide street networks. They knew other young people as friends, brothers, family, or rivals competing for the same resources. As part of their street survival strategy, these young people informally “monitored” their areas, keeping track of who already lived there and who newly came to live there. Workers who had long-term contacts with these youth sought their help to meet young people. Madan, a worker with many years of street

outreach experience, explained:

I know many street children and youth. When I see new faces on the streets, I go to the ones I already know and ask who these new children are. Street children whom I already know introduce me to the new ones. The new ones usually do not talk to me in the beginning. They will remain quiet and not laugh or joke with me like the others. But they open up slowly.

These approaches used to build street contracts were different for workers, particularly new workers, employed in relatively small street programs.

Workers employed in NGOs that had limited street outreach programs used observation and inter-personal communication skills to build street contacts. Small street outreach programs usually had fewer staff and offered fewer services. For example, Santosh worked in an NGO whose primary focus was its transition home and its street outreach work was not regular. Prabin worked in another NGO that had scaled back its work because of decreased funding. In these programs, workers did not visit the streets in groups or could not visit all geographical areas regularly. Santosh said that in many areas, he was not a “familiar” face. Therefore, when we went to the streets, he first observed young people, studied their activities and group dynamic, and then looked for opportunities to talk to individuals:

Many [street children and youth] become violent when we approach them. This is because they are also scared of us. They sometimes curse and spit at us. That is why we need to observe them first and find out what they do and how are they interacting with other people. For example, when I see a group of youth walking with a sack full of plastics, I casually follow them. I watch them do their work. They usually pick up plastics, cardboard boxes, and metals from trash. After half hour or so of observing them from a distance, I go to a boy and ask, “*Bhai* [brother], do you sell these things?” or something like that. If he says, “Yes, I sell them at the junk yard,” then I ask, “How much do you get for it?” In this way, I find opportunities to talk to them.

Prabin talked about similar ways of building contacts with young people:

I stay a bit farther away from them [street children and youth] and act like I'm just hanging out. I watch what they are doing, but I don't make eye contact with them. I pay attention to who is doing what, and after a few days of doing this, I go and talk to them. I usually start by asking a youth something like, "Weren't you playing cards yesterday?" Then the youth will ask me how I know this, and I would reply, "I have been here for a few days now. You probably didn't notice me, but I sat over there texting on my phone."

These approaches facilitated workers' street familiarity and built street contacts, which were important but not sufficient. To "motivate" young people to leave the streets, workers had to be able to understand individual young people more deeply, that is to learn about their past, current situations, and future aspirations. Young people shared this kind of information only when they knew workers well and perceived them as "real" and credible.

### **Establishing street credibility**

Workers' lack of credibility with the young people resulted in barriers to their work, both when they were new to this work and when they were experienced. Many workers said that these young people often ignored, ridiculed, or tricked new workers. For example, Prabin recounted his experience of being tricked by a group of young people when he was new to the streets:

Only two brothers were hanging out when I reached there. They asked me if I would buy them a cup of tea. I agreed, and we went to a teashop. At the teashop, I ordered three cups of tea, two for them, and one for me. Then one brother asked from my back, "Why only three?" I turned around and ten of them were standing there. I still have not been able to figure out where they appeared from, but I had to buy tea for all of them. I could not say I am buying for only two.

No credibility meant that workers' talks and actions were interpreted from a space of distrust. As described, this "distrust" in workers were based on young people's personal experiences of interactions with workers and NGOs, or learned about from

others. Furthermore, young people's distrust in workers increased their risk of threat, aggression, and violence from young people. For example, Padam described how he was nearly beaten by street youth when he was new to the streets and had limited skills to appropriately communicate with the young people:

We [the NGO] had some shelter space available for girls and needed to recruit them. We went to a park for our regular outreach. Some street boys were hanging out there, but I did not see any girls. So, I asked the boys, "Do you know any girls? Can you bring them to me?" This upset the brothers, one of whom replied, "You are an NGO staff and you are asking for girls?" The brothers started to surround me, and I realized what I said. That day I learned that I should say "sisters" and not "girls."

Niraj, another outreach worker, described his experience of being threatened with HIV contaminated needles:

This happened in my second week of street outreach work. I reached that place and found that a brother had overdosed on drugs. The boys surrounded me and asked that I call an ambulance. I did not know how to handle such situations and called my supervisor for guidance. He suggested I call an NGO that offered ambulance service, and I did so. The ambulance took a while to get there. In the mean time, one youth came to me with a syringe in his hand and said, "Will you call the ambulance or do you want to be stabbed?" I was really scared; many are HIV positive. I called that NGO again and put the phone on a loud speaker so that everyone could hear the conversation and be sure that the ambulance was indeed on its way.

Workers needed to be credible to the young people in order to change that environment of distrust and to co-create a space where young people could interpret the worker's actions more positively. Many workers said that when they had relationships with young people, they excused or overlooked workers' minor violations of street norms and, more importantly, accepted scolding from the workers for certain actions like sniffing glue. In building this kind of "relationships," workers needed to demonstrate continuously that they understood these young people's problems and troubles, that they

were “real,” and that they “cared.” This was important because it was not only the workers who assessed these young people. These young people also constantly assessed and re-assessed the worker’s values, attitudes, and behaviors. Thus, doing frontline youth work was an ongoing test for the workers.

### **“I hear you”**

According to the workers, their street credibility was closely associated with their respect for and empathy toward the young people. In this, workers viewed as important language and tonality in talking to the young people. Some workers said that they talked to the young people using words and tones that they used for their own children, as a way to make these young people feel that they care for them. For example, some workers called the boys “*bhai*” [little brother] and “*babu*” [little son] and the girls “*baini*” [little sister] or “*chhori*” [daughter]. A management level staff explained that many of these young people have been abused and neglected by their family and society, and a little attention from a worker sometimes meant a lot to them. Other workers used a slightly different approach. They used the language and tonalities of the streets as a way to let the young people know that they are one of them. For example, Kumar explained:

I have a street background. I was one of them [street children]. I have been in this world [street and NGO] for about 15 years now. That is why it is easier for me to talk to brothers and for them to talk to me. I understand what they go through. I am better able to understand their lives and their problems than other staff. I talk to them about these things in the street style. I present myself in a street way. Other workers [who worked in his NGO] do not have a deep understanding of the realities of street life. That is why I facilitate the conversation between these workers and street children.

In demonstrating their respect and empathy for the young people, it was also important that workers let the young people know that they “mattered as individuals.”

According to the workers, one way of doing this was by learning their names and calling the young people by their names. Padam added that noticing individuals and asking about them also demonstrated that the workers cared for individual youth. He described doing so when he was an outreach worker:

If I didn't see a brother, I asked his friends where he was. And then I would tell his friends to let that brother know that I asked about him. This would make the brother happy. He would know that I cared for him. It is important to let street children and youth know that we care for them. Many of these young people have experienced abuse and neglect. A little bit of attention means a lot to them.

Another crucial aspect of demonstrating their respect and empathy was not acting "smart" or being "judgmental," said the workers. This included accepting lice, dirt, smell of the glue, and "vulgar language" as part of the street world. Some workers said they sat with street children on the floor and chatted with them, drinking tea, and even treating them to a cup of tea. They added that they listened to the young people first and did not "preach" to them (right away) about living healthy lifestyles on and off the streets.

Chetan explained:

We can't act smart and give them advice or criticize them for doing what they do. We have to first build relationships with them. We have to respect them and the conditions in which they live. When we are visiting their place, we may find them sniffing glue or using drugs. In such situations, we must not start "treating" them. We must not tell them to not sniff glue right away. They do not want our advice.

These ways of showing young people that workers' respected and empathized with them and their everyday street life increased workers' street credibility and also reduced the social distance between workers and street young people. It helped young people see the workers as individuals who "hung out," chatted, joked, played games, and drank tea with them. Doing so increased the workers' credibility and thus strengthened

their contacts with young people. To be further accepted as well as heard by the young people, many workers said that they also had to be “authentic” and “practice what they preached.”

### **“Walking the talk”**

To many workers, an important aspect of building credibility with young people was practicing in their everyday personal and professional lives what they preached to the young people. Workers explained that doing so reflected their integrity, which was crucial in gaining credibility. Moreover, these professional and personal practices were often beyond the requirements listed in their employer NGO’s “code of conduct.” They included not smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, which were a part of the workers’ street education to the young people. As Madan said, “We can’t tell young people to stop smoking cigarettes if we are doing it ourselves.”

In everyday practice, “walking the talk’ and thereby being “role models” were idealized and not practiced by all. On the contrary, some workers were reported as acting in ways that damaged their credibility and the credibility of other workers and of their employing NGOs. For example, a youth shared the following story about workers drinking alcohol while doing street outreach work:

Youth 1: I don’t like those sirs. They come at night to give us medicine, but they sit at the pub and drink alcohol.

Youth 2: Not all of them do that. Only Bishal sir...

Youth 1: That other sir, the old man, he also drinks. One time, they parked their van by the road and went to the pub. We saw the van, went looking for them, and found them at the pub drinking Blue Diamond.

*What is Blue Diamond?*

Youth 1: Alcohol. I went in the pub and said, “What is this? You came to give us medicine and instead of doing that, you are drinking? If you don’t come back now, I will break the windows of your van.”

It was not only the young people who told such stories. The workers also told stories of other workers who smoked pot with street young people during street outreach work. An example was Keshab, who candidly talked about smoking pot on the streets with other young people as a way to let them know that “he is one of them.” Such acts were reported as being done most often by peer educators, who typically were former street children. Yet, clearly, other workers also did this, as seen in the story told by the young people. Such acts became folktales of the streets and were shared among the young people. This added further to an environment of distrust and low credibility for some, if not all the workers.

Another aspect of “walking the talk” was following through on workers’ promises to the young people. Workers talked about being honest in their communications with the young people and not making any promises. As Bikash explained:

I never make promises. I never say, “I will come again to see you tomorrow, and I’ll do this and that for you.” If you do that, they will never trust you. They have many experiences of promises made by NGO staff that were not fulfilled. That is why they don’t trust workers who make promises. On the streets, we have to stay in that very moment and talk about we can and cannot do for them right then.

Typically, promises were made when workers “marketed” their NGOs’ services to the young people. The young people heard and were aware of the difference between what the workers told them and what they received when they used center-based services. The young people also talked about youth workers not coming to help them when called. Such practices negatively influenced workers’ street credibility.

One way of understanding worker practices that damaged their credibility and their employer NGOs' credibility is from the frame of selection, training, and supervision of these workers. In Nepal, there were no professional institutions training or supervising ethical practices of these workers. This was the responsibility of the employing NGOs. Since most NGOs worked in the context of funding uncertainty and street outreach was an entry-level position, the NGOs filled this position through referrals from colleagues, as explained by three management level staff. A common practice was also to employ former street youth as peer educators who left the streets with the help of their now employer agencies. These peer educators were viewed by the NGOs as being a good fit for this work because they represented "successful" cases and could be role models for the young people. NGOs viewed peer educators also as being more approachable to the young people on the streets because they had lived-experiences of being a part of the same street world. These assumptions and hiring practices could mean that the NGOs overlooked the training and other support needed by these workers. There was little supervision of workers during street outreach. On the other hand, young people did not report such activities to the NGO managers because they thought they would not be heard.

Thus, it can be suggested that the employing agencies were also partly responsible for their workers' unethical practices. This compromised the credibility of both the workers and their NGOs, and further contributed to an environment of distrust between and among the young people, the workers, and the NGOs. In this environment of distrust, youth work became an exchange built around the interdependency of the worker and the

young people. Many workers used that conception to further build their credibility with the street children and youth.

**“I am there when you need me.”**

This exchange relationship meant that workers kept their end of the bargain and helped young people when asked, and this increased their street credibility. Workers said that often, they were the only ones these young people could turn to for help. Many of these young people did not have regular contacts with family and did not have access to basic services, such as food, personal hygiene facilities, medical services, legal support, and the like. For these, they called on the workers, who worked out ways to help them. For example, Padam who used to be an outreach worker and was now a manager described helping young people who came to him for help:

They [street children and youth] call me or sometimes come here to see me. Sometimes they come here because they are worried they might have contracted sexually transmitted diseases. They say, "Sir, I have to discuss something with you." I take them to a room and they will tell me that they had unprotected sex and are worried that they might have HIV. They tell me things like that. I refer them to get tested for HIV and other STDs. If they need treatment, I refer them to organizations that offer treatments. I also give them information about safe sex.

A group of young people talked about a worker coming at night to help their wounded friend:

Three boys stabbed our friend at night. He was on the streets and bleeding. Umesh sir [a youth worker] came and took him to the hospital, but he died the next day. We like Umesh sir. He always helps us. He treats us all like his sons.

Some youth workers talked about helping older youth who “aged-out” of services. For example, Bijay said:

Krishna is older, and NGOs do not want to help him. He had many chances to leave the street when he was young, but he never took those chances. Now there

is none. He is now frustrated with life and has started to cut himself ..... last week, he had cut his hands and a cheek. I brought him to the center and dressed his wound. It is not good if he continues cutting himself. He sits outside the Shiva temple. I check on him once in a while and give him food. I tell him, "It is not too late, don't give up. You are a man. You can fight."

These workers' became the young people's "go-to" person. Helping young people was a part of the exchange relationship. Helping them, particularly in emergency situations, was also viewed as workers' and their employer NGOs' moral or ethical responsibility and as ensuring children's rights to adequate standards of living. At times, helping young people could mean crossing street outreach programs' philosophical boundary of "not making street life comfortable" for young people. It could be that these workers also conceptualized their support and services in emergency situations as making street life "livable," rather than comfortable.

Challenging in this exchange-relationship was managing expectations of the young people. Many young people told stories of workers not coming to help when called. For example, a young person said:

*What do these sirs [street outreach workers] do?*

They come, say "hello, hi," talk a bit. That's it.

*What do you think about what they say?*

We think nothing of it. They [frontline youth workers] haven't done anything for us. We let in what they say from one ear and out the other. We do that especially with sirs from Safe Haven [an NGO].

*Why?*

We don't like them. One time, our friend was seriously ill and we called them for help. But Kishor sir did not want to talk to us. He finally picked up the phone, but he said he would come in 2-3 days. Our friend was dying. We don't like Save Haven.

Many stories told by young people were of workers not coming to help them when they were locked up in jail for stealing or other petty crime. Another young person told this story:

They don't come to get us out of jail. They say they are NGO staff, but they don't come to help us when we call them from jail.

*Why do you think they don't come?*

Who knows? Maybe because we do "wrong things." When I called them, they said, "Ok brother, I'm on my way." But I was in jail for 42 days, and not once did they come.

In interviews, management level staff clearly said that they did not encourage young people to engage in petty crimes and did not offer help if the police had a valid reason for locking them up. The young people seemed aware of this, but they also thought that NGOs' got money to help young people and so should help them in all situations. This expectation seemed in part to be encouraged by workers, since many young people said that workers responded to their phone calls by saying "they will come" but would not do so. Also important to note is that these workers were NGO employees and were required to follow their employer's policy. This may mean that in some situations, workers were unable to help young people. Also, it was expected by both worker and young people that the other could "let them down," given the environment of distrust in which street outreach was done.

One outcome of these expectations was that the young people's "anger" toward workers was often temporary. Workers said that when their actions upset the young people, they reacted right away with threat, scolding, cursing, or hitting (or trying to hit)

workers. But they cooled down in a few days, and worker-young people relationship continued. Madan described one incident:

Our anti-glue sniffing campaign included a message to the public that money they give to street children is mostly spent on sniffing glue. Street youth became angry with us because this message could decrease their daily income. They threw stones at our office vehicle, tore up our pamphlets, and cursed us. A few days after that incident, some brothers came to us and apologized for their behaviors. They said, “Sir, we shouldn’t have done that.”

They tend to get angry right away, but they don’t stay angry for too long. This is because they know us. When there is a problem, they call us. When they are sick or injured, they call us. When they get into trouble, they come to us. If there is problem with the police, they call us. And sometimes, they react without thinking. They know that we work for them. They know that.

Thus, within the broader environment of distrust was intricately woven connections between the workers and young people, and these formed the basis of their everyday interactions.

In this exchange relationship, young people showed respect to the workers they viewed as credible. Workers talked about different ways young people showed them respect. One was hiding their glue pouches or not engaging in any “deviant” actions when these workers visited them. This was reflected in Ajay’s recount of his recent meeting with a former street youth:

If they were smoking pot when I reached there, they would put it away. One youth was telling me the other day about an incident that happened when he was living on the street. He said that he and his friends were hungry and had started a small fire to barbeque some meat. Then they saw me coming there, got scared, and threw away the meat. I asked him why they did that and he said, “We just felt we shouldn’t be doing that. I felt ashamed when I saw you.”

The young people also showed their respect by quietly listening to workers’ scolding and advice. Kumar explained:

You cannot go the street and tell brothers and sisters to stop sniffing glue. They will not listen to you. They may even curse you if you do that. First, you have to

show them that you care and respect for them. When I started working in Pashupati and Jamal area, I did not tell the brothers to stop sniffing glue. I avoided that topic and pretended that I did not see them sniffing glue. Now, if I catch them sniffing glue, I snatch the pouch and scold them. Sometimes I get angry and say, “Ok, sniff as much glue as you want. I don’t care if you die.” I curse at them. And they sit there and listen because they know I care for them.

Workers added that young people hugged the workers they liked when they visited.

Another way of showing respect was protecting workers when they visited their streets.

Young people did so particularly to female workers. For example, Anita, a woman worker, described her experience:

One time, I was walking with a group of street youth. We saw another group of street youth walking toward us. I did not know them. Then a youth from my group said, “Miss, please walk from this side.” He suggested that I walk from the other side of the street. He was trying to protect me. Sometimes they even bring me gifts, like bangles and tika.

Thus, nature of worker-young people relationship changed as workers gained street credibility. What did not change was the general environment of distrust between the worker and the young people. But in this distrustful environment, both worker and young people continually negotiated and re-negotiated their “relationship.” Sometimes, there was ambivalence, tensions, and anger between the worker and young people and other times, there was care and even trust. All this opened-up spaces for work with the young people and help them transition off the streets. One common way of doing this is what the workers called “psychosocial counseling.”

### **Psychosocial counseling: Helping young people change**

“Psychosocial counseling” was “serious” and “critical” conversations between workers and the young people about their past, present, and future. It was the workers’ job to offer psychosocial counseling, and this was offered together with other services.

To the workers, psychosocial counseling was basic to street outreach work – it was a crucial tool used to achieve the street outreach goals of enhancing the young people’s “wellbeing” and “rescue” from the streets. However, to the young people, these were just conversations in which they sometimes did not want to participate. When asked what workers talked about, one youth replied, “They say don’t sniff dendrite, don’t smoke cigarette, go to their NGOs and stay there, things like that.”

There were three main purposes of psychosocial counseling, all of which were guided by the philosophies of street outreach work. The first was to encourage young people to adopt “healthy lifestyles.” A healthy lifestyle was when young people avoided or discontinued using cigarettes, glue, alcohol, and other medications and stopped self-cutting, intravenous drug use, and engaging in unprotected sex. This was a moral status, as much as a health status. Workers used psychosocial counseling to help young people become aware of the negative effects of unhealthy lifestyles and offered information about “support” and “opportunities” available to help them change these lifestyles.

A second purpose was to “motivate” young people to use NGOs’ center-based services. Getting young people to use center-based services was central to the “rescue process.” According to workers, young people lived a “free” life on the streets, did “whatever” they wanted, and enjoyed this freedom. In contrast to this, at NGO centers, young people had little control of their time and were required to follow agency rules. Workers explained that this was one of the reasons these young people resisted using center-based services. At the same time, these workers highlighted their sense, as well as requirement of their work, to bring these young people to the center. To them, it was only

at the centers that these young people could be “socialized” into “normal childhood and youthhood.” Herein was the everyday struggle of power, values, and morals between youth workers and young people, facilitated by the NGOs with funding, values, and the philosophies of the international donor agencies. The workers viewed young people as needing to be “saved” morally and ethically, while the young people wanted the services to meet their everyday needs.

“Saving” young people was “socializing” them to change, to become “normal.” While the young people viewed themselves as “just like any other people working to make a living,” workers and management staff saw street children and youth as “different,” “not normal,” and *bigreko*, (deviant). To these workers, their job was to get the young people to “fit” mainstream society. To do this, they needed to change their behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles through “socialization.” This socialization was not possible on the streets because the “free streets” did not allow youth workers to closely monitor or control these young people’s lives - their lifestyles and behaviors. Therefore, in psychosocial counseling workers encouraged young people to use these center-based services and told them about free food, clothes, education, and other services they would get there. It must be noted that there were some NGOs that helped young people return home directly from the streets without “socialization” at drop-in centers and transition homes.

Another purpose of psychosocial counseling was “needs assessment,” which meant understanding young people’s problems and troubles and identifying their service needs, typically from the workers’ and agency’s points of view. This was another

philosophy of street outreach programs, and so this too was the street outreach workers' responsibility. In practice, youth workers through conversations with young people learned about their problems and troubles. To workers, this process helped their NGOs to stay "connected to the streets," to better understand street children and youth, and to use the information to write program proposals to donor agencies. But this practice could also be understood as a kind of self-fulfillment. In "needs assessment," the workers' ways of seeing, hearing, and reading what young people told were based on their personal and professional experiences. This means that what they found or what was "real" for them may be were what they had been trained to find. And these findings justified their own, as well as their organizations,' presence and work with these young people.

The agenda for each psychosocial counseling session was not pre-determined. Rather, this was co-created within each conversation by the workers and the young people. Moreover, these purposeful conversations were not scheduled activities. They were more spontaneous and took place amidst the chaos of the streets.

### **Psychosocial counseling amidst the streets chaos**

Psychosocial counseling took place in the "hustle and bustle" of the streets. Many workers described these conversations as being constantly interrupted by passers by, those shopping, hawking merchandise, or just hanging out on the streets. These people often surrounded the young people and the workers, watched, listened to the conversations, asked questions, and offered suggestions. An example of this occurred during data collection. Despite our effort to hold interviews in quiet places where we could not be heard and interrupted, our interviews paused twice because of such public

interruptions. Once, a group of adults came to listen in and asked if the interview was for a radio station. Another time, a shopkeeper from a nearby store came and said to the young people, “Why don’t you also tell them about how you all sniff glue at night and lie here intoxicated.” Workers said that they also experienced such interruptions during other street outreach programs. Madan, an outreach worker, described how one adult disrupted their street drama:

We were showing a street drama and distributing pamphlets about our organization. One man from the audience started saying, “You people only show these dramas and distribute pamphlets. That’s all you do, and you take home money that come for the street children. This is all a scam. I am fed up with you people.

Workers said that these interruptions at times became a major hindrance to “psychosocial counseling,” particularly when young people reacted angrily to local people watching them or commenting about them. As Prabin described:

If a brother is sniffing glue and I go to talk to him, other people will surround us and see what is going on. If I am alone with the brother, he will usually keep quiet and listen to what I am saying, but I don’t know if they understand what I say when they are like that. Brothers usually get angry if other people surround and watch him. He will shout to the public, "What are you watching?" They can even be violent in situations like that.

This complex mix of responses reflects the society’s attitude toward these young people and toward the NGOs. Workers said that the curiosities of the local people were mostly based on concerns about what these workers might do to the young people. For example, Prabin described how local people reacted when he approached “street sisters” and talked to them:

One time, I was talking to two sisters at a park. There were other people there. Some began to be attentive to what I was doing, and one asked why I was bothering these sisters. My colleague who was also there explained to these

people that we are from an NGO that works with street children. Sometimes, we face problems like this from the public.

This concern may have increased when workers talked to girls, who were traditionally supposed to be “inside the house” and protected by male household heads. Some workers talked about local vendors being concerned about young people’s wellbeing and telling them, “why don’t you go to the NGO and try it out.” Local people’s amusement and curiosity could also be because they were seeing these “well-dressed” workers sitting on the floor and talking to “dirty” “glue sniffing” children. This is not a “normal” scenario in Nepal, a society divided by caste- and class-based hierarchies. On the other end of the local reactions was anger toward both young people and NGOs. This anger could have been an outcome of the “nuisance” caused by the young people. It was also based on local understanding and assumptions about NGOs’ work in general. Many workers talked about local people assuming that NGOs “harvest dollars” but do not do any work. These people vented their frustration to these workers, who were NGO representatives. Workers also talked about others in the immediate environment of street children and youth, such as local shopkeepers and even police, who perceived NGOs as “enabling” these young people to engage in negative activities.

Further adding to this chaos were the young people themselves and their lifestyles. As mentioned, the workers described each street visit as being familiar and unpredictable - familiar because they were expected, unpredictable because anything could happen there. For example, sometimes the workers found young people busy, tired, high, angry, fighting or not at their hang-out places. In these cases, “psychosocial counseling” was neither appropriate nor possible. Often, the workers found young people

sniffing glue, sick, or wounded from self-cutting, which provided the workers a context for talking to them about leaving the streets. Other times, they assessed street situations and co-created with young people environments for “psychosocial counseling.” Crucial to this was connecting, assessing, and then counseling.

### **From “psychosocial counseling” to rescue**

Psychosocial counseling was purposeful conversations that street outreach workers facilitated using specific skills and techniques learned in training and at work. Workers’ descriptions of their “psychosocial counseling” suggested two distinct phases. These were: 1) “connecting” to young people, and 2) “assessing” needs and offering advice.

#### **Connecting to young people**

The streets were the young people’s home, and they had a say in how youth work was done there. Unlike in center-based settings, on the streets it was the young people who decided who they wanted to talk to, when, and for how long. This decision was largely influenced at that moment by the nature of these young people’s relationship with the worker at that moment. This meant that these young people sometimes sat and talked to the workers, while at other times they simply walked away, or made excuses and walked away from the workers. For example, Prabin described one of the ways young people say “no” to the workers:

If the brothers do not want to talk to us, they will signal each other with their eyes, and everyone leaves gradually. The leader will engage the workers in a conversation, and others will gradually walk away from there. Finally, the leader will also find a way to get out of the conversation.

To workers, young people walked away from conversations when they did not have a good working relationship with the worker, when conversation was “boring,” or there was “too much lecturing.” Unlike in center-based settings, workers on the streets could not “tell” young people to engage in conversations. Instead, they had to find ways to co-create with young people a space and an environment for talk and for psychosocial counseling. Such an environment had to be “entertaining” and “engaging” to the young people, according to the workers.

In producing and co-creating such spaces, workers used their personal and professionally learned skills. They joked, played games, danced, and sang with young people to create a social space for talk. For example, Prabin talked about being “friendly” with the young people and joking with them:

I usually joke with them. If they ignore me, I ask, “Why are you shy today?” If they are somber, I ask, “Did your girlfriend dump you?” Then they open up. Sometimes they reply, “Sir, I’m like this because I haven’t had anything to eat today.” This is how I talk to brothers and make them open up to me.

Sabin talked about playing card games and taking their photographs:

Sometimes I take cards to the streets and show them card tricks. Sometimes they are playing cards, and I join them. I know I will get in trouble if the police catch me playing cards on the roadside, but I do it anyway. Doing this helps me get closer to the brothers, and they will talk to me more openly. Sometimes I click their photos. They love posing alone and with their friends for photos. It is fun to do these things, and it allows me to get close to them.

Similarly, Bijay described singing and dancing as ways to gradually engage young people in “deep” conversations:

I sing and dance with children, and they call me “Crazy Sir.” I do these things to make the environment jovial. But I am not there to just have fun. I make them laugh, but I also understand their pain. I don’t ask questions about their personal lives directly. I find ways to get them to talk to me. Sometimes, we sing and

dance, and later I say, “By the way, how are you all? Should we talk about our *dukha-sukha* (sad and happy things in life)?” Sometimes we do that, sometimes they say, “Let’s not talk about that today,” and I let it go.

These approaches reflect the sharing of power and control between young people and worker, necessary for work to be done both “for” and “with” young people. Sitting with young people and being with them in these informal ways, these workers aimed to reduce the social distance and social hierarchy between the young people and workers. Workers heard and responded to the young people’s situations, interests, and suggestions, and negotiated with them on when, where, and how these conversations were to be held. This youth work was different from youth work in other settings, where these same workers imposed on young people the center’s rules and requirements.

Engaging young people in these ways opened up spaces for psychosocial counseling. But this effort was not enough. Workers had to draw on other psychosocial counseling skills. One important skill described by workers was “careful listening.” To workers, careful listening was viewed as important for connecting with the young people and for “understanding” them. They explained that listening attentively to young people further opened up spaces for young people to “share” their stories. Workers added that these were “marginalized” young people, whose experiences and “voices” were rarely “heard by” or “mattered to” their family and community. Therefore, when the workers listened attentively, it gave the young people a sense that the worker’ cared about their problems. “Listening” was also important to help workers “better understand” individual young people and offer advise accordingly. For example, Kumar said that understanding a young person’s personal history and biography helped him get a sense of how they

would respond to the idea of leaving the streets:

We have to understand the child, before we work to change his mind. We have to find out how long has he been living on the streets and why he came to the streets. He may have come to the streets to make money and support his family. He may have come to escape his alcoholic parents or for some other reasons. These reasons influence how they respond to the idea of leaving the streets. Some say they have lived on the street for too long and there is no returning now. Some worry about what their families will say. Some have a responsibility to support their family. Some do not want to have any contact with their family. We have to listen to all this and understand before we say or do anything.

“Careful listening” was not just for empathy and understanding; it was also a tool workers used to test and authenticate the information given by the young people.

Listening attentively helped workers notice inconsistencies in the stories told by the young people. As described, workers constantly strategized about how to “trap” young people in their conversations and into enrolling in their programs, and the young people typically found ways to evade these traps. This was an on-going cat-and-mouse game played by workers and young people. In this, as workers said, many young people “made up” their life stories as a way to give the workers what they wanted to “hear” and what they had to hear from the workers to receive certain services. As a part of this game, to prevent being “played” by these young people, these workers had to listen carefully to young people’s information told one-on-one and in groups. Because of this, “patience” was said to be another “must have” skill.

To the workers, “patience” was needed to deal with the constant interruptions and distractions of the streets. Street chaos was the context for psychosocial counseling.

Workers said that they needed to be patient so as to manage the frustrations and anger of the local people and the young people, and their own arising from working in chaos. For

example, Sabin talked about how street chaos posed barriers to on-going conversations with young people:

When I talk to a group of brothers, there is no guarantee that I will be able to continue that conversation in my next visit. In my next visit, I may find the brothers high from drugs. It is hard to talk to them in that condition, which means I would have to postpone the conversation to the next visit. The next time, I may find them a bit calm in which case, I would talk to them about how they are, what is happening, and so on. Sometimes, something else may happen the next time too, and I may not get a chance to continue that conversation. We start a conversation with the brothers, and sometimes, that conversation does not go anywhere.

Equally important was being patient with young people and playing along (or outplaying) this “cat-and-mouse” game. This meant “hanging out” with these young people, listening to them, asking for more information from them, offering some services and advice to them, and continuing this cycle of meet, greet, tease, play and try to talk to about them and about them leaving the streets. Beyond patience, the workers also listed as important to their work other psychosocial counseling skills, such as “being empathic,” “probing,” “being non-judgmental,” maintaining the confidentiality of information given by the young people. These values, skills, and ways-of-being with young people were learned in agency training.

#### **Assessing needs and offering advice**

In the space that workers and young people co-created for “psychosocial counseling,” workers listened to young people, assessed their situations, and offered advice. Workers said that young people told stories of their past and present problems and troubles. They talked about problems in their “love life,” frustrations over not getting too far in life, and sometimes problems with their biological families, even abuse they

experienced on and off the streets. If young people talked about experiencing abuse on the streets, workers prioritized working to remove them from their abusive environment. Usually, workers listened to young people's stories to understand them as individuals, which included understanding the individual's present and past experiences, his or her "perceived" needs, and future aspirations. Workers explained that this helped them assess individual young people's readiness and willingness to change his or her lifestyles and situation. In response to the information and stories young people told, these workers helped them understand the many negative consequences of their street lives (as workers and their agencies saw this) and offered information about opportunities to change their life-situations. Rohit, a management level staff, explained:

Our staff talk to street children about meanings of life, importance of time, family, and so on. It is difficult to have long conversations on the streets. So, these conversations are usually short, and workers just talk about two-three things to motivate street children to leave the streets. Our staff help these children understand that if they work hard, they can achieve their dreams.

Workers' assessment of, and advice to, young people were influenced by their training and their cultural socialization into what is "appropriate," particularly for women and girls. Most workers were men, most street children were boys, and a majority of NGOs served only boys. Given this, most workers were more experienced and skilled in working with boys than with girls. But on the streets, conversations were held in peer groups that included girls. This required workers to talk to girls, even when they worked for NGOs that only served boys. Workers reported differences in their reported skills in offering psychosocial counseling to girls. For some, the sex of these young people did not matter, and these were generally older workers with more than five years of street

outreach experiences. Other younger and newer male workers reported “cultural barriers” to talking frankly with girls. This was because conversations with young people included their sexual activities and sexual abuse. For example, Madan said:

Our organization offers services to boys only. I am really good at working with boys, but I am not as good with girls. I meet them on the streets when I go for street outreach. I don't know how to talk to them. With boys, I use informal language and slangs – I talk just like them. But I have to be more careful about the language when talking to street girls. And girls don't share their problems with men. They have been abused by men on and off the streets, so it is hard for them to trust us.

Prabin's NGO offered services to both boys and girls, and he described challenges in talking to girls about sexual health:

Most of them (street girls) are sex workers, even 10-11 year olds. Street boys also force these sisters to have sex with them. That is why many sisters are HIV positive. I talk to the boys about safe sex during field visits. I ask them, “Do you have sexual relationships with anyone?” If they say yes, my next question is, “Do you use protection?” But it is hard to have such conversation with sisters. They will not talk to me about their sexual behaviors.

There were fewer women doing street outreach work, and the women workers interviewed talked about psychosocial counseling but did not mention talking to young people about their sexual activities. This suggests that street outreach work and training for this work mostly focused on working with boys, who comprised a majority of this group of young people. Such practices may serve to marginalize the girls from NGO services.

In general, workers' advice, their “solution” to the young people's problems, was mainly making them understand that it was their own responsibility and their choice whether to change their lives in what the workers saw as a positive direction. This suggested that in some ways workers and NGOs viewed these young people's present

and their likely futures as an outcome of their personal choices. Their decision to live on the streets may have been influenced by various socio-economic and family realities, but what happened in the future was their choice. NGOs were providing them options to leave the streets and work toward a “brighter future.” While workers and NGOs were focused on these young people’s futures, young people were more concerned about managing their everyday lives on the streets.

“Future” was time orientation for the workers and their agencies. On the streets, for the young people “now” was forever. Workers explained that these young people were “impulsive in nature” and did not think or plan for their future. Daya, a management level staff, described:

When they (street children) make a lot of money, they even ride a taxi. They will eat good food, buy glue and alcohol, and spend all their money. Next day, they are back to being hungry. They live one day at time. They don’t think about tomorrow.

Helping young people see and plan for a “better future” was the workers’ professional and moral responsibility. Were young people to not choose this “better future,” they will likely experience many negative realities of street life, and these could be seen as outcomes of individual choice. Moreover, a “better future” meant that young people go to a NGO center or home to their biological family.

To help young people make these “positive” choices, workers marketed their employer agencies’ services to young people. These workers were employed in different NGOs, but they all worked in the same geographical areas with the same street children and youth. Each worker described and promoted services and opportunities available to young people at their NGOs’ drop-in and transition homes, thus creating a market with

competitive bidding. For example, Prabin talked about telling young people about his NGO's drop-center:

I say, "You can come to our center if you need anything. We have medical services. You can learn to read and write at our center. If you study, it will be good for your future." They say they will come. Some come, some don't.

Kumar talked about sharing similar information about his agency with young people:

I tell brothers and sisters what it would be like to live in a home. What I say depends on who I am talking to. If it is someone who has recently arrived on the streets, I tell that person what my organization is about, how children live here, what kinds of freedom they have here, and so on. New children and youth understand fast. It is difficult to make older youth understand, those youth who have been on the streets for four-five years and have used services of many organizations. To these youth, I give them my example. I tell them that I too was on the streets and then went to my NGO. I tell them that now I sit around the table and work with those workers who used to come to the streets. I feel like I have achieved a lot. That is how I think and tell them.

In so doing, these workers further reinforced their identities as salesman for their NGOs more than as advocates for street children and youth.

This process of psychosocial counseling and getting young people to leave the streets varied. Workers explained that it took some young people, particularly those new to the streets, fewer "counseling sessions" to become ready to leave the streets, while others took longer. According to workers, some young people never became "ready," and these young people were categorized as "addicted to the streets." When these young people decided to leave the streets, the workers did not simply bring them to a transition home. Their "rescue" involved a planned, institutionalized, and normative process.

### **Rescue: From streets to transition homes**

When a young person became ready to leave the streets, a worker began working at facilitating their "rescue." As described, rescue was as much moral as it was physical.

It involved taking young people “out of the streets” and “away from risky and morally depraved activities,” such as glue sniffing, petty crimes, and unprotected sexual activities. This kind of rescue needed strategic planning and actions. Importantly, workers needed to ensure that they “rescued” those with “higher potential” for remaining off the streets.

There were several models of rescue and reintegration into family and society. Some programs, particularly those having a smaller scope of work with street children, rescued and sent young people home directly from the streets. In their street outreach programs, psychosocial counseling focused on preparing young people to go home. Some NGOs offered drop-in centers, and workers from these NGOs “encouraged” young people to go to their drop-in centers, where young people further received “psychosocial counseling” and “encouragement” to leave the streets. Other NGOs offered transition homes or both transition homes and drop-in centers services. Workers employed in these NGOs motivated young people to use drop-in centers and to go to transition homes. Rescue to transition homes was a major step for both the young people and NGOs. For the young people, this meant leaving behind their street families, street homes, and their ways of being. For NGOs, rescue meant considerable financial investment in the young person, and therefore, it was important that they rescue individual young people with a higher chance of being “a successful case.” This section mainly focuses on the “rescue” of young people from the streets to transition homes.

In rescue from the streets to transition homes, a common practice of NGOs and its workers was to rescue young people individually. This could be NGOs’ way of increasing their chances of achieving higher outputs. Workers said that they did not work

toward group rescue because peer groups were difficult to “manage” in transition homes. These groups tended to form “cliques” in transition homes that supported each other in negative activities, including bullying and abusing younger children and “running away.” To prevent this, outreach workers “rescued” young people individually. Also, the “rescue” priority of newer and younger children required workers to strategically not focus on peer groups, which often included older and “hard core” youth. Given all this, leaving the streets for individual youth meant that he or she “break-up” from his or her peers. Thus, young people were “rescued” from the streets and from their peers.

### **Rescuing young people from their peer groups**

For many young people, leaving the streets meant more than “just walking away” from the place where they hung-out with their friends. These streets were the young people’s “home” – a place where they could exercise their agency, and a place where and to which they had developed a sense of belonging. Their peers were in many ways their “family,” and they supported, protected, and cared for them. Rescuing young people from this meaningful place required workers to talk to an individual’s peer groups into “allowing” that individual to leave the streets. In so doing, workers sought support particularly from the individual’s peer group leader.

Peer group leaders played a crucial role in whether, when, and how the individual young person left the streets. Often, young people could or would not leave the streets without the leaders’ agreement. It was these leaders who organized, then protected, and controlled their group members, typically abusing and exploiting them economically and sexually. To them, a young person leaving the streets could mean a loss of income. Thus,

these leaders were often barriers to a young people's rescue. To protect a young person and to facilitate his or her "rescue," the worker focused his/her efforts on older group leaders, building and maintaining good working relationships with them. Many workers said they had good connections with these older leaders. Some said that these leaders were young children when they started street outreach work, and they continued talking and offering them services over the years, as they grew older and even "aged-out" of services. These regular connections became crucial in convincing leaders to let individual young person leave the streets.

It was not only the older group leaders who became a barrier to young people leaving the streets. The individual young person's friendship and family-like relationships with her or his peers also became a barrier. Many young people found it difficult to separate from their peers, who were their friends, brothers, and even life-partners. Living together on the streets, they shared experiences of problems, troubles, and jobs, and developed common worldviews and ways of being-in-the-world. There was also a practice of young girls and boys "getting married" on the streets. Workers said that many girls married group leaders and viewed this as a girl's way of gaining protection, love, and care. For these young people, going to transition homes meant breaking up with their street families and "partners." In such cases, workers "talked" to peer groups about "opportunities" and "better futures" that their partner, friend, and family would get at a transition home and encouraged her or his peers to support the individual youth in going to transition homes. While working with peer groups to motivate individual members to leave the streets, workers also tested individual young people on their seriousness to

leave the streets. For workers, it was crucial to ensure that a young person “rescued” stayed at a transition home or returned home and not run back to the streets.

### **Assessing young people’s seriousness about leaving the streets**

“Rescue” was a primary goal of street outreach programs, but it was important to “rescue” those with seemingly higher chances of remaining in a transition home or remaining with their biological family. The workers gave several reasons for this. First, NGOs spent considerable financial resources on young people’s everyday needs as well as on health, education, and job skill training needs, which would be viewed as “wasted” if young people ran from transition homes. Second, young people leaving or “running away” to the streets from transition homes or from their biological families were for the NGOs’ “failed cases,” and this could influence NGOs’ credibility with funding agencies. Third, workers said that these young people were typically “flippant” in nature and frequently changed their minds about leaving the streets. Fourth, going to a transition home for some young people was a temporary survival strategy. They went there in winter or monsoon seasons because then sleeping on the streets was more difficult. Because of these reasons, workers intentionally delayed young people’s rescue from the streets to transition homes, as a conscious strategy to test a young person’s “seriousness” to leave the streets.

This process of assessing a young person marked the beginning of adult (youth worker’s) control of the young person. Workers tested young people’s “readiness” to leave the streets by setting meeting times and asking them to come to these meetings. Important to note here is that, until the young people became ready to leave the streets,

the workers followed them, and young people decided when, where, and how their meetings were to be held. This was reversed and it was the workers who decided when, where, and how the meetings were to be held once individual young person agreed to leave the streets. Workers viewed young people coming to these meetings regularly as being “serious” about leaving the streets. In these meetings, workers made young person wait as a way to further test their “seriousness.” Santosh, an outreach worker, said that if the young people waited for him, it was an indication that he/she was serious about leaving the streets. But workers also gave them little flexibility in this “test.” Sometimes these young people did not come to the meetings or came late because they were held up by other realities of their everyday life, workers said.

These “test” meetings were used by workers to “pre-socialize” individual young people to transition homes. In “psychosocial counseling,” workers talked about opportunities available to young people if they went to a transition home. This “talk” continued even during these “test meetings,” but in these visits, the worker also informed the young person about rules and activities that he or she needed to follow in the transition home. Group interviews with young people showed that the young people were already familiar with the rules and activities of the transition homes because they had been to many of these. The rescue process for those who had run away from transition homes varied a little.

Responses to young people who ran way from a transition home varied, depending on their length of their stay there and characteristics of the individual youth. Young people who were assessed by workers as having a high chance of “reintegration”

were brought back to the transition home, by following-up with them and encouraging them, and at times forcefully. For example, some workers described the practices of other NGOs that brought vans to the streets and forcefully took back young people who had run away from their transition home. On the other end of this continuum were young people who were viewed as having “little potential” for successful integration.

Management level staff and workers talked about practices of other NGOs (and not their own) of not following up when young people assessed as “difficult to work with” ran away from a transition home. In some cases, young people wanted to return to the transition homes, and workers again tested their seriousness. For example, Padam described:

Some regret leaving our organization and ask us to take them back. When they say that, we tell them to wait for 2-3 days. We set an appointment to meet them next. We go back and talk to them to find if they are still interested in coming to our organization. If they are still interested, we make another appointment to talk to them. We do this 2-3 times. If they are motivated and really want to come with us, they will be there to meet us at every appointment. Then we bring them here.

Some workers also talked about “making young people realize and value the services they get at the transition home.” For example, Sharan described:

They [a group of boys] sent us a message saying they wanted to come back. We decided to bring them back after a month and let them sleep on the streets during this monsoon season. We did so much for them and still they ran away. We want them to see the difference between our organization and other organizations. We also want them to struggle on the streets for a while. So, we ignored their request to take them back.

Thus, workers were strategic about who they rescued and how they did so. These strategies focused on maximizing positive outcomes, which is the number of young people “reintegrated” and “rehabilitated.” This could be understood as workers’ and their

agencies' ways of getting "ahead of the game" they played with the young people. More importantly, this was a selection process, which suggests that leaving the streets was not entirely the individual young person's choice. It was also a choice made by the NGOs and the workers.

### **Summary**

Street outreach work was no simple task. Workers did not have a musical pipe that they could play and lead the children away from the streets never to return. Rather, this was an ongoing game, where both the workers and young people strategize to outplay the other. The outcome of this work, of course, was seen partly as individual young people's personal choices, this leaving little space for NGOs and workers to reflect and modify their orientation and approaches to working with young people.

The nature of street outreach work was congruent to the general environment of the streets and differed from center-based work. Unlike center-based work, street outreach work was mostly not "program" based. This meant that the young people were not required to enroll in street outreach programs, to make serious commitments to street outreach programs or workers, or to follow any program rules or policies. This rigidity and formality was commonly found in most center-based youth programs, even though street outreach programs too were bounded by NGOs' objectives and policies. Nevertheless, the semi-structured nature of this work provided workers opportunities and possibilities to adapt outreach activities to make them "more responsive" to the needs and wellbeing of street children and youth. Necessary for this was the co-creating of spaces with young people for youth work.

Different kinds of spaces were co-created, including geographical, social, and moral spaces. Because street outreach work was done in public and unstructured environments, frontline youth workers co-created geographical spaces that became meeting places for frontline youth workers and young people. Usually such spaces were young people's work place or places where they congregated or slept at night. Social spaces were co-created to build good working relationships with young people. These were spaces where workers and young people hung-out, sang songs, played games, and talked. Moral and ethical spaces helped workers better understand young people's lives, their needs, and aspirations, as these were spaces where young people, individually and in groups, shared with youth workers aspects of their everyday lives, past and present problems and troubles, and youth workers shared information, ideas, and opportunities for young people to what they saw as living healthy and more productive lives off the streets. These activities reflect emotional labor of these workers (Hochschild, 1986). Also, all these spaces acted as "bridges" that opened up possibilities for street children and youth to connect to and transition to mainstream society (Gibson, 2011).

Workers were "connectors" and "sales persons" for their agency's services. Multiple NGOs with similar programs serving the same young people in the same geographical areas created competition between and among organizations, since they all focused on increasing their organization's credibility through "good work," that is, higher program outputs. This was necessary for securing program funding from international agencies. Workers "connected" young people to mainstream society by "marketing" their NGO's services. In so doing, their accountability was directed to their NGO, and via their

NGO to international donor agencies.

In street outreach, social control was minimal but present. Work was done “for and with” the young people, as a necessity and more as a philosophy, it seemed. Workers needed young people to do their work on the streets. But they choose purposefully who they wanted to work with and “rescue.” Their priority of rescuing individual young person who were assessed as “easier to work with” and having “higher potential of remaining off the streets” shows that this “social control” work did not focus on all street children and youth. How the nature of this work changed when these same workers offered services to young people in drop-in centers is described in the next chapter.

## Chapter 9

### Drop-in Centers: Preliminary socialization

#### Observation notes

“Namaste Miss,” “Namaste Miss,” “Namaste Miss,” everyone greeted, as I walked in the room. There were about 10-12 young people who to me seemed to be similar ages. They were looking up at me from the floor, where they were sitting and writing something. I smiled and greeted Namaste back to them, but they continued to look at me, perhaps wondering who I was and why I was there. Also present was a worker, sitting on the floor with these young people. It looked like she was teaching them to write. As I approached to talk to her, another worker walked in the room. He was the manager of this center, and I was there to interview him.

The manager took me to another room, which was smaller than the first room. This was a bedroom for young people wanting to spend the night at the center. The room was a bit dark and a little stuffy from the summer heat and humidity. There were beds on one side of the room, and on the other were a few chairs. The manager offered me a chair and asked if we could do the interview there. I said I did not mind as long as we could talk in private. He closed the door to the room, and we started the interview.

A few minutes into the interview, I sensed people outside the door. There was a gap between the bottom of the door and the floor, and it reflected shadows that were moving. It seemed like there were people outside the door trying to listen to our conversation. The manager did not seem to notice this and continued the conversation. And then it came, a loud bang. Someone had kicked the door. The door, however, remained shut.

The bang startled me, but the manager remained calm. He paused momentarily and continued the conversation, as if nothing had happened. This surprised me, even more than the kick on the door. I was too distracted to continue the conversation and said to the manager, “I think there is someone outside.” He replied, again very calmly, “It’s just some boys. They’ll go away if we ignore them.” This was his place and his way of managing the situation. I accepted it and refocused on the interview. We resumed our conversation. Eventually, the young people did go away. Perhaps they were bored by our non-response.

The remainder of the interview was uneventful. After about an hour, the manager and I walked back to the big room. The television was on, and a group of young people was watching it. This time, my presence in the room went unnoticed. The manager and I greeted each other goodbye, and I left the center.

- A drop-in center  
July 21, 2011

The drop-in center is another service space in the system of response to street children and youth in Kathmandu, Nepal. These centers are “outreach” programs, meaning that they invite young people who live, work, and play on the streets to use the services and then return back to the street lives. There are rules and polices for entering the center and using the services, but these rules and polices are fewer and flexible, in comparison to those of transition homes. In these centers, workers offer services to young people to help meet their everyday needs and also to “rescue” them from the streets. As center-base outreach services, these centers often are a link between street outreach and transition homes. These drop-in centers provide another context for understanding frontline youth work.

This chapter shows how frontline youth work is done in drop-in centers. To do so, I begin with the philosophies and ethos underpinning youth work in this service space. Next, I present a brief portrait of the young people using these services and of the workers providing services in this space. This is followed by descriptions of the various approaches used by workers to invite young people to visit there, to build relationships with them, and to “motivate” them to leave the streets. I then focus on two processes - “socialization” and “rescue” - of young people from the streets to transition homes. All this together describes and analyzes frontline youth work in drop-in centers – the second space in the system of response to street children and youth.

### **Drop-in center philosophy and ethos**

Programs and services are embedded in certain philosophies and ethos, which in turn guide its structure, processes, beneficiaries, and expected outcomes (Karabanow &

Clement, 2004). This means they also guide everyday practice – in this case frontline youth work – making it necessary to understand the philosophies and ethos of drop-in center programs. Therefore, in this chapter too, I start by describing these. These philosophies and ethos were similar to those of street outreach, since drop-in centers are a form of “outreach.” At the same time, as a center-based program, there were some differences between these ideas and beliefs. Broadly, drop-in centers were underpinned by the following three philosophies: 1) harm reduction; 2) secondary and tertiary prevention; and 3) socialization.

### **Harm reduction**

Similar to street outreach programs, drop-in center programs were based on the philosophy of “harm reduction.” This meant helping young people “change,” “adopt healthy lifestyles,” and “leave the streets,” and to do so in small, incremental stages (Tatarsky, 2003). To accomplish this, most drop-in centers provided services that focused on meeting the everyday basic needs of young people under the age of 18. These services were provided to promote young people’s wellbeing and to meet their rights to basic services, according to NGO management-level staff and workers. They were also there to encourage, or help workers encourage, young people to “leave the streets.” To do so, workers focused on building with young people healthy relationships, with them as responsible adults, and on helping young people experience the “comfort” and “safety” of living indoors, in a shelter, in contrast to living on the streets. These worker activities were referred to as “attracting” young people to the centers and gradually “preparing” them to leave the streets.

Basic needs services were offered to promote young people's wellbeing and also to "attract" them to come to the drop-in centers where they were offered a range of services including food, clean water, shower, laundry, other personal hygiene services, and recreation programs, like television or movies at scheduled times. The centers also offered first aid and connected young people to medical services offered by other agencies. Some drop-in centers provided night shelters. Non-formal education was an important service too. In these classes, young people were taught to read and write in Nepali and English and to do arithmetic. Some centers required young people to take non-formal education classes to qualify for other services, such as free meal or watching television. Some centers offered on Saturdays, a public holiday in Nepal, special recreation programs, such as a special meal or movie at the center or even at a movie theater. These services were one way of attracting young people to the center. Another way was to make the centers accessible to the young people.

To make it easy for young people to enter, the centers enforced fewer admission criteria. One criterion used in many centers was that young people provide only their names and ages, since many did not want to give detailed personal information to an NGO. This rule was also the workers' way of keeping records of the number of young people served, which they could report to program funding agencies. A second commonly applied rule was that the young people not bring into the center any kind of chemical substance or weapon, such as knives, blades, and match sticks. All drop-in centers were guarded and gated, and the guards did body checks to ensure that the young people were not carrying these items. Workers said that this rule promoted safety of both

the young people and the workers. At the same time, this rule and body checking could suggest to young people a lack of trust by the workers and produce a tense environment. The third criterion was related to the time of entry into the center. Some centers operated 24 hours, but for safety, young people were not permitted to enter after dark. The fourth and final criterion was that young people come into the center sober, not under the influence of glue, alcohol, or another substance. This rule was flexible, and workers used it at their discretion. These admission criteria controlled how, when, and in what state the young people entered the center. While there was control over young people's entry into and activities inside the center, there was also a choice: Young people could walk out of the center at their will and without any negative consequences for their re-entry.

These criteria were developed by workers, seemingly without young people's input, to help young people reduce the risks associated with street life. They were offered also to "teach" young people that living in a society means following its rules. In addition, these services were offered as a way to control and prevent the "problem" of street children.

### **Secondary and tertiary prevention**

The prevention philosophies of the drop-in centers were the same as those of street outreach programs. In public health, secondary prevention focuses on those who have been recently affected by the "problem," while tertiary prevention focuses on those affected by the problem (World Health Organization, 2004). In work with young people, prevention was understood as "rescue" of young people from the streets and sending them or "placing them" in transition homes or with their biological families. Secondary

prevention focused on those who had recently come to the streets and on younger children because it was thought easier to “change” them and keep them from deeper street involvement. Tertiary prevention focused on older youth who had been living on the streets for a relatively long time and were experienced at using NGO services. This “rescue” or prevention philosophy influenced the kinds of services offered at drop-in centers and the criteria for their use by the young people.

Services were offered as a way to bring people into the drop-in centers. Inside the centers, workers intentionally and strategically worked toward secondary and tertiary “rescue” of young people. Priority was given to secondary prevention over tertiary prevention. Regular service use by the young people provided a space for the workers to build a working relationship with them. For example, when these young people walked in the centers, workers talked to them and introduced themselves. Over time, with continued conversations, workers assessed these young people’s needs and interests in leaving the streets and offered them “psychosocial counseling” to motivate them to further making a choice to leave the streets. These services acted as a means to secondary and tertiary prevention, but at times, services also became a barrier to prevention.

Many young people manipulated these services and used them to survive on the streets, not to help them leave the streets. Most problematic to the workers and their employer agencies were young people coming to the centers only for free meals. Workers described how young people memorized meal plans of different centers and visited centers that served meals they liked the most. While workers said that some young people ate lunch at more than one center in a day, young people said that many of these centers

served a fixed amount in a meal, this was not enough for them, and that is why they went to more than one center to eat. A youth explained:

They [a drop-in center] serve the “sirs” first. They can eat as much as they want, but we get to eat only what is served to us. How is that fair? Didn’t the money come for us? Shouldn’t we be served first?

These practices of not giving food or not giving sufficient amount of food seemed to diminish workers and their agencies’ credibility among young people. But workers and NGOs seemed to focus mainly on the effect of a free meal on young people’s rescue from the streets. Free meals were problematic because, as workers explained, when young people get free meals, they use money they earned on the streets for glue, alcohol, and other substance. And when young people are able manage all this, there is little “motivation” for them to leave the streets. As one worker described:

At our drop-in center, we provide food, shelter, non-formal education, and games to make children interested in coming and staying there. We make the place attractive so that they stay there. Children come, eat, and leave. They go out of the drop-in center to make money. They work in junkyards. They carry sacks of metal scraps and other items for recycle sale. Why are they carrying sacks when they are getting free food here? They are doing it so that they can use the money they earn to buy glue. There has to be a little bit of control. We have to stop them from sniffing dendrite. Children should be afraid to engage in bad habits. We cannot just pamper them.

As a response to this, most centers developed rules that did not allow young people to only walk in and eat. To eat at the centers, young people had to participate in certain activities, including taking non-formal education classes and spending the night there. Also, some drop-in centers did not offer meals, and this filtered-out most young people who came in the center only wanting food. Once in and at the centers, workers “prepared for rescue” the young people through what they called “socialization.”

## **Socialization**

Socialization was another philosophy that guided youth work at the drop-in centers. Workers and their managers used the term “socialization” to describe their work with these youth, perhaps a term taught and diffused at the local level by international organizations. To “socialize” young people was to teach them “appropriate” ways of living in a family environment, and by extension, in mainstream society. These centers were where this socialization process began.

Socialization was necessary for the “reintegration” of these young people into their family and society. Workers said that these young people needed to change their lifestyles and learn new “ways of being in the society.” This was necessary because young people engaged in risk behaviors, such as glue sniffing, smoking cigarettes, drug use, and unprotected sex. Workers also explained that many of these young people came from “unhealthy” and “unstable” families that had failed to socialize them into living “properly” in the society. Thus, workers and NGOs viewed both young people and their families as not “normal.” These views also reflect an image of these young people as “deviants” who must be “corrected” and “controlled.” And it was their responsibility, as workers and as responsible members of Nepali society, to teach the young people to follow society’s norms, values, and correct ways of being a young person, so that they can become or act “normal.”

### **Frontline youth workers and the young people in drop-in centers**

Both young people and workers at the drop-in centers held certain perceptions and image of the other. These were based on their experiences of using and offering drop-in

center services. These understanding of the “other” in some ways shaped the worker-young people interactions and shaped youth work at the drop-in centers – roles and practice both.

### **Young people as clients**

Young people using drop-in center services were still living on the streets. They varied in age, ranging from seven years to 15-16 years. And they were boys because only boys were served at most centers. Many of the centers were located near areas where young people “hung-out” or worked. Typically, boys living in the neighborhood of a center came to it to use basic services. While some young people used these services sporadically, others used them consistently. To many young people, these centers were a part of their street lives – a place to visit if they wanted to get away from the streets, if they wanted food, or if they wanted to watch TV or a movie. They did not come explicitly or primarily to be prepared for leaving the streets. In effect, centers were “break rooms,” youth spaces of less intensity than the streets, for most young people. They and the workers used the spaces in vastly different ways.

Descriptions by workers and by young people suggested that two broad categories of young people used drop-in center services. The first category was younger children and those who were new to the streets – centers’ focal population. Workers encouraged these young people to use the services frequently because this population was more likely to agree to leave the streets. The second category was older youth, the so-called “hard-core” who were viewed as having little potential for moving beyond the streets. Workers said that these older youth used the services but did not think about leaving. They talked

about these youth reporting their age as 14 even when they were in fact 16 years, so that they could continue using centers' services. Gagan said:

Older youth say they are 14 years old for at least two-three years. When they think they can no longer fool us, they find new NGOs and go there as 14 year olds.

Although older youth qualified for drop-in center services, some workers discouraged them from using these, especially for a free meal. Some older youth said that drop-in center staff asked them to not come to the centers, sometimes explicitly. As one youth said:

I don't go to that drop-in center anymore. The last time I went there, Madan sir said, "You are a grown up man. Aren't you ashamed to come here and ask for free food?" When they come to the streets, they say come to the center and stay there. But they treat us differently when we go there.

On the other hand, workers viewed young people not using drop-in center services as personal preference. For example, Suraj, a drop-in center worker, said that some young people preferred to sleep on the streets to spending nights at a drop-in center:

Our drop-in center provides services like shelter, food, clothing, and other services to street children. Some come here regularly, some do not. Some sleep outside at night, some sleep here. Some children have been to many other organizations and have been on the streets for a long time. Children like that do not want to sleep here. They go out to sleep at night, and come here during the day.

Some young people were also discouraged from using these services by their poor quality and by workers attitudes toward them as persons.

Some young people viewed these drop-in centers as being "worse than their street homes." Many complained that these centers were dirty and infested with lice and bed bugs. They said it was cleaner on the streets than in the centers. They also talked about

the actions and attitudes of center staff. They said that center staff asked them to do chores, which they disliked. They believed that drop-in centers got money from foreigners to offer them services and yet, the center staff were making them do the chores. These young people talked about corporal punishment, like hitting and beating, carried out by some staff. This was a major violation of the “child rights” approach that NGOs promoted and that many youth workers cited when describing this work. Almost all young people talked about some of the workers beating them or their peers when they used services at the centers.

Young people’s response to these poor quality services was not to visit these centers and not to use their services to the extent possible. One street youth group leader said that he did not “allow” young people who used a particular drop-in center to hang-out in “his area” because that center worker had kicked him out:

We helped them raise money from local tourists to build that drop-in center. They said this would be our center. After they built they center, the staff threw me out because I was making too much noise there. I don’t like that center, and I don’t want anyone going there.

Seen here is that it was both the worker and young people who had a say on which young people used the services, with young people exercising some level of control by refusing themselves, or by not allowing others, to use center-based services. Much of this was about who were the youth workers and their style(s) of working.

### **Youth workers as service providers**

Drop-in center workers had various job titles. Some were drop-in center “managers” who managed center-based programs and activities and supervised staff, and in so doing, engaged with young people. Some were “outreach staff” who worked part-

time in street outreach and part-time at the centers. Some of these staff were “peer educators,” who had lived on the streets and had “successfully transitioned” from the streets. Some were “teachers,” who taught non-formal education classes. Many of the center workers had multiple responsibilities; many occupied entry-level positions at the center.

To the young people, drop-in center workers were mainly “sirs” and “misses” who offered services and required them to follow center rules. To them, workers were also staff who denied them services, made them leave the center, and even hit them if they did something wrong. But not all workers were seen this way. There were a few workers that young people liked. A youth talked about one such worker:

I like that sir because he gives us food even when Shiva sir [the director] tells him not to do so. He is kind and cares for us.

Another young person described another worker that many young people liked:

He talks to us nicely. Other workers yell at us if we make noise or if we don't follow the center's rules. But he will say, “Babu, you must not do this.” And he is a great artist. That is why we like him.

These views reflect variation in youth work practice. But more commonly, there were hierarchy and power relationships between workers and young people. Typically, in the drop-in centers, workers presented themselves as, and acted as authority. They tried to socialize young people and also to “correct” and “change” them. In intention and action, center workers became service providers and also agents of control and change over young people. These issues, goals, styles, and practices were center-based. Young people came here from the streets through various pathways. The workers were moral agents of

the NGOs, their funder, and of the Kathmandu community, and they read young people's acts, actions, and behaviors through moral glasses.

### **Pathways to drop-in centers**

To be able to use the services, young people had to first learn about these centers and their services. Many learned this from street outreach workers and from their peers. In street outreach, workers' responsibilities included telling young people about services and special programs offered at the centers by their employer agency. In addition, young people who used a center told their peers about it. Possibly, because of this workers said that most young people came to the center with knowledge and ideas about drop-in centers, their programs and services, as well as their rules. Some came to the centers with their friends who guided them on "what to do." As Suraj explained:

Our outreach staff bring children who are new to the streets and those who are sick to this drop-in center. Many of them stay here. Others come here for the first time with their friends.

Young people used drop-in center services for various reasons. Many came to the centers for food and to use the laundry and personal hygiene facilities. Some came to watch television or movies. Workers said that some individual young people came to the centers to stay away from their peers, particularly when they had been fighting. They also came when they were injured or sick and needed medical help. Ajay described this:

Children come to drop-in centers for various reasons. They may come for food, entertainment, or medical needs. Sometimes they come after fighting with their friends. Some come to check out the place because the outreach worker told him to do so. They come to see if this is a place for them, if they like living in-doors. Therefore, we need to make the drop-in centers more attractive.

This service-use pattern suggests that many of these young people relied on these centers for their basic needs, even though some did not like these centers, or how services were offered there, or some center workers. When young people regularly came to use these services, it gave workers opportunities to “build relationships” with them and ultimately try to “motivate them” to leave the streets. Here, it was easier to build contacts with young people because drop-in centers were defined and contained spaces where young people came in contact with their workers while using the services, whether or not they wanted to. According to the workers, after building contacts with these young people on the streets, it was important to make them feel safe at the center.

### **Co-creating safety at the centers**

In the drop-in centers, it was crucial for workers to co-create safety with the young people. Here, safety was physical, protecting young people from violence and abuse. Safety was also emotional. This included letting young people know that workers understood and cared for them, and were there to help them with their life-problems. More importantly, safety meant making young people comfortable to talk to the workers honestly about their life, including their family backgrounds, reasons for coming to the streets, their needs, and future aspirations. Making young people safe in the centers was important because many young people, particularly new visitors, did not know the workers. Many had experienced unhealthy relationships with adults in their lives and did not trust adults in a “closed” environment. Also, they were not comfortable being inside a house and following rules. Gagan explained:

For street children, drop-in center is a different environment. Many find it difficult to adapt to in-door life. They feel trapped when they come to the center.

They will see our rules. Most organizations will list their rules on their board. The rule will say that they cannot use chemical substance, and they cannot use bad languages. They have to follow routines of the center. There is a schedule for food, playtime, and study time. We make them follow these rules. They are used to a different life on the streets. Sleeping at the center is different from sleeping on the pavement.

A safer space also helped workers establish credibility with young people and build relationships with them. The process of co-creating safety provided a context and a space within which workers and young people connected with each other and gradually develop a working relationship. This relationship was essential because young people did not tell their personal problems and troubles to a worker they did not know and trust. Coming from the streets, young people lived in the general environment of distrust, and they brought this distrust to the center, along with an image of the worker. This image included beliefs (and facts) that not all workers were credible and to be trusted with their personal information. A safe space with good working relationships provided workers an opportunity to change this image that young people had of them.

### **Being approachable**

Among a myriad ways of co-creating safety at the center, workers highlighted as important making themselves “approachable” to young people. Basic to this was being non-judgmental and seeing and treating these young people as any other young people, said workers. Important to note here is the inconsistency between workers’ view of being “non-judgmental” and their own descriptions of street children as *bigreko* (deviants) and not “normal.” Here, being non-judgmental seemed to mean not “showing” to young people that they were judgmental. It also meant accepting the poor hygienic condition of these young people.

Another aspect of being approachable to the young people was being flexible with center rules to make the center inviting and welcoming to the young people. Workers talked about overlooking certain rules, depending on the situation. For example, Roshni, who worked at a drop-in center, said she sometimes gave young people food even when they did not participate in non-formal education classes:

We tell them that they can't come here to just eat. But sometimes they come right before mealtime. How can we turn them away? I know these children, I know they are hungry, and I know they don't have anywhere else to go. It is hard for us to tell them to go away. So we give them food, even though we are not allowed to do so.

Bhoomi talked about overlooking the no-smoking rule:

Some [young people] go out of the center saying they are going to the toilet. We know they will go out and smoke. We don't encourage them to do this, but we let them go out and pretend that we don't know they smoke there. If we don't let them smoke, they will not want to come here again.

Many workers said that young people come to the center intoxicated. They talked about the need to manage such situation appropriately because turning them away may mean that they may not come back to the center, while letting them in may teach other young people there that they too can come in intoxicated. Madan described how he managed one such situation:

I told the youth, "You are drunk, do you think you should do this? What will your friends here say? Don't you think they will *billa* (laugh at you)?" When I said that, he became a bit alert and said, "Do I really look like I'm high?" He was high but, in that moment, he tried to hide it. We put him alone in a room and told him to go to sleep. And then I talked to other brothers. I told them that we have to give him a chance to become *ramro manche* (a good person). They noticed a difference between that youth and them, and this in a way encouraged them to not be like him.

As found in other studies too, workers may not enforce center rules rigidly because doing so could stop young people from coming (Southon & Dakhal, 2003; Turnbull et al., 2009). Workers need young people to use services at the centers to be able to show center “output” to their funders and government.

Rule flexibility was required also to manage the problem of stealing. Workers talked about young people stealing water taps, shower-heads, mirrors, and other bathroom items. One worker described a group of young people running away from the center at night with blankets. These actions reflect young people’s street survival strategies. It also suggests that these young people did not see the centers as their place: It was the workers’ place. When young people stole and ran away from the center, it meant that they would not return. As Roshni described:

He was a little bit older and was regular here. So, we trusted him. One time, we asked him to deliver a big metal pot to our other location. He left here with a pot, but he never reached there. He ran away, and we haven’t seen him since.

Some workers talked about managing such cases cautiously by talking to these young people. For example, during one of my visit to a drop-in center, one youth had stolen a large sum of money from a foreign volunteer and run away. The center staff were able to find that youth at another NGO’s drop-in center. The center staff talked about not reporting this to the police. The center manager said:

We have to talk to that brother nicely. We have to tell him that it must have been hard to resist such a large amount of money. At the same time, we have to tell him that he could have gone to jail for stealing. We will not report him to the police because, if we do so, he and his friends will never come to our center. We also have talk to that volunteer about taking care of her belongings.

To workers, responding in such ways taught young people to not steal and also made them understand that workers cared for their “wellbeing.” This helped workers become more approachable to the young people.

Another important aspect of being approachable to young people was listening to them, workers said. Listening to young people meant not asking them too many questions or not telling them about rules right away, particularly if they were new to the center.

Gagan explained:

We cannot ask them questions as soon as they step inside the center. When they come in for the first time, we don't say anything about following rules. Some children feel suffocated and want to leave. If they decide to go, we say, “Come back again.”

Listening, however, did not mean believing. Workers said they listened to the stories of these young people, even when they knew that young people were telling them lies.

Bhoomi said:

When I was new to this work, I used to believe everything they [young people] told me and I would find out later that they lied to me. Now I know that only 5% of what they say is true. These days, when new staff tell me that they heard a sad story about a brother, I say, “Oh yeah.” They too will learn to not believe everything these brothers say.

While young people told stories to manipulate workers into giving them services, workers listened to the stories to better understand the young people based on what they said and did not say, to help them feel safe at the center, and to build relationships with them. Being approachable to young people was one way of creating safety; another way was being supportive of them.

## **Being supportive**

“Being supportive” to street young people included providing both emotional and practical support. Emotional support included helping young people manage their personal problems and troubles. Workers talked about giving these youth space where they could talk about their problems. Gagan explained:

Many of these children have experienced abuse on the streets, at home, or in both places. They are hurt from inside. Most will show this in some ways. Some talk to themselves, some stare at the walls, and some show anger. We have to find out what caused that. They will surely not tell us anything until they know that we understand them and will help them. That is human nature. How do we do that? Some find it more comfortable to talk to male workers, while others open up to female workers. That is their choice. But we have to be able to earn their trust. Then they will tell you about their wounds. And when they do that, we have to respect their privacy and keep their information confidential. If we break their privacy, they will not be able to trust any other staff.

In providing emotional support, workers talked about being attentive to “signs of need.” Such signs included young people coming to the center intoxicated, fighting with workers or other young people, cutting themselves, or being especially quiet. Here the workers were reading young persons clinically. Workers worked as a team, and feedback or conversations with co-workers helped them identify these signs and to follow up on them. Workers coordinated with their co-workers to find ways to be alone with individual young people with whom they had relationships, and to talk to them and together to find ways to solve their problems. According to workers, one-on-one conversations with young people provided individual youth more space and safety to tell a worker his or her problems. In addition to these kinds of emotional support, workers also talked about providing practical support to the young people.

“Practical support” was crucial to co-creating safety at the center. This included helping young people with their everyday needs and helping them leave the streets. Workers sometimes overlooked center rules to give young people food and to let them watch television. Workers said that young people appreciated help from workers in crisis situations, such as when they were sick or injured. For example, Suraj talked about an experience of helping youth when he was sick:

There was a brother who used to come here regularly. He was very quiet and wouldn't tell us anything about him. He used to come here in the afternoons and return to the streets at night. One day, he came here sick with high fever. We helped him with medical needs and also took care of him. He began to trust us and talk to us. Until then, we didn't know where he was from and why he left his family. He told us all that after we took care of him. We talked to him about leaving the streets. Now he is back with this family.

Sometimes, girls came to the centers with their male peers. Most of these centers were for boys, and girls could not be there. However, instead of simply telling them to leave, workers tried to connect girls to other agencies that offered them services. Roshni described one such case:

She came to our center twice. The first time, I talked to her and convinced her to go another NGO. We made some phone calls, and I reached her to the NGO. She ran away from that NGO after a few days. Then a few months later, she came to our center again. And again, I reached her to that NGO and this time too, she ran away from there. I heard she is now doing sex work on the streets.

This kind of support to girls helped workers become credible with the boys. Workers said that when they gained credibility with individual young people, particularly group leaders, this credibility diffused to other young people because these young people trusted their peers' opinion.

These approaches to co-creating a safer space in the centers provided a context for workers to build relationships with the young people. In the process of being approachable to and supportive of the young people, workers helped them understand what kind of person the worker was, if they cared for them, and if they could be trusted. When these workers had good relationships with young people, they offered them “psychosocial counseling” and “assessed their needs.”

### **Psychosocial counseling and assessing young people’s needs**

Psychosocial counseling was an important part of youth work at drop-in centers because it helped them achieve one of their major goals: “rescuing” young people. Here, as on the streets, “psychosocial counseling” was conversation between workers and the young people about young people’s lives and opportunities available to them to make their lives healthier and “better,” typically by leaving the streets and going to a transition home or by returning to their biological family. Gagan explained psychosocial counseling:

We try to convince them [young people] to forget street life, and to make them understand why shelter or home is important. We tell them that if they don’t like our shelter, then there are other shelters they can go to. We counsel them slowly. They won’t be ready to change right away, and some will never be ready. But we keep talking to them about leaving the streets.

Workers offered these counseling sessions to individuals and to groups in a room behind closed doors, in classrooms, or while young people were using services. Young people viewed these sessions as conversations where workers told them to leave the streets.

Psychosocial counseling in the centers was not much different than on the streets. It had three main purposes: 1) encourage young people to adopt “healthy lifestyles” by

not using cigarettes, glue, alcohol, and other medications and refraining from self-cutting, intravenous drug use, and the like; 2) assess young people's "needs," which could be used to motivate young people to go the transition homes and also as data for grant proposals to donor agencies; 3) motivate young people to go to a transition home where they could be further socialized into being "normal" to fit mainstream society. Workers' descriptions of psychosocial counseling reflected three interconnected stages – connecting to young people, assessing their needs, and advising them.

### **Connecting to young people**

Connecting to young people was easier at the drop-in centers because this was a center-based setting, and young people came there knew they would need to meet and talk to the workers to get the service. As described, workers co-created with young people a safe space where they were comfortable using services and talking to workers. In this safe space, workers found opportunities to connect and talk to young people. Here, unlike on the streets, it was not easy for young people to walk away from these conversations. Drop-in center workers were authority, and young people needed to be on good terms with them. At the same time, workers said that they did not pressure young people into talking to them. For example, Roshni said:

Sometimes they come here wanting to talk to me about their problems. Sometimes, I casually ask them personal questions and they talk. And sometimes, when I ask them questions, they say, "Miss, I don't want to talk about that today." And I change the topic.

Young people listened to, or pretended to listen to, what workers said, and often they told workers lies about their lives, perhaps to give workers what they wanted to hear. Suraj explained:

We give them food, clothes, and talk nicely to them. They will listen to us, but they will not tell us truth about their lives. They make up stories. They tell lies out of fear. They are afraid we might take them to transition homes or back to their homes. That is why we don't push them.

Telling lies seemed to be how young people exercised their agency and maintained their privacy. As a response to this, workers said they “cross-checked” information provided by the young people with their co-workers. With continued psychosocial counseling, workers assessed an individual young person's needs and offered them advice.

### **Assessing needs**

In drop-in centers, needs assessment helped workers better understand individual youth. It also helped workers collect data about these young people. Here, as on the streets, needs assessment meant understanding young people's problems and troubles, their family backgrounds, their reasons for coming the streets, their length of time on the streets, other NGO services used, what they needed to help them leave the streets, and the like. In assessing needs, some workers said that younger boys connected better to women workers and older boys were more comfortable with male workers, while other workers, both male and female, thought this was a personal preference. Roshni, a female worker, said she was not comfortable talking to older boys about their sexual activities:

Sometimes boys tell me, “Miss, this happened and that happened.” They talk to me about their sexual activities. I don't know what to say to them. I say, “Come on, don't talk to me about those things.”

It could be that Roshni was unable to connect these conversations with sexual health or sexual abuse, and this could be her issue. It is also possible that other female workers experienced similar discomfort, given the traditional gender norms of not openly talking about sexual activities with boys or men. This could also be an outcome of inadequate

preparation by the employer NGO on how to manage such conversations. At the same time, male workers talked about how they joked with young people about their sexual activities and sexual health. Workers said that being able to talk to young people about their sexual activities was crucial since it helped them find out if the young people were being abused and needed urgent rescue.

“Needs assessment” helped workers understand if individual youth wanted to leave the streets and “what could be done to get them ready to leave the streets.” According to workers, some young people could be convinced to leave the streets sooner than others. Workers explained that information about other NGO services used by individual young people helped them build up on work done by other NGOs. This required workers to contact those other NGOs to learn about this young person, his/her family background, behaviors, and reasons for leaving that NGO. Workers said sometimes they tried to “return” young people back to those other NGOs. In some cases, the other NGOs refused to take back an individual if she or he was “difficult to work with.” Collecting data on other NGOs’ services used by young people could be important also because it could help workers determine if that young person was a “good candidate” for rescue. After all, they too needed to show higher program outputs.

As in street outreach, information collected from young people was data for the NGOs. This information helped the agencies stay in contact with young people and learn about street situations. This information was up-to-date. It could be used write proposals for program funding. It could also help in the evaluation of NGO services. However,

these NGOs did not seem to have conceptualized using the data collected from street young people in this way.

### **Advising young people**

Following their training and their program goals, workers advise to young people focused on “change.” Change meant adopting healthy lifestyles, leaving the streets, and staying at the center. Doing all this increased young people’s chances for “brighter” future, said workers. And, it was the young person’s responsibility to think about their future and to take up opportunities offered by the NGOs. Not doing so was their choice. This view also made the young people responsible for their experiences and outcomes of street life. However, many young people lived in a perpetual “now” and focused on surviving “now.” As a way to help them leave the streets, workers encouraged young people to regularly use services at their drop-in centers, that is, to get into a different “now.”

Workers advised young people to stay and sleep at their drop-in centers as a trial for leaving the streets. It was assumed that the “home” or “indoor” environment of a drop-in center would encourage them to leave the streets. If young people came to the centers when they were sick, workers took care of them and also advised them to stay there. One drop-in center was attached to a transition home. Here, those youth living in the home were used as a way to motivate other young people to live there - workers told young people that they could live like that and be like them.

Additionally, peer educators – former street children who were now working in these centers – became role models for street young people. They told young people that

they too could become like them. They talked to young people about going to school or getting job-skill training and becoming financially secure. When young people agreed to leave the streets, workers “prepared” them for a life in a transition home. This was called “socialization.”

### **Socializing and rescuing young people**

Drop-in centers were “socialization” centers for the young people - spaces for teaching the young people the social norms and roles of “normal” children and youth doing everyday life. Workers and their employer NGOs viewed young people as needing to be “socialized” to fit into mainstream society and become responsible citizens. All young people coming to use services at the centers were socialized in some way.

Workers’ description of socialization suggested that it broadly focused on two aspects – reducing young people’s risk behaviors and teaching them the social norms of mainstream everyday life in Kathmandu.

### **Reducing risk behaviors**

Guided by their harm reduction philosophy, drop-in centers helped young people lower their risk behaviors, such glue sniffing, cigarette smoking, self-cutting, and alcohol drinking. According to workers, these behaviors negatively influenced the wellbeing of the young people and also became barriers to their leaving the streets and to going home or to a transition home. There were different ways of helping young people “reduce these risk behaviors.” It started with the rules for entering the centers. As mentioned, young people were not allowed to bring in any kinds of addictive substances. To workers, young people’s time spent at the center was time away from engaging in risk behaviors. By

engaging them in a variety of center activities, workers said they helped young people stay away from the streets, and hence from addictive substances and other risk behaviors. Since these young people could not give up these “bad” habits at once, some workers “indirectly” let young people smoke cigarettes outside the center, while offering young people betel nuts to help quit cigarette smoking, a commonly used local solution. In addition, workers told young people about the negative effects of substance abuse.

Workers directly and indirectly taught young people to not engage in risk behaviors. They provided non-formal awareness education classes. During casual conversations with young people also, workers talked about the harmful effects of these risk behaviors. For example, Nirmal described:

When they say they want to practice English writing, I teach them to write their names and tell them to practice it. Sometimes I teach to them to write, “I hate dendrite.” I explain to them what that means and ask them to fill up a page with that sentence. When they finish writing, I say, “Now you have to do what you just wrote.”

At times, workers said that young people drank alcohol or cut themselves because of frustration with their life. In such situations, workers let the young people into the centers and helped them manage their situations. Suraj described:

We cannot throw them out of the center because they are high. Beating them will not solve the problem, neither will yelling at them. They abuse substance or drink alcohol because something is troubling them. It could be that they don’t have slippers or they don’t have warm clothes. Some may be missing their family. They are many problems in their lives. When they come here like that, I take them to a separate room. I send them to wash their faces, hands, and feet, give them lemon tea, and the effect of the drugs or alcohol will slowly wear down. Then I ask them what happened. I talk to them and try to understand that problem, and find ways to help them.

Bhoomi, summarized her drop-in center’s approach to helping young people change their risk behaviors:

We focus on how we can influence them to adopt healthy lifestyles and leave the streets. Sometimes we have to be strict with them, and sometimes we have to be nice to them and make them feel special. They listen to us when we treat them well.

These ways of helping young people adopt healthy lifestyles suggests that drop-in centers were more than just “free-meal” providers, as thought by the public and other NGOs. Such a space allowed street children and youth to go on living their street lives but in healthy ways. But, it was clear that these centers had a youth-change philosophy, one element of which was to lower children’s risks – harm prevention and reduction, while also “preparing” them to leave the streets. One strategy of preparation was informal education on doing and being “normal” children and youth.

### **Teaching social norms and roles**

As part of the service-use requirements of the drop-in centers, young people had to learn the social norms and roles of a “normal” child and youth. The centers had “codes of conduct,” and these differed by drop-in centers. But they all focused primarily on teaching young people “manners” and “discipline” and on teaching them to be “responsible” – all socio-moral norms.

Workers noted that these young people used “vulgar language” and mostly communicated using an informal language, *Ta*. Many Nepali use this informal language to talk to those younger than them. In the centers, workers taught them to use the language of respect when they talked to the workers as well as when they talked to their peers. Bijay explained this rule:

Brothers have to call their younger peers *Timi* (informal language) and the older ones *Tapai* (language of respect).

While the rule said that older youth were to call younger ones *Timi*, many workers communicated with the young people in *Ta*. This suggests that workers themselves did not practice what they taught. Workers did not allow young people to use vulgar language inside the center, and if they did so, they were disciplined. As Suraj explained:

In this center, street children cannot behave the way they behave on the streets. We have rules here. Many children have the habit of using vulgar language on the streets. We teach them to speak “good” language here. We tell them that every one likes “good” language, and they must speak “good” language to live in a society. They understand that and tell me that they won’t speak bad language, not even with their friends. We teach them in this way. We don’t hit them. If they use bad words, we make them practice handwriting. They have to write 4-5 pages, or wash a few dirty glasses or sweep a room. Then their friends too will understand that they must not use bad language.

Workers said they taught young people to respect others, but they did not themselves seem to model this. Workers described bullying, arguing, and fighting as part of these young people’s everyday reality. They fought with each other “for no reason.”

Roshni described:

They fight for no reason. One will say that other is staring at him. The other will answer back and soon there will be a fight. We have to separate time. Last time, a sir got hit while breaking a fight.

In response, workers said they taught young people individually and in groups to change such behaviors. While with words they taught respect and non-violence, with actions many of these same workers taught violence and rudeness. Young people talked about workers at different centers hitting them, and in one case, even beating a youth. A young person described:

He [a youth] got angry and punched a sir. That sir left the room and came back with three other sirs. They all ganged up and beat him.

Many young people said workers talked to them rudely as a way to show their authority. They further added that there was little room to file complaints against such worker actions.

The centers had structures for young people to provide feedback, but young people said that these structures mostly did not work. Workers and NGOs talked about youth clubs and weekly meeting to enhance participatory approaches to working with young people. A youth describe these meetings this way:

They ask us, “What do you want?” We tell them we want this and that. One time we asked for a heater inside the center. Another time, we asked for a television. They write down what we say, but it takes them forever to get us those things, or they don’t get them at all. This is what happens in those meetings.

Given workers’ training and focus on the CRC, child participation should be a basic practice. This may be a poor attempt at this, but it is an attempt, nonetheless (VeLure-Roholt & Baizerman, 2012). At the same time, young people viewed workers as supporting each other, this leading to young peoples’ concerns and complaints not being heard. This suggest that young people experienced abuse in these centers, a place that was meant to be safe, that supposedly respected child rights, and that was supposed to help young people experience positive social relationships.

Another aspect of socialization was related to “cleanliness.” Some centers required young people to wash their hands and legs when entering. One center that closed down after funding ended used to make young people shower and gave them clean clothes when they visited. While workers talked about young people needing to be clean, young people talked about bed bugs and lice in these centers. Young people said it was cleaner on the streets than in these centers. Here too were inconsistencies between what

workers taught and what they themselves did, and how young people perceived this, or at least, talked about it.

“Socializing” also included teaching young people to be “responsible” and contribute to household activities. One aspect of this was following the scheduled activities at the centers. Bina described scheduled activities of a drop-in center where she used to work:

In the morning, they [young people] drank tea and ate breakfast. After that, they cleaned their rooms, made beds, washed their clothes. They did all these themselves. Classes started at 10 am and lasted till noon. Between 12-1 pm, they were allowed to do whatever they wanted. Then they ate food and participated in other activities until 4 pm. We let them go out of the center from 4 – 6 pm. They went out, played, walked around the neighborhood, and came back in the evening. In the evening, they watched TV, ate dinner, and went to bed.

Another aspect of this socialization process was helping out with chores to clean the centers. Bijay explained:

They have to be clean themselves and also keep the center clean. They have to sweep the floors, make their own beds, make tea, and do other chores that children typically do in their own homes.

To the workers, young people were being asked participate in chores so that they could learn to be a part of a family, to make contribution to family life. But these centers, with rules for entry and service use and scheduled activities, did not seem like a “family environment” to the young people. Moreover, participation in these chores was also a criterion for service use and not an option. Considering all this, socialization reflected the centers’ way of controlling young people and their activities when they used their services. Young people who followed these socialization activities and agreed to leave the streets were selected for a transition home.

## **Preparation for a transition home**

Workers selected and referred young people from drop-in centers to a transition home. A part of their work in the drop-in center was to motivate young people to leave the streets. When young people agreed to do so, workers tested them to see if they were good candidates. A good candidate followed the rules and scheduled activities at the drop-in center and stayed there regularly. Suraj explained:

This is a drop-in center. It is a first step to leaving the streets. When children start to come here regularly for 15 days to one month, we put them in a separate class. Then we refer them to the transition home.

Bijay explained this in the following way:

We separate those who come regularly from those who are not regular. Those who stay with us for a few days look cleaner. They take non-formal education classes. When kids stay for a couple of weeks or a month at the drop-in center, we send them to our transition home.

After they selected good candidates, workers “prepared” them to live in a transition home. Workers explained to them what it would be like to live there and what was expected of them. Some NGOs required young people to consent to family visits, while others also required them to consent to medical examinations. Bina explained:

Usually, when we helped children with wounds, or flu, or fever, we did not test their blood without their consent. When we referred them to transition homes, they had to agree to medical examinations, so that we know if they have any contagious diseases. Many have sexually transmitted diseases. This helps us provide them treatment or refer them to other services where they could receive treatment for their medical problems.

Another part of preparation included non-formal education classes. Workers said young people needed these classes to be able to read and write, and also learn to sit in a class

and stay focused. What was being taught to these young people was both, subject and discipline – both elements of the social role, student. Roshni explained:

These children cannot concentrate for too long. Our classes last for 2-3 hours a day, and we make those hours very engaging with games, songs, drawing, coloring, and so on. These are restless children.

Thus, young people were sent to transition homes partly prepared to leave the streets and be “normal” children and youth. This work continued in the transition homes, with even more rigorous socialization, as will be shown in the next chapter.

### **Summary**

The drop-in centers were the workers’ place, just like the streets were the young people’s place. Young people coming to these centers had to respect and follow their rules. Here, worker-young people relationships were those of service providers and service recipient. Workers were the authority, and young people needed to be on their “good side” to use services. In drop-in centers too, young people and workers played games to outsmart each other. While workers provided services to “attract” young people to the centers, young people came and used services selectively. In response, workers imposed on young people rules for service use: Worker power and youth agency clashed repeatedly, since the youth could keep coming back to the drop-in center.

As a way to “attract” young people to the centers, workers focused on creating there. This safety was physical and emotional. There was tension in creating these two types of safety because creating physical safety required workers to set rules about body checks by guards at the gate, which seem to create a tense environment. Some workers mitigated this tense environment partly co-creating with young people emotional safety.

At the same time, a few individual workers, with practices such as yelling and hitting young people, negatively influenced safety in their center and also damaged their centers' and employer NGO's reputation.

Services provided included "socializing" young people into "normal" social roles of children and youth. However, what was being taught and how workers themselves acted seemed to be in conflict at times. Young people were asked to treat the centers "like their homes," but the center rules did not make them feel like a home environment. Workers taught young people not to be violent with each other, yet they raised their voices and some even hit young people as a way to discipline. These practices led the young people to view these centers as having double standards – one for them and one for the workers. These centers were also preparation centers for the transition home. Those moving on to the transition home were trained and made ready to live there.

All these practices and activities show that workers exercised some level of control over these young people at the center. Work was done "for" the young people, not with them. Since workers needed the young people to justify the existence of the center and their work, they were at times flexible in applying center rules. But workers also viewed young people as needing these rules and center services. This gave workers space to tell young people how to use the services and what they needed to do to use these services. Furthermore, their responsibility to assess and select young people for rescue and referral to a transition home suggests that they also decided who received transition home services. What youth work with these young people looked like in a transition homes is described in the next chapter.

## Chapter 10

### Transition Homes: “Rehabilitating street addiction”

#### Observation notes

A modern-looking house stood out among the others in the neighborhood. Tall brick walls surrounded it, and its tall gates were closed. This house looked unfriendly and cold. It seemed to be screaming, “keep off” to its neighbors. This house was a transition home for street children and youth. I was going there to interview its workers.

Getting inside this home was not so simple. The guard briefly interviewed me about the purpose of my visit and the staff I was visiting. He then checked the information with that staff - the manager. Next, I needed to fill in a registration book – name, address, purpose of my visit, person visiting, time-in, signature, and date. After that, the guard escorted me to the manager’s office. This whole process made me feel like I was going through an immigration clearance at an airport.

Once inside, I found the place to be lively and warm. Friendly faces of young people greeted me, “Namaste miss.” There was a group of girls sitting on the stairs. They were watching a woman apply *mehendi* (natural dye) on a girl’s hand. That day was *Saune Sankranti* festival, a day when Nepali women and girls apply mehendi on their hands. These girls were celebrating that festival. There were some boys also hanging out nearby.

The manager was expecting me. She called two other staff, and we sat down and talked for a while. I explained them my study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the consent process. They all agreed to participate in my study. I was eager to start the interviews, but the manager suggested we first eat a mid-day snack. I hesitated because I was already grateful for their interview time and did not want to burden them with anything else. The manager said, “You are our guest, and we treat our guest. This is our way of teaching our children how to be hospitable.” How could I say no?

The dining room was quite large with many small tables and chairs. A kitchen staff served us a festival food – a special kind of bread called *malpuwa*. Young people started to come in, and they too were served food. Soon the room was full and noisy. The staff sat on one table, and young people sat with their peers on other tables.

After the meal, I noticed that everyone washed their plates and utensils and brought them in the kitchen. I was told that this was a way of participating in household chores. I too participated in this chore and washed my plate. We then headed back to the office, and I started the interviews.

- A transition home  
July 17, 2011

The transition home is another service space in the larger community and organizational response to street children and youth in Kathmandu, Nepal. These homes were places where many young people came when they left the streets. Here, they received the support necessary to “rehabilitate” and then to “reintegrate” into their biological family and mainstream society. This was a place where workers had longer-term, continued relationships with young people, as many stayed in these homes until they became 18 years old. These homes provide another basic context for understanding frontline youth work with street young people.

This chapter examines frontline youth work in these homes. In doing so, it highlights similarities, differences, and continuities between youth work in the three major service spaces in the NGOs’ system of responses to street children – the streets, drop-in center, and transition home. I begin with the philosophies and ethos underpinning youth work in transition homes. Next, I present characteristics of the young people and workers living and working in these homes. Following this, I discuss different aspects of youth work in transition homes, namely, helping young people adjust to the home, doing case studies of the young people living there, “socializing” these young people into “normal” children and youth, and engaging parents of young people living there. The final section describes family and society reintegration of young people and its challenges. These different aspects of youth work were interconnected and took place simultaneously. All this together reflects frontline youth work in transition homes.

### **Transition home program philosophy and ethos**

Following the outline of the other two chapters on youth work in two service

spaces, I start with philosophies and ethos of the transition home. Transition homes provided long-term support to young people. This meant that these homes also needed resources to sustain themselves for years. While there were NGOs that closed down when their funding ended, some NGOs maintained continued partnership with international donor agencies and were able to keep open these homes. A few NGOs owned the property on which their homes were built. It is primarily the practices of these NGOs I describe here. Their programs were based on the philosophies and ethos of providing long-term socio-economic support to young people and socializing them.

### **Long-term socio-economic support**

To achieve the primary goal of “reintegrating” young people into their family and society, socio-economic support needed to be provided. This was a basic philosophy of the transition home. Many young people were on the streets because of economic necessity. Their families were unable to provide for their basic needs, such as food, clothes, and education, with some depending on income from them. For many, their family environment was “unhealthy” or “unstable” with alcoholic or abusive parents. As Gagan explained:

How can we send home a child whose mother is already dead, whose father is an alcoholic, and whose step-mother beats him? We have to find ways to help children like that. These children need long-term support.

Some street young people came from healthy families. Given both realities, workers had to assess and then determine which young people needed long-term support.

This was necessary particularly because transition homes had a fixed number of spaces for young people. It was workers’ responsibility to ensure that these limited spaces

were given to those who needed it most and who were most likely to “successfully reintegrate” into their family and society. To assess individual youth’s family situation, some NGO workers visited the family, while others did “needs assessment” without family visits. If the assessment found a young person’s family environment to be “healthy,” the young person was encouraged to return home. Young people whose family environment was assessed to be “unhealthy” were offered support until they turned age 18 or earlier, after which attempts were made to gradually reintegrate them into their family and mainstream society.

Socio-economic support in transition homes was aimed at promoting healthy development of those living there. Transition homes provided basic needs, including food, shelter, and clothing. Typically, younger children were sent to regular schools, while older youth, those 13 and 14 years in age, were provided non-formal education and job-skill training. They also received regular psychosocial counseling to help them manage trauma associated with their family and street life. In addition, they were given life-skill training and “socialization” to help them fit into the mainstream society.

### **Socialization**

Transition home services were guided by the philosophy of “socializing” these young people to become “normal” children and youth. This was viewed as essential for young people’s “rehabilitation” and thereafter, for their “reintegration” into their family and society. As mentioned, workers described these young people as “troubled” young people with “problem” behaviors. They needed to be “controlled,” and their behaviors had to be “corrected.” Socialization was the workers’ term for “disciplining” and

teaching “appropriate” behaviors. This view made individual young people the “problem” and provided justification for the NGOs’ predominant focus on them. This was a moral reading of the youth.

Socialization was teaching young people the social norms, roles, and practices of “normal” children and youth. To these ends, they were required to follow the rules and to participate in the activities of the transition homes, including non-formal education and various extra-curricular activities, all focused on helping young people adapt to life off the streets and in the mainstream. Gagan said:

We have a routine. It begins with wake up time in the morning. We have a schedule for non-formal education class, job-skill training, playtime, recreation time, and things like that.

Workers, through transition home rules and programs, regulated young people’ everyday activities and lives. These activities and chores were framed as “participatory,” while young people saw no choice but to participate in them and to participate in ways they were taught by workers.

A “socialized” young person was someone who complied with the rules of transition homes and participated in activities designed for them. In so doing, these young people learned a way of living that was different from their street life, where they were feisty, vivacious, critical, and frank. Here, they were taught obedience, to follow rules and instructions, and to not question too much or answer back. Thus, the socialization process taught these young people to repress their personal agency and their voice. The characteristics of those who stayed in these homes are presented next.

### **Frontline youth workers and the young people in transition homes**

In transition homes too, as in street outreach and drop-in center programs, both workers and young people had certain understanding of the “other” as a category. Young people had certain images and understandings of these workers based on their experiences in their residence there. In the same way, workers held certain understanding of the young people living there. These understandings were integral to worker-young people interactions and to the youth work practiced in these homes.

### **Young people as clients**

Young people living in transition homes were supposed to be “changing,” or had “changed.” They were no longer following street lifestyles, although they always carried the identity as someone from the streets. In these homes, young people as “clients” had given up cigarettes, glue, and other addictive substances. They lived a scheduled life, followed planned activities, and learned new social roles from society and school. Many had regular contacts with their biological families, but they were not allowed to have contacts with their street-family or street-peers. They no longer had access to money and were no longer able to “buy whatever they wanted” or do whatever they wanted: their everyday life-world and lives were being changed, supposedly with their agreement and assistance.

In this “people-changing environment,” many young people found it challenging to become “normal.” Workers described that many never really give up street ways of thinking and being. Particularly those new to the homes easily got agitated and became aggressive. For example, Gagan said:

Many street children tend to get angry very fast. It's like they have high blood pressure. And, they react right away. They will throw or break whatever they see in front of them. We have to calm them down.

Workers added that these young people did not want to think about or plan their "futures." They do not easily follow rules, and "intentionally" looked for ways to break rules, such as coming late to classes, not doing homework, and the like. Workers responded to these actions by closely monitoring these young people and by continually working to change their attitudes and behaviors, so as to get the streets out of them.

### **Youth workers as service providers**

Transition home workers had various job titles with different work responsibilities. Here, frontline youth workers were home managers who managed workers, services, and activities and worked everyday directly with young people. They were "caretakers," some of whom lived in the transition home with young people. Some were non-formal education teachers who worked with some of the young people during the day. Some were full or part-time staff psychologists or "professional" social workers who provided regular "psychosocial counseling" to these young people. Transition home guard and kitchen staff also at times became youth workers.

Of course, here worker-young people relationship was more hierarchical than in the two other settings. To young people, transition home workers were "misses" and "sirs," or in some homes, "big sisters" and "big brothers" who taught them classes, looked after their food, clothes, health, and other needs, and ensured that they followed the rules of the home. To young people, workers were the staff who disciplined them and

cared for them. For some young people, these workers were biased toward peer group leaders and listened only to them.

### **Pathways to transition homes**

Young people came to live in transition homes either directly from the streets or from drop-in centers. Unlike the drop-in centers, young people here could not just walk into most transition homes. Instead, workers admitted young people whom they assessed as being serious about leaving the streets and having a potential for successful “reintegration” into society. Some young people were brought directly from the streets to transition homes. This was the practice of those NGOs that did not have drop-in centers. Those with drop-in centers selected and referred young people from these centers to their own transition home.

The NGOs needed consent from young people to keep them in the home. Living in a transition home was voluntary and young people used their personal agency in deciding to leave the streets to go to transition homes, just as they did when they left home to come to the streets. Parental and government consent was not required, but most NGOs contacted parents or guardians to tell them that their child was living in their home.

Young people came to live in transition homes for various reasons. Some were persuaded to live there by youth workers. Some came because they could go to school or get job-skill training and they did not have to worry about food and clothes. Some came because a personal crisis, like sickness or the death of a friend, made them want to leave the streets. Some came because their friends were there, and some visited for a trial – to

see if the home suited them. And some youth came planning to live there temporarily, until the weather changed or until certain street youth moved to other streets. They came to the transition home at different ages, but most came when they were around ten years old. When these young people came to the home, workers started by helping them adjust to the home environment.

### **Helping young people adjust**

A transition home was a different environment for the young people. Here, workers set rules, schedules, and everyday activities for them. Most had rules about not going out of the house compounds without staff permission. There were rules against smoking, sniffing glue, or using bad language. There were rules for participating in various educational and recreational activities and in household chores. This was different from the streets, where young people could do “whatever they wanted” and “whenever they wanted to do it.” Chetan described his homes’ way of welcoming a young person:

When a child comes here, we have a welcome program. The new child meets those staying here. We do an introduction game. After that, we explain our rules to them.

Gagan drew on his experience to describe how young people felt when they first came to a home:

When they enter the compounds of the homes, they feel like they are in a jail. They are not free like they are on the streets. They don’t have money in their hands and cannot run around buying what they want.

In transition homes, young people were passive participants who tried to fit into this environment. This process of young people learning and then “fitting in” mainstream society was gradual.

According to workers, young people brought with them aspects of street lifestyles when they first came to live in a home. Workers talked about a possibility that those coming to live in a home could negatively influence others already living there. Asmita, explained:

Older youth are trying to forget their past. When new ones come, they get excited. They want to know about that person: in what location did she/he hung-out, who are her/his peers? They ask about their friends. They are reminded of the streets.

There can be a problem if there is another child also in the early phases of adjustment. They can form a peer group and support each other in things like smoking cigarettes, scheming to run away, things like that.

Similarly, Chetan said:

The new ones will try to influence the older ones here. When new children talk differently and behave differently, those living here also go back to talking and behaving that way.

At the same time, workers also talked about how these “problem” young people became a touchstone for other young people to self-assess their own progress toward

“rehabilitation.” Prabha said:

When a new person comes to live in the home, children who are living here compare themselves to that person. They are able to see how different they are from those coming to stay there, and how far they have come. The new person also looks at those living here as see that he can become like them.

These views reflect workers’ and their NGO’s common understanding of the young people, and how they “taught” young people to accept that they were the “problem.” The youth were also “taught” to accept that they needed “rehabilitation.” A

part of “rehabilitation” was adjusting to the transition home. This adjustment was an on-going process, and those who completely “adjusted” were seen as “rehabilitated.” In helping young people adjust, workers said that being attentive to them was an important skill.

### **Being attentive to young people**

There were different aspects of “being attentive” to the young people. One was noticing them. To the workers, noticing young people was a way of letting them know they cared. This was crucial for making young people feel they were a part of the transition home “family.” Workers talked about young people liking and welcoming “good” attention. This included listening to them, smiling at them, or greeting them. For example, Prabha talked about listening to children carefully:

We have to listen to them, to every thing they say, and even when we know they are lying. We cannot tell them directly that they are lying. That will negatively affect our relationship with them. They will not come to us to talk about their problems. We have to listen to them and ask them follow up questions.

Asmita described how young people responded when she did not smile at them:

Sometimes when I am occupied with something, or when I am busy, I may not have time to stop and talk to the boys and girls. Sometimes, I don't notice them or I forget to smile at them. When I do that, they too will stop talking to me, or they will come back the next day and say, “You didn't smile at me yesterday. These days, you don't care for me.”

This “good attention” also included noticing if these youth's material and emotional needs were being met. This included noticing if young people were sleeping and eating well, if they had clothes, shoes, and school supplies, if they were sick, and the like. In looking after these needs, workers were required to be like “parents” or “family members,” reflecting the emotional labor of their work (Hochschild, 1986).

Another part of being attentive was “observing” the young people and monitoring their activities. A part of this was noticing how young people were getting along with their peers and watching the activities of peer groups. Workers said it was crucial to observe interactions and relationships between peers. This was their way of assessing how young people were adjusting to the home. It also helped them monitor if there were any problems between young people or peer groups. According to workers, these young people often “ganged up” to break home rules like no smoking. More serious was when they “ganged up” to fight or abuse other young people. Workers talked about “behind the scene” violence between young people in the transition homes. One worker talked about how the young people usually did not report violence to workers:

Violence is hidden and kept among children. They will be wrestling with each other, but they will not let the staff know. Children from one group will not want to interact with children from another group. They may have fought when they were on the streets, and they continue that fight here.

Few workers talked about cases of sexual violence on young people by young people in transition homes. One worker explained:

These boys have been sexually abused on the streets, and some might have abused others. When they come here, they bring that experience with them. Some are very angry, and they try to abuse younger children in the home.

A youth described his experience in a transition home:

In the homes, older youth abuse new ones. They do dirty [sexual] things on younger ones. I ran away one time because older youth covered my face with a pillow and hit me. They would have killed me if I had stayed there.

As a response, these homes had violence preventive measures. Most homes had separate bedrooms for younger (those under ten years) and older children. Workers talked to young people regularly, shared notes and information between staff, and encouraged

young people to talk to workers about their problems. Additionally, workers said that they needed to be attentive to such group dynamics and activities, and act to prevent this.

Chetan described this:

How is their behavior? Are they talking to us openly? How are they getting along with their peers? We have to observe and note how they are interacting with us and with their peers.

Being attentive to young people also included observing or noticing signs indicating a youth might be dropping out or about to run away from there. In many cases, young people ran away and not walked away because it was easier to avoid workers than explain and discuss with workers their choice to leave the home. Young people left for different reasons. For some, it had to do with peer pressure, as one youth described:

I really liked that place and wanted to stay there. My friends decided to run away and asked me to come with them. I didn't want to stay there without my friends, so I ran away with them.

Some ran away or left because of alleged staff mistreatment:

There was a staff who never talked to anyone nicely. He was a bully and told us to do this and that. One day, we were in a class and he scolded me. I walked up to him, punched him on the face, and walked out of the home.

For others, it was physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by older adults and the lack of recourse there. Workers said that young people acted in certain ways when they were planning to run from the home, including staying aloof and quiet, finding faults in staff, and fighting with peers. Asmita explained:

The child will start to distance himself from his peers. That is one clear indication. Then he will tell his close friends that he does not want to stay here. Sometimes he wants us to know, but he will be afraid to talk to us about it.

Gagan explained:

He will look sad. He won't smile and talk freely. He will not participate in activities. When we see these signs, we know he is thinking of running away.

When workers noticed these signs, they responded by talking to that young person and her or his peers to check and find ways to prevent young people from running away.

When young people ran away, workers tried to bring them back to the home.

When a youth ran away from a transition home, workers coordinated with street outreach workers to locate that young person on the streets. Then, both home and street outreach workers went to the streets and persuaded the youth to return home. In some cases, this was done forcefully by putting the youth in a van and bringing him or her back to the home. Workers viewed it necessary to convince young people to return, although many did not come back. Workers explained the importance of this by giving examples of young people who returned and went on to graduate high schools and colleges. One peer educator pointed to himself as an example. Another worker, Bina, described:

We have brothers who have run away from our home. We brought them back, and now they are doing well. One brother, who ran away from here twice has now completed high school and is in college.

When workers brought young people back, there was usually a conversation between the young person and a worker to address that young person's reasons for running away.

One worker described this:

Our counselor handles situations like that. But we also talk to that child. They usually tell us what happened. They don't need big reasons to run away from here. They run away because a staff scolded them, a peer hit them while playing, or a teacher made them stand up in class for not doing homework. Things like that. Most of the time, they run away for small reasons.

These ways of helping young people adjust to a transition home facilitated a relationship between workers and the young people. To better develop meaningful

relationships with young people, to better “control” these young people, and to help them change, workers needed to better understand them. For this, individual case studies were viewed as important.

### **Understanding young people: Case studies**

A case study was a report prepared by workers about an individual young person. It included young people’s name, age, address, family backgrounds, length of time spent on the streets, reasons for coming to the streets, experiences on the streets, and the like. Workers from street outreach, drop-in centers, and transition homes coordinated in preparing this case study. In most cases, these studies began before young people came to live in a transition home. These case studies often facilitated workers in selecting and referring young people to a transition home. Workers in a transition home continuously worked on these case studies to add, update, modify, and check for inaccuracies in information provided by the youth.

Workers gathered information about young people by talking to them and by crosschecking the information give to them. To be able to get information from young people, it was important to gain their trust. Workers said that helping young people adjust to transition home was one such way of gaining their trust. This included talking to them regularly and listening to them. Workers also talked about giving them space and not forcing them to divulge information. For example, Chetan said:

I ask them, “Can you tell me about yourself?” When I say that I leave it to them to choose what they want to tell me and what they want to keep from me. Sometimes, they talk about their parents, and gradually, when they are more comfortable they tell me more. While we are trying to find out about them and their lives, they too are doing the same with us. They assess if they can trust us or not.

Multiple workers talked to the same young person in different contexts, such as conversation, class, and counseling. They then checked with co-workers for information consistency. In one transition home, a worker said that all staff typically met at the end of each business day to talk about the progress of individuals and to tell others any issue or problem that came up during the day.

In doing case studies, young people's peers and family members were important sources of information. Many young people knew each other, and some were from the same village. They shared with workers information about their peers. Madan explained:

A youth's peer will come to us and tell us about him. Sometimes, the friend tells us that he is actually a dalit caste. When we hear that, we don't go to that brother and ask him, "Why did you lie?" These brothers have experienced or seen their families discriminated for being from that caste. To escape this, they give us another family name. We have to talk to such brothers slowly and help them feel safe about telling us their family name.

Gathering information from parents required workers to first locate them. In many NGOs, young people were required to let workers visit their family if they wanted to stay in a transition home. Some NGOs did not visit young people's family. Those who visited said that the visits helped them learn more about an individual young person. Asmita told one such experience:

There was a girl who lived here. We visited her home one-year after she stayed here and found out that she had lied about her family name. She had come to Kathmandu to work as a domestic worker. In that house, her employer had suggested that she use another family name, so that their relatives do not criticize them for hiring a dalit worker. When she ran away from that house and came to the streets, she retained her new family name. Sometimes, even parents try to hide their last name, thinking we will not keep their child here if it became known that they were from a dalit caste.

These cases reflect caste-based discrimination in Nepal.

When workers visited family of a youth, they were able to gather more in-depth information about young people and also about their parents and family situations. They collected from parents information about household economic conditions, education level of their child when she or he left home, reasons for leaving home, frequency of contacts with their child, and the like. In addition, some workers observed family environment and parent-children interactions to assess the nature of their relationships. In some cases, workers visited the family without the youth, particularly if the youth did not want to see their parents. Bina explained:

If they don't want to see their family, we tell them to just show us their house. They will take us to their village, show us their house, but they do not go in.

These case studies were on-going and regularly updated. They formed a basis for responding to individual youth. More importantly, they facilitated in “controlling” and “changing” young people through “socialization.”

### **Socializing young people**

“Socialization” of young people was one of the major aspects of youth work interventions in a transition home. Compared to socialization at drop-in centers, socialization in a transition home was more rigorous and long-term. Young people were taught what was assumed to be “best” for them – that is the social norms and roles of a “normal” young person. The desired outcome was “a changed person,” who followed these norms and roles and were better able to adapt (and accept) their family and community situations. In many cases, this socialization began on the streets or in drop-in centers and included monitoring their “risk behavior.”

## **Monitoring “risk behaviors” of children and youth**

The process of “socializing” young people began in drop-in centers or on the streets, as described. Young people came to the homes partially aware of the way of life there. Prabha said:

They come informed about what the home would be like, what they would get here, and what is expected of them. They know that they cannot sniff glue or smoke cigarette here, and are prepared to try alternative like betel nuts and cloves.

This socialization process was different from NGOs that had drop-in centers and those that did not. Youth coming from a drop-in center were trained there to follow center rules and participate in non-formal classes, while youth coming directly from the streets were informed by street outreach workers what it would be like to live in a transition home. In both the cases, young people needed help adjusting to the home.

In the initial phases of living at a transition home, a common problem experienced by young people was related to their addiction to cigarette and other chemicals. Many young people talked about difficulty giving up cigarette and said this was a reason they ran away from the homes. One youth said:

When I was in a transition home, I was in the third grade and going to a school. Both the school and home were strict and did not allow cigarette smoking. I could give up glue sniffing, but not cigarette. That is why I left.

There were different ways of helping young people give up their addiction. Some NGOs did not allow young people to smoke at all and offered betel nuts and cloves, while other NGOs monitored young people’s smoking habits and gave them cigarettes but helped them reduce smoking and ultimately give it up. In addition to helping them give up

cigarette, workers also “socialized” young people go back to school or receive job-skill training.

### **Preparing for school or job training centers**

A “normal” child went to school. A “normal” older youth had job-skills, and she or he worked and earned an income. Since the goal of youth work was to “change” these street young people, transition homes taught in non-formal education classes knowledge and roles of doing and being “normal children and youth.” In these classes, young people were taught both academic and social skills. They were taught basic reading and writing in Nepali and English, math, and science. They were taught to speak “good” language, treat others with respect, and be focused on what they were doing. After the initial adjustment phase, younger children living in these homes were sent to formal schools. Older youth usually did not want to go to formal schools, and workers did not pressure them to do so. Bina explained:

Our focus is on formal school, but we learned from working with these children that it is very hard to start school for older children. They find it hard to catch up with others their age, and they think it is embarrassing to take classes with younger children. We send children like that to job-skill training.

Asmita described:

We keep a youth for two-three years. The first two years, we teach them to read and write. Then we send them for job-skill training.

In job-skill training, older youth were offered a range of options to choose from, including fitting/wielding, electronics, carpentry, driving, sewing, and cooking. Gagan said:

We don’t force them to go to a specific training. We tell them about 10 or 12 different training opportunities and let them choose the one they are most

interested in. Once they complete their training, we contact local businesses and try to find them jobs.

Thus, after an initial training and preparation, young people went to school or job-skill training. Along with this training and education, workers “socialized” youth to live in a family and be responsible family members.

### **Socialization into “normal” children and youth**

These homes aimed to provide young people a healthy family environment.

Workers said that everyone was treated equally and with respect. They provided food and clothes to young people according to the rules. In one transition home, each young person received three new sets of clothes a year. Another transition home gave them used clothes that were donated by international agencies. Everyone ate the same food and had a decent place to sleep. The standards of material services provided in these homes varied. Some homes followed Western standards of basic needs, while others provided lower-middle class standards of basic needs services as a way to help youth better adapt to family and society when they left these homes. Typically, young people going to formal school stayed longer in these homes and those taking job-skill training were “re-integrated” in a few years.

In these homes, young people were taught to be different from “street children and youth.” They were taught to be “responsible family members.” Being responsible meant following house rules and activities developed and scheduled by workers. The young people began their day with a rule regarding their wake-up time and ended rule regarding their bedtime rule. Bina described:

They have a rule poster in their rooms and in the kitchen. These posters say what they should do, starting from what time they should wake up in the morning. We work with brothers and sisters and decide how they would contribute in the kitchen and in cleaning up. They have to clean their own rooms. During the day, they go to school. They have a fully packed schedule.

During the day, many went to school or studied in non-formal classes. In the evenings, mornings, weekends, and holidays, the homes had planned activities. These activities included playtime and recreation time, group conversation, psychosocial counseling sessions, outing or a trip, and the like. In addition, young people helped in house chores. While they followed these activities and did the chores because they were told to do so, workers framed this as a “participatory” approach. Participation of young people in these activities was mandatory, and this was justified as “socialization.”

To further promote these approaches, many transition homes encouraged young people to form “youth clubs” and appointed leaders. It was assumed that such clubs and leaders would better understand the needs of young people, support peers in the “change-process,” and address other problems. For example, Prabha described one such youth club:

We have a child club. They meet every Friday. They talk about their problems, problems with younger or newer brothers, and how to manage them. We [staff] don’t sit in that meeting.

In theory, this empowered young people and promoted their participation in taking care of their “home” and “family members.” In everyday practice, this participatory approach sometimes led to negative consequences. The child club “empowered” a few youth, usually those who had been there longer. Young people and some workers said that these youth leaders “disciplined” others. Many acted as bullies and hit those they did not get

along with. This often led young people to run away. This highlights the importance of workers observing peer group activities and relationships. This also shows the need to evaluate the effectiveness of these “participatory approaches.”

Some workers talked about helping young people change these aggressive behaviors. They said that many needed help with “anger management.” Some youth had problems sleeping at night, which workers said was related to their abuse experiences. These young people needed professional help to manage their personal problems, and transition home also provided professional counseling services. In this work, workers had to be patient, they said. This was an important skill.

### **Being patient**

Being patient meant worker self-control of their anger and frustration when teaching young people to be “normal.” Workers said that this was necessary, since many young people did not understand or listen to them at first. These youth often broke the centers’ rule, and sometimes, they did this intentionally. Pushpa described:

Some of these children like to rebel. We tell them to go right and they will go left. They know that they should go right, but they won’t do it just because we told them to do so.

Asmita explained:

We have to be patient, or we will go crazy. They won’t learn everything at once. Sometimes we have to teach them the same thing four or five times.

To workers, being patient helped them better manage tensions and difficult situations. Workers talked about finding ways to let young people understand that they cannot break house rules. At times, they intentionally and in a controlled manner let young people know that they were upset at them. Gagan explained:

Sometimes we have to get angry when they do something wrong. But we need to make it clear to them that we are angry because we care about them. We have to understand the situation and act accordingly. We cannot just pamper them all the time.

Prabha described how staff managed situations in her transition home:

Sometimes, we have a meeting when someone breaks a rule. We ask all brothers to tell each other rules of the center. Children listen better when their peers talk to them.

Over time, with “socialization,” young people began to follow the rules of the center and adopted “normal” ways of being and doing child and youth. Usually, when they did so, they were no longer active agents of their lives, or “survivors.” They were now “normal” young person, ashamed of their past experiences and their “street children” identity. This was “rehabilitation.” Young people were “rehabilitated” and “ready” for “reintegration.”

Before talking about reintegration, it is necessary to discuss another aspect of work in transition home, which was working with parents of these youth. These parents supported and at times became a barrier to their children’s “rehabilitation.” Therefore, workers in transition home also worked with parents of the young people.

### **Working with parents**

The NGOs and workers engaged parents in several aspects of their work. Parental consent was not required to keep young people in the transition homes, yet it was crucial for workers to maintain contact with parents and try to get their support for helping their children become responsible adults. Workers said that it was the parents that young people went back to after the transition home.

Many NGOs located and informed the parents about their children staying in these homes. Some transition homes also made a verbal agreement with parents about rules for visiting their children at the home, and some homes had rules about young people visiting their family. One NGO said they organized meetings with parents twice a year and paid for the parents' travel expenses to come to these meetings. However, not all parents were supportive of their children living in a transition home.

Workers managed the barriers set up by parents who wanted more support from the NGOs and by those parents who did not want their children living there. These barriers were mostly because of poverty. Many workers said that parents asked them how much money they will get for "sending" their children to a home. Some parents relied on income from their children. While many parents understood the goals of the transition home and the possibility that their children could have a "better future," workers said that some parents indirectly encouraged their children to leave the home. Pushpa described:

Some parents call and talk to their children about their economic hardships. Then they will say something like, "But you don't have to worry about that. You live in that big hostel, and you have everything now." It is natural that children feel guilty when they hear something like that from their parents. It makes it hard from them to live in transition home. They will feel the responsibility to economically support their family. Then they think about running away from here.

Other parents asked workers for more support. Prabha described:

Sometimes, parents come here to meet their children. They tell us their life stories, hoping we will give them something. Some ask if we can keep their other children who are not on the streets.

In some cases, parents came to these homes at night, after drinking alcohol, and demanded that they see their children. Asmita said:

Sometimes parents come to see their children when they are drunk. We don't

open the gates when they come like that. We have an understanding with the parents that they can come here only after making an appointment. We make it clear that we will not open the gates otherwise.

Workers said they did not let intoxicated parents inside the home. In general, NGOs provided no help to parents. Their services were children-focused, and it was “beyond the scope” of NGOs’ work to provide economic or material assistance to parents and family. Workers said they explained this to parents and encouraged them to motivate their children to stay in the transition home.

Workers also worked with cooperating parents to coordinate their children’s home visits during holidays and festivals. Many NGOs valued young people’s relationship with their families and encouraged children to visit their family during holidays. But this was only after the workers assessed that individual as having “changed” and would be likely to return to the transition home from their family home visits. Workers said they sent on home visits only with those children whose family environment was “healthy.” Furthermore, workers set rules for such visits, including parents not giving their children money and gifts. These practices showed that NGOs and workers had stronger influence and control over these young people’s lives than did their parents or the young people themselves. Coordination with parents was also important to these young people’s reintegration into family and society.

### **Reintegration**

“Reintegration” of young people into family and society was the ultimate goal of youth work with street children in Nepal. Reintegration was helping young people leave the “risky” streets and their “problem” behaviors and lifestyle, and return to their family

and community who they had initially left for the streets. This was being a “responsible” citizen, in NGOs’ term. This reintegration was a priority of the government, international organizations, and the local NGOs. This was a moral, ethical, and social response of these organization and community. It could also be a problematic one because it deprived a family of an income, while increasing costs because another person was now to be cared for.

Young people were reintegrated in all three service spaces: street outreach, drop-in, and transition homes, and those needing long-term socio-economic support was reintegrated from transition home. In the streets and drop-in centers, workers offered psychosocial counseling to encourage young people to return home. Those who became “ready” were provided bus fare to return home or brought home by workers. Workers talked about how young people tricked them into a free trip home, and some even came back to the street with their friends from village. In some cases, the parents did not want them back because they viewed their children as being “better off” on the streets and in NGOs.

In transition homes, family and society reintegration was done in different phases. Older youth were reintegrated into society after a few years of “socialization” and job-skill training. Workers helped these young people find jobs or in some cases, start their own business, such as street vending. Some NGOs provided youth help renting a living place when they “graduated” from the home. Some younger children went home or were encouraged to go home after living a few years in the transition home. Gagan said:

When they see their friends going home, they too want to go back. We make arrangements and reach them home. I take them to their families. When I meet

their parents, I tell them how they live on the streets and about their risk behaviors. I encourage parents to not let their children go to the city.

Asmita described one such case:

There was a girl from a very poor family. Her parents had sent her to work in the city as domestic worker. She ran away from her place of employment and came to the streets. She stayed with us for two years and wanted to go home. She did not want to stay here. She wanted to go back to her village and work in the farm. We reached her home. We bought her a goat and some chickens to help her start a farm.

A young person said:

I ran away from the transition home but Manoj [his peer] stayed on. He lived there for three years and went back to his village. He works in his family's farm now.

Some youth were reintegrated gradually into society after graduating from high school.

Young people reintegrated directly to society were mostly from “unhealthy and unstable” families. Bina explained this kind of reintegration:

We have some youth who have completed high school. When they graduate, we give them career counseling. We help them find a job. We help them find a room to rent. We provide utensils and basic furniture. We help them start up. This is how we reintegrate them to a society. We don't cut off all ties at once.

One way of continuing to support to these “rehabilitated” youth was to hire them as peer educators to work in outreach programs. Many NGOs employed these “peer educators.”

In some cases, this became a problem. Some peer educators re-established their street connections and engaged in negative activities like smoking marijuana and taking other substances. While there were “successful” cases, there were many reintegration challenges.

### **Reintegration challenges for young people**

When workers connected young people to their family or job, they were reported

as being reintegrated. But many of these young people came back to the streets. Workers said that young people re-entering the streets was not adequately taken into account in NGO reports to their donors, mainly because this reflected negatively on the NGOs program effectiveness. Workers talked about various reasons for young people's return to the streets.

One of the reasons was inadequate follow-up from workers. In many cases, workers followed-up with phone calls once a month or every three months to check on how these youth were doing. Workers cited funding limitation as a reason for not visiting these youth in person. Most phone calls were made to a local village office, schools, or neighbor's house, since many young people did not have home phone. One worker, who was a street youth, explained that a phone conversation did not provide adequate safety or space for young people to talk to a worker about their problems. Similarly, workers said that there was little follow-up with young people who were connected to jobs.

Many of the young people who returned home struggled to adapt to their family and to their community. This is not surprising, considering that youth work was done to "change" the youth and not their family. One worker who was a street youth described his experience:

I ran away from home when I was in third grade. I spent a year on the streets. They [workers] brought me to an NGO. I stayed there for seven months. They said I should go home and reached me home. Everything was ok in the beginning. Then my family went back to being the same. I was stressed but there was no one to talk to; sirs from NGOs were not around. As my family problem continued, I began to miss the streets. I had freedom there, I had friends there, and I knew how to survive there. One day, I ran from home and came back to the streets.

Workers who were former street youth talked about how their neighbors and friends called them *Khate*, a derogatory term for street children. These workers blamed the NGOs for revealing to their family and community about their street life. Some said that this led to “shaming” by their family and community, and this in turn led them to come back to the streets. In contrast were young people on the streets who openly identified and talked about themselves as being “street children.” This shows the shame that some youth came to internalize when they used NGOs’ service.

Young people who were reintegrated into society through jobs also faced problems adapting. Workers said that many came back to the streets because of problems at work, or because they did not earn enough. Gagan explained:

The money they [young people] earn from these jobs is usually not sufficient. Rent is expensive, so is other living cost. When they are working hard and not making enough money, they come to be streets where they are better able to survive.

Keshab talked about a street peer who had received help to start a street business:

They trained him and bought him a cart to do business as a street vendor. There was no follow up from the NGO, and he was left on his own. He made very little money. One day, he sold the cart and used up the money. Now he is on the street.

These problems with street young people’s family and society reintegration clearly show the limitations of the individual-focused approach of the NGOs. It shows that young people were not the only “problem.” It also shows that NGOs through this approach reinforced the stigma in young people as “problem” youth, which became a barrier to their family and society reintegration.

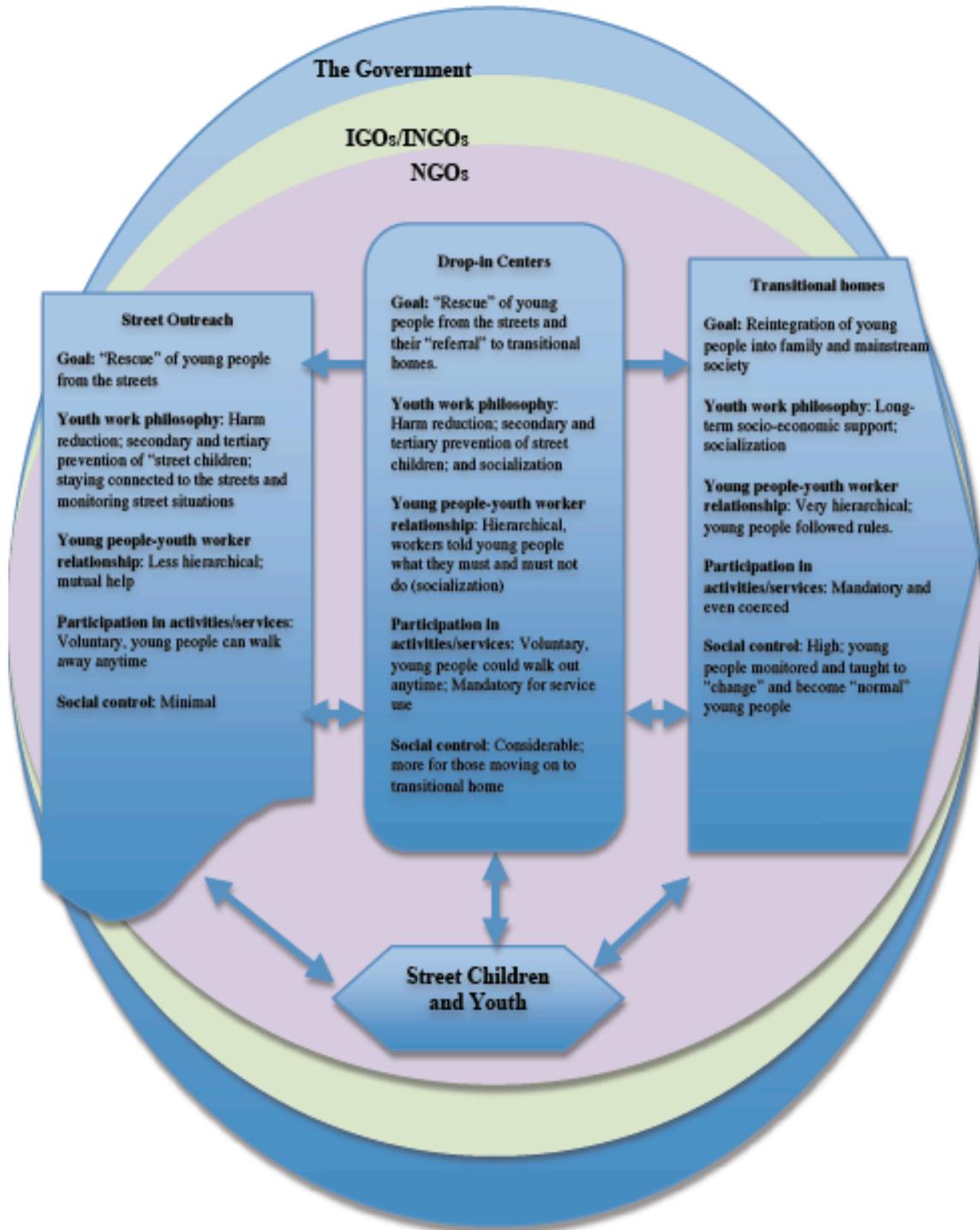
## Summary

Transition homes differed from young people's street homes. In transition homes, young people were "guided" and "taught" how to be "normal" young people. Workers were their guide, teachers, and caretakers over the many months to years they were in the residence. They were household heads whose directions and advice young people had to follow. Many young people lived in these homes until the workers assessed them as "rehabilitated," and then they were "reintegrated" into their family and larger society. Those unable or unwilling to adjust in these homes ran away and went back to the streets.

Workers helped young people adjust to the transition home environment. They were attentive to young people's everyday emotional and material needs. They monitored and observed how young people interacted with peers. They talked to young people casually and during formal counseling sessions. All this was necessary for young people's successful rehabilitation. These activities also helped workers in individual case studies.

Case studies were on-going work in the transition homes. Workers updated individual case studies or needs assessment done by street outreach or transition home workers. To do so, many workers visited families and collected detailed information. This helped workers better understand and "socialize" these youth.

Figure 6: Differences and continuities in youth work practice



Workers viewed “socialization” as crucial for young people’s successful family and society reintegration. In socializing young people, workers decided what young people needed to learn and how they were to be taught. They focused on teaching young people academic, job, and social skills. Young people were required to participate in classes and activities developed for them. Workers talked about using participatory approaches, but in practice, participation seemed mandatory and coerced (Rooney, 2009). When young people “learned” and “adopted” these new ways of being and doing child and youth, they were assessed as “rehabilitated” and ready for “reintegration.”

“Reintegration” was to family or society, and both processes did not always work effectively. Many struggled to adapt to their family and society. These “changed” youth were ashamed of their past. Many returned to the streets, where they did not have to hide their “street identity,” and to which they had a stronger sense of belonging. This is not surprising, particularly when considering that these NGOs’ directed minimal focus on working with families and communities of these young people.

Youth work in transition homes was done “for” young people, as it was in drop-in centers. It was not done “with” them, as it was in street outreach. In the transition home, workers did not “need” young people like they did in the two outreach services, street and drop-in centers. Young people came to them. However, in the transition home, workers justified their work in terms of the number of young people successfully reintegrated. Since the focus here was “socialization,” this gave workers authority and space to tell the young people what to do and how to do it. This reflects the highly structured and rigid environment of the transition homes. In the larger system of response to street young

people, services for them increased as they moved from street outreach to a transition home. Along the same path, NGOs' control over young people increased, taking away from them their ways of being, belonging, and relating to their street world.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Conclusion and Implications**

There is a growing body of research documenting the negative experiences and lifestyles of street young people in Nepal and globally (Onta-Bhatta, 2000; Baker & Hinton, 2001; Child Workers Protection Centers and Services, 2007, Child Workers Nepal Concerned Center, 2010; Child Workers Nepal Concerned Center, 2002; Teal, 2005; Hecht, 1998; Kilbride, Suda, & Njeru, 2000; Panter-Brick, 2000; Turnbull, Hernandez, & Reyes, 2009). There is less information on community and organizational responses to these young people and how these responses are influenced by, as well as understood, by those funding, planning, and implementing the programs and by the young people who are the beneficiaries. Similarly, there are studies that examine youth work with street or homeless youth and that examine young people's perceptions of these programs (Dybicz, 2005; Huang, 2008, Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kidd, Miner, Walker, & Davidson, 2007; Thompson, 1999; Karabanow, 2004; Kidd, 2007), but few studies look at workers in all service spaces of the community's response system to street youth. Little focus has been on examining all of this in the context of developing countries. This dissertation addresses these knowledge gaps by analyzing how NGOs (and by extension their international donors), workers, and young people understood and influenced frontline youth work practice in Nepal. All of this and its implications for enhancing the communal response to these young people are presented here.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study answered three research questions: What is frontline youth

work in Nepal? How it is practiced? What influences how it is practiced in Nepal? The following general conclusions can be drawn from this study done in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and the largest city.

### **What is frontline youth work with street children and youth?**

Frontline youth work with street children and youth was young people-focused, and not focused on the larger problem of “street children.” This study found that NGO management level staff and their workers (as well as the international agencies with their funding) understood the social problem in individual terms and not as a social problem in their sociological sense. They associated the “problems” of these young people with inadequate “socialization” because of families with “unhealthy” or “unstable” life-conditions. Workers and managers also focused on the problem associated with these young people's “unhealthy lifestyles.” This led to workers and NGOs viewing these young people as both victims and deviants and to seeing these young people as partly responsible for their own victimization and their future life-outcomes. This understanding was the basis their program and service goals and approaches, which was essentially individual-level work.

The ultimate goal of this work was young people's reintegration into family and society. Frontline youth work was done in three service spaces: the streets, drop-in centers, and transition homes. In all three service spaces, work was directed at helping young people leave the streets. Services were framed and presented to young people by workers as opportunities to leave the streets. Not taking up these opportunities was the young person's choice. To workers and agencies, it was these young people who had to

enter “mainstream society.” Little attention was given to macro-level social structural issues and the role of these in bringing about the street children and youth social problem. It was these that pressured young people to choose the streets and to keep them there. These young people were held responsible for “fixing” their situations and circumstances through “socialization.”

Socialization was viewed as necessary for changing “deviant” young people to “normal” young people. Socialization was teaching young people to accept situations with their family, community, and the larger society. In doing so, this work helped young people re-define themselves and their identities. This process often reinforced for young people the stigma associated with their “street children” identity and experiences. However, this kind of socialization was viewed as important for young people to grow up to be responsible members of mainstream society. This work was future-focused, while young people lived in the perpetual “now.”

### **How is it practiced?**

In street outreach, workers co-created with young people spaces for youth work. Workers and young people engaged in exchange relationship. Workers helped young people by offering them or connecting them to services, while young people helped workers build street contacts, protected them from violence on the streets, provided them information about the streets and street lifestyles, and even convinced other young people to leave the streets. Very little commitment to leave the streets was required from young people to use outreach services.

In drop-in centers, workers created spaces to talk to young people and motivate them to leave the streets. Young people-worker relationships were hierarchical, with workers as authority. There were rules for coming to the center and using its services, but workers tended to be flexible with the rules in these settings. And young people could walk out or not use services if they did not want to follow the center's rules. Here some level of commitment from young people was required, and it was mainly to follow the centers' rules and policies.

Transition homes were the third space in the local service system for street children and youth. These were structured spaces into which young people were taught to fit. Here worker-young people relationships were very hierarchical, with workers being authority. Child rights and young people's participation were reported as guiding approaches to youth work. Yet, in practice, rights were selectively applied and participation was coerced. To stay in these homes, a level of youth commitment was required because it was there that they were helped to give up their street lifestyle and become "normal" young people. When young people did so, they were viewed as "rehabilitated." They were then reintegrated into their family and society. However, many came back to the streets because they "failed to fit" into these life worlds.

Overall, youth work was a form of social control. As the young people "transitioned" from a street outreach program to a drop-in center and then to a transition home, there was an increase in youth workers' control of these young people's time, activities, choices, and even voices. These three service spaces were mainly based on the NGOs and their funding agencies' idea of what these young people needed. While in

street outreach, workers did youth work “for” and “with” young people (mainly as a necessity), in other two service settings, youth work was “for” young people.

What does this say about the CRC and child participation? NGOs and their partner INGOs emphasized child rights and child participation. Workers talked about participatory approaches, such as holding regular group meetings and consulting with young people about what they wanted, and forming child clubs or advisory committees in the transition homes. In many cases, participation in these activities was mandatory, if not coerced. In some cases, participatory approaches, like a child club, empowered a few young people to control or bully others living at that home. These participatory approaches reflect workers’ manipulation and tokenism rather than youth-driven and youth/adult equity (Hart, 1992). These were symbolic, even ritualistic, but surely not substantive actions by NGOs and the workers.

### **What influenced how it is practiced?**

Street young people’s needs were defined mainly by external international donor agencies, rather than locally by street children and youth or by youth workers. The Nepali government had limited expertise, experience, and financial resources to respond to the needs of street children and youth and to the street children problem as such. Therefore, programs and services for street children and youth were offered primarily by NGOs. These NGOs relied on international funding, which was ad hoc and given to promote the agenda of the international donor agency. These international agencies, as program donors, guided and shaped the street level understanding and practice of frontline youth work.

Youth workers were agents accountable to their employer NGOs and to their foreign donors. Many of these workers learned their roles and youth work practice on the job. On the streets, workers named themselves as agency employees, thus gaining professional status. They believed their accountability and loyalty were mainly to their employer. Missing was their advocacy for street children. Missing was accountability to these young people.

The practices of some workers further alienated young people from mainstream society and damaged their own and their employer NGOs' reputation. Young people shared many stories of workers' practices, which were ethically and professionally questionable. For example, workers shamed young people for coming to a drop-in center only for food, and yelled or hit young people to "discipline" them. There was little opportunity to report this, making running away from the centers a viable option. Such practices re-affirmed young people's distrust of adults, of the NGOs, and of mainstream society, and of youth workers specifically.

Finally, little attention was given by NGOs to systematically assess the effectiveness of their interventions. NGOs claimed their work as effective, but no systematic and rigorous research was found. Typical was studies about the young people's lives, their risk behaviors, and their victimization on the streets. Little efforts and no standards for measuring long-term outcomes were found for those youth "reintegrated" into their biological families and society. Perhaps, this is partly an outcome of the NGOs' resource constraints.

Many workers and their employer NGOs were doing good work on their own

terms, particularly given the obstacles they encountered. These were the only agencies that offered services to street young people. Their work was constrained by financial uncertainty, pressures from government and international organizations to produce outputs, and little support from government or community for a system of response that focused beyond street young people to their community and to the larger society. Overall, frontline youth work was a moral practice.

Finally and explicitly and after one year of field study in Nepal and reading about street youth, it is clear that the Nepali NGO response studied and reported here was not about the social problem, the youth problem, or the street children problem as such. It was not about the social arrangements, which constituted this socio-cultural, political, and economic reality. Rather, the Nepali NGOs' response, along with government and international donors, was to the individual person, extending to their family, when possible. This is a band-aid approach, valid on its own moral terms, but surely not an effort to get at the sources and manifestations of this phenomenon. At best and at most, it gets at the victims, participants – the young people. Is this enough? No!

### **Implications**

**Macro-level implications: Avoiding the social problem of the milieu** (Mills, 1959). Given that Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, it is highly unlikely that national funds will be available for the street youth phenomenon beyond a token amount. Given the nation's on-going political crisis, the relatively small size of the street children population, and their current relatively benign presence and limited intrusiveness into everyday life for most in Kathmandu, it is highly unlikely that the government will

fully engage in this issue. If it does, a police response could be called. Assuming government and street children constituencies, locally and internationally, and the push against that type of social control, government policy is likely to remain weak, opening spaces for international organizations to shape local responses. These they will do on their own interests, while responding to the street youth problem as they see it or as they judge that it can best be controlled: By providing services to the children and youth primarily; by secondary and tertiary prevention on individual-level, with few family services.

**Policy implications: Response to street children and youth must focus on multiple levels.** The response must recognize that individuals exist in the context of their family, community, and the larger society, as suggested by social work community practice (Hardcastle, 2011) and social science. This is aphoristic, a truism. Doing so highlights the need to focus also on family, community, and larger society level responses. Then the existing individual focused response becomes only one component of a broad multi-level system of response.

As part of this multi-level response, it is important to consider economic and social service support to families and communities. NGOs talked about household poverty as being one of the realities for young people to come and remain on the streets. Current practices have largely overlooked support needed by families to increase their household conditions, as few NGOs sporadically worked with families in slum areas of Kathmandu. Another reality that led young people to choose the streets was family abuse and neglect, according to NGOs workers and other studies (Baker, 1998; Child Protection

Centers and Services, 2007). Community level social service support is absent for young people facing difficult family situations, often making streets their only option. When young people run away from home for these and other reasons, there lacked adequate response system for locating and appropriately responding to them. It must be recognized that such responses are beyond the scope of NGOs' work, particularly considering the legal authority and financial resources needed for this. What NGOs could do is continue their individual-level response, while advocating with government for long-term immediate and structural changes for multi-level response to young people likely to come to the streets or who are on the streets.

**Practice implications: Help young people be their own advocates.**

Socialization approaches used tended to suppress young people's personal agency. Instead of doing so, youth work could help young people find ways to positively exercise their agencies. NGOs and workers could co-create opportunities for young people to represent their street children community, engage them in critical thinking about issues that affect their lives, enable them to positively organize and change their situations and problems, and engaging them in program and services planning and evaluation. Of course, engaging young people in this way requires NGOs and workers (well as government, international organizations, and larger society) to change their ways of thinking about these young people – view them as assets and not problems (Scales & Leffert, 1999; Ginwright & James, 2003). This way of enabling young people to positively change their life situations could lead to empowerment of these young people in its true sense.

**Practice implications: Evaluate program effectiveness and meaningfully engage young people in program design and implementation, as well as in program evaluation.** Meaningfully engaging young people (not only those living in the centers but also those who are on the streets) can contribute to new ways, alternate ways, and/or more effective ways of programming and offering services, as these young people have extensive and first hand experiences of street life and service use. Doing so could also give these young people a stake in the programs and a sense of ownership that could contribute to their active participation in these programs. Furthermore, engaging young people in program evaluation both as evaluators and as informants could help NGOs and workers better identify concerns and needs from young people's perspective. When these needs and concerns are adequately addressed, it could give young people a sense that they have a voice, another aspect of empowerment.

**Practice implications: Frontline youth workers' structural position, purpose, training, and supervision.** The primary focus of this study was frontline youth workers. This practice was located in the reticulum of the employer NGO, the national government, and international donors. All of these were sources of pressure on frontline youth workers, and all exerted their interest downwards toward the workers. The result was that the worker-young people encounter was shaped away from the particular worker and child, with her/his needs and wants. The moment of encounter, so crucial to Western/Northern youth work practice was minimally important: youth work practice was salesmanship, selling the NGOs' and its funders' ideas and goals – leave the streets.

Given this, workers have to be prepared for this role. Workers must be selected

and trained both by their employer NGO and by a more neutral agent, such as an institute or university, to better get at the structural constraints on their position and the contribution of these to worker burnout – psychosocial and existential, that is, loss of meaning in their work.

A problem arises if a goal is to professionalize frontline youth workers. If professionalization is a training goal and practice standard, these will conflict with the sales focus of the work. This tension must either be resolved or at minimum, engaged in training so that professionalization does not become another strain on the worker role, one contributing to early to burnout. Since professionalization or at least professional status lead to higher incomes and more job security, this may not fit current practice where street-level work, arguably the most difficult, is the entry-level, lowest paid position. In this arrangement, professionalization could be restricted to workers in other two service spaces – the drop-in center and the transition home. Arguably, there is even more sales work there, so the problem remains.

All of this suggests that in the current system, the training and other enhancement of the frontline youth worker role and status is problematic. It is clear how to train the salesman to sell, while in this arrangement it is less clear what and how to train frontline youth workers not to sell and to practice differently. But then again, such differences might not fit local practice models, and also these would likely be imports, likely from the West, considering that the international funding agencies pays the training bill. While not necessarily a problem, it could become one in certain socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-moral climates.

Best would be local training in indigenous practices by locals. However, there were few youth workers with long and deep experience in this work and who have done colleague training. But new and indigenous models of training could be created and evaluated. Then the problem is whether this new content and these new approaches would be acceptable to funders. Workshop experience in Kathmandu and field observation showed local training to be especially moralistic, almost evangelical in message and practices. Will donors accept this? Can we in good faith support this even if it is indigenous? All of these issues are real and consequential for sorting the training of frontline youth workers.

A final consideration here about training is whether to train workers for service specific environments – street, drop-in, and transition home – or more generally, since the work in all three is similar. On the other hand, similar looking work differs by context so that general training may be insufficient.

**Former street youth.** The study found former street youth employed as peer educators in part as a role model, showing that one can actually leave the streets and be trained and employed, albeit inside the same world. This practice is worldwide, hence accepted as helpful to the children, and as moral and ethical. Without a career ladder in place, these youth may not easily find other employment and remain stuck at the same place where they now work. Is this fair?

**Supervision.** Elsewhere there is managerial supervision and professional or practice supervision, one for the system’s needs (“paperwork”), and the other for working with young people. Since there were few frontline youth workers with extensive

“professional”-level experience, the latter type of supervision was limited to how employing agencies do their work. This may be sufficient, but it does limit career possibilities, along with transmitting successfully unproven practices. There seemed to be very little systematic monitoring or assessment of supervisory practice. This is not unusual in most NGOs in developing countries. This too is a historical-structural issue. Beyond worker selection, training, and research is research and evaluation.

**Research implications: Rigorous research to explore and examine possible ways to meaningfully engage young people, family, and community in response to street young people.** Since interventions in Nepal and many other countries tend to focus primarily on young people, this work could be enhanced by further research on how to integrate other crucial and influential elements of the society into the community’s response system. One way this could be done is through action research by workers with young people and in partnership with educational or research institutes. The research could focus on multiple approaches to integrating different aspects of the multi-level response system, including organizing street youth to become their own advocates. This research approach would allow both workers and young people to together find new possibilities and ways of co-creating youth work.

**Research implications: Professional level (program) evaluation – both process (implementation) and outcome.** There was little systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the NGOs programs and services. Typically, most research on program effectiveness or most program evaluation was driven by international donors using their evaluation models and practices. These could be culturally insensitive and technically

difficult and inappropriate for local use. Culturally specific strategies and methods should be developed, and priority given to their use.

These are some of the basic implications of the study of frontline youth work in Nepal. These are all obvious, yet complex enough to make change neither easy, nor quick, and not too likely. There are too many who are too invested in the present practice, and given the pace of change on issues concerning street children and services to them, it will be a while before any of these ideas are taken up for discussion and to make changes.

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## Appendix 1

### Frontline youth worker interview guide

1. How long have you been doing this work? How long have you been working directly with street children and youth?
2. Tell me about your work. What do you do?
  - a. What is your job title?
  - b. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of this job?
  - c. How did you learn about these roles and responsibilities?
  - d. How did you learn how to take on and carry out these roles and responsibilities?
  - e. What are the goals of your program? What do you do to achieve these goals? What happens if you are not able to meeting these goals? What happens if you are able to meet these goals?
  - f. What other kinds of programs does your organization offer?
3. What is your typical work day?
4. Can you tell me stories about your work with street children and youth?
5. Is it hard or easy to work with them? What are the challenges?
6. Do you like working with them? What specifically do you like or not like about working with street children and youth?
7. Is there any thing youth would like to tell about this work?
8. Do you have any question for me?

## Appendix 2

### Management level staff interview guide

1. How many frontline youth workers do you have in your organization?
2. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of front line youth workers?
3. How do they learn to take on these roles and responsibilities?
4. How do frontline youth workers learn to work with street children and youth?
  - a. Is there a training center for this kind of work?
  - b. Is there college or university level training for youth workers (or those in closely related fields, such as social work, formal health, public health, etc.)?
  - c. If yes, do most youth workers have this training?
5. Are there any written code of conducts or guidelines for working with street children and youth? If yes, is it agency specific?
6. What are some of the challenges youth workers' experience working with street children and youth?
7. How do you and your staff deal with challenging situations?

Organization as context:

8. What are the major problems with street children and youth here?
9. How does your organization address these?
10. What are the goals of your organization? What do you do to achieve these goals?
11. Are your programs evaluated? By whom and how often? What happens to the evaluation report?

12. Who funds your organization? Is the funding short-term or long-term?
13. What requirements, expectations, and policy rules about frontline youth work with street children and youth come along with this funding?
14. Is there any thing youth would like to tell about this work?
15. Do you have any question for me?

Thank you for your help with this study.

## Appendix 3

### Young people interview guide

#### 1. Outreach work

- Are you always at this (geographic) place?
- Do staff from different organizations come here?
- How many different staff from how many different organizations come here in a week?
- Do you know the names of the organizations they work for?
- Do any of them come everyday? Do they come at the same time or at different times of the week and of the day?
- What do they do when they come here? Is this helpful to you? In what ways? Is it not? Why not? What would make it more helpful?
- Do you think these staff really understand you? What do they get and what do they not get? What would you like them to say, ask, do?
- What do you like about how they are with you and what they offer you?
- Why do you think these staff come here and say and do what they do?
- If you could make what they offer better, what would it be and how would you do it?

#### 2. Drop-in centers

- What is a drop-in center?
- What are the names of some of these drop-in centers?
- Do kids around here go to drop-in centers? Which ones? Why (not)?

- What do you like about the drop-in centers?
- Are staff and services at drop-in centers helpful to you? In what ways?
- Why do you think drop-in centers offer all those services?
- Do you think staff at drop-in centers understand you? What do they get and what do they not get? What would you like them to say, ask, or do?
- If you could make drop-in centers better, what would you do?

3. Transit homes

- What is a transit home?
- What are the names of some of these transit homes?
- Have you ever lived in a transit home?
- If yes, for how long?
- How do you get into a transit home? What do they ask you? Why do you think they ask you these questions?
- Do you like transit homes?
- What do like (or not like) about transit homes?
- Do you think services offered at transit homes are helpful? In what ways?
- Why do you think transit homes offer all those services?
- If you could make transit homes better, what would you do?
- Is there any thing youth would like to tell about this work?
- Do you have any question for me?