Child homelessness in Ugandan city more than doubles in six years

Friday 10 November, 2023

10 November 2023, Manchester: Child homelessness in Jinja in Uganda has increased by 192% since 2017, according to research conducted by the Manchester based charity, S.A.L.V.E. International.

The new analysis shows that there are now an estimated 11,516 children living and working on the streets of Jinja in Eastern Uganda, compared to only 3,943 in 2017. With a population of approximately 570,000, the levels of child homelessness in the region are incredibly concerning, with children as young as three years old now on the streets.

The news aligns with a global trend of increasing homelessness, which has been driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of conflict and political instability. Uganda also suffered a major Ebola outbreak in 2022, which further threatened livelihoods, schooling and access to healthcare and forced many onto the street.

Nicola Sansom, CEO and Co-founder of S.A.L.V.E. International said: “This research was vital in understanding the scale of child homelessness in Jinja. Global homelessness is on the rise but, in Uganda, it is the children that are paying the price.”

This perfect storm has seen children in Uganda turning to the streets due to increasing poverty and starvation at home. To stay alive, children are forced to look for work, collecting scrap metal to sell, begging or making money through sex work.

Nicola said “Without support and intervention to break the cycle of poverty that many Ugandan families find themselves in, increasing numbers of children will continue to be on the streets. It is vital that we act now on global homelessness and empower the next generation to have brighter futures.”

Increasing numbers of children are without the safety of a family home, access to medical care, regular food, clean water or schooling. This means more cases of child trafficking, torture, rape and abuse.

Alfred Ochaya, Ugandan Director of S.A.L.V.E. International said: “As a charity we strive to provide a lifeline to children on the streets of Jinja, Uganda, when they need us most. This research has highlighted the need for more support than ever before, to protect children both in Uganda but also globally. Children are the future and need to be prioritised.”

S.A.L.V.E. International was founded in 2008 to help tackle the issue of child poverty and homelessness in Jinja, Uganda. The charity, funded predominantly by donations from the public, works with local communities to provide outreach services to children on the street, aiming to re-settle them back home and provide initiatives such as business training for their caregivers and education support to help ensure their children don’t turn to the streets again.

Since 2008, S.A.L.V.E. has helped 744 children away from the dangers of the streets and back to a loving family home, trained 335 caregivers with business skills and seen 87 children graduate from education to date.

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Notes to the Editor:
S.A.L.V.E. International is a UK and Ugandan partnership charity supporting children on the streets of Jinja, Eastern Uganda to return to a safe family home and an education.

S.A.L.V.E. has a base in Manchester and in Jinja, Uganda. The team in Uganda are social workers, teachers, care and medical staff.

S.A.L.V.E. International works in a variety of ways to reduce the number of children having to live on the streets of Uganda, which all have education at the heart of them. This includes:

- Street Outreach - our Street Outreach programme helps us build strong trusting relationships with the children living on the streets through street walks, sports and our Drop in Centres.
- Halfway Homes - our programme of home tracing and family resettlement allows us to try to find

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the best solution to help children to permanently leave the streets and settle in a caring family home.

- Drug Rehabilitation - our Drug Rehabilitation programme supports children who are addicted to drugs to overcome their addiction and work towards being safely resettled back to a family home.
- Business Empowerment - our programme helps families of resettled children start up their own businesses so that they can support their children and reduce the risk of them returning to the street due to poverty.
- Research and Partnerships - our work helps to reduce the number of children who will come to the streets in the first place and challenges negative attitudes towards children on the streets.
- Permaculture - our Permaculture programme teaches the children and young people who are staying at our residential site sustainable farming techniques, as well as providing permaculture training for vulnerable rural families of street connected children.

The research report can be found on S.A.L.V.E.'s website: www.salveinternational.org/research/2023-head-count/

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