

[www.publiceyenews.com/2012/06/18/second-home-for-street-kids](http://www.publiceyenews.com/2012/06/18/second-home-for-street-kids)

## SECOND HOME FOR STREET KIDS

*By Libuseng Nyaka*

**BLOEMFONTEIN** – Twelve-year old Lerato (not his real name) is one of 11 teenagers housed at the Kidz Care Trust's temporary shelter for teenage boys, who were rescued from the streets of Bloemfontein.

Fadzayi Matongo, the manager at Kidz Care Trust said: "Most of these kids come from dysfunctional families and have experienced emotional and sexual abuse.

"But on the streets they are introduced to all sorts of bad habits including sniffing glue under the illusion that doing so relieves stress and is a coping strategy. They said when they were high after sniffing glue; they became indifferent to cold and fear. Then they were able to eat food from dustbins without qualms."

Lerato and the other 10 boys are being rehabilitated for glue addiction, counselled and motivated at Kidz Care Trust.

Matongo said her organisation worked with a street worker who was also former street kid.

Michael Van Heerden, the rehabilitated street kid, helps identify street kids and lures them off the streets as he can relate to them. She said her organization had also partnered with the police to rehabilitate the children and deal with negligent parents.

Said Van Heerden: "As a former street kid, I know how bad it is [out there]. I know their challenges and how to relate to them. I was once in their shoes. I left home due to family problems."

Lerato looks like a six-year-old child as he plays soccer with fellow street kids his age. Matongo, who is also a social worker, blamed his stunted growth on malnutrition.

She said the challenges that street kids faced included health risks and exposure to potentially criminal activities. She added that some of the children used glue to deal with pain the same way that people use painkillers.

"Our street worker who is also a former street kid identifies these kids. He is able to lure them to the centre where they can get help because they are able to relate with him as he comes from the same experience," she said.

Van Heerden said it broke his heart to see street kids and wished he could do more to help them as he empathises with them.

"I left home because of my step father who was very abusive and I know all the hardships associated with being on the street. I am able to relate to the street kids and it is easier for them to open up to me and get help once a problem has been identified," Ver Heerden said.

"When a kid arrives on the street he/she is welcomed with a glue, which numbs their feelings once they get hooked," he said.

Besides Van Heerden's success story, Matongo said at the centre children were counselled and given all the support to turn a new page.

"We invite religious leaders who preach the word of God and advise them on the importance of repenting from their sins and seek forgiveness. We are working with Department of Sport to introduce soccer and other sports so that they are busy and forget everything that occurred at the street," she said.

Kids Care Trust is non-governmental organisation and a temporary home for the 11 children aged between 12 and 17 years. However, it uses a single house without proper security, which makes it easier for boys to abscond. Situated about 30 kilometers east of Bloemfontein, it is designed to accommodate 16 boys.

"Initially Kidz Care Trust had 15 children. Three of them absconded due to craving for glue. Two who also tried to flee came back and apologised. I think some of these kids love their family because sometimes they refrain from the bad habits just to avoid hurting their family members further. That is the approach we use when counseling them," said Matongo.

"We cannot take girls because our street worker is a man and accommodation is an issue here," she said. "Our main challenge is that we do not have enough resources needed to help these children quit their bad habits. However, we have trained them to suck sweets whenever they feel like sniffing glue."

Matongo said Street kids were a social problem which was being made worse by members of the communities give the children money, unaware that they use it to buy the glue. "We provide a temporary home in a rental house, food assistance, lessons in personal hygiene, life skills programmes, basic formal schooling, sport and recreation activities and religion. The maximum stay is two months, before kids are united with their parents where possible while others are sent to social development."

Matongo said some parents of the runaway children accuse them of poor discipline and of being averse to being reprimanded.

"With cold winters, I cannot determine whether their stay here is due to the cold or if they are really determined to change and refrain from their bad habits," she said.

She attributed the growing number of children on the street to parental negligence.

Unicef estimates that there are about 100-million children living and working on the streets worldwide. The majority of these children are in developing countries.

The Minister for Women, Children and People with Disability Lulu Xingwana said that while some vulnerable children may be protected through social assistance and childcare services provided by the government and NGOs, other children are not detected.

She said that this is why the Department of Social Development has developed a strategy, which will advise on the best response to the needs of children at risk of having to live on the streets, as well as those who are already in that position.

The strategy focuses on prevention and early intervention to reduce risks, enhance protection of children already on the street, and reintegration of these children into their communities.