Nothing about us without us:

A toolkit for organisations working or wanting to work with adolescent street-connected girls
Working with adolescent street-connected girls:
overview
The Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is the leading international network dedicated to realising the rights of street-connected children worldwide. Nothing about us without us – a toolkit for organisations working or wanting to work with adolescent street-connected girls has been produced by CSC with the support of our network and external experts. It helps address some of the challenges that organisations face in supporting adolescent street-connected girls, as highlighted by our network, interviews with girls and the organisations that support them and research conducted between 1998 and 2013.

This toolkit supports the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) 2012 report and recommendations on street children, which outline the need for specialised interventions. Consultations with children and young people informed the report and highlighted the importance of young people’s participation in decisions that affect them. Nothing about us without us supports organisations to build their capacity and programmes by learning from, and working alongside, girls.

Nothing about us without us was written by Leonora Borg, Consortium for Street Children, with the support of the CSC Executive team, the working group, advisors and organisations who piloted the toolkit.

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About this toolkit

*Nothing about us without us* uses the term ‘street-connected’ and ‘street’ child, referring to any child who has connections to the streets and whose identity is shaped by their experiences on the streets. A child might work on the street, spend time on the street, or live there.

This toolkit has been designed to be used by staff; it does not require an external trainer or facilitator.

**Aim**

*Nothing about us without us* is to support:

- Organisations that **work directly** with adolescent street-connected girls (aged 11 to 18 years old) and want to review and develop their programmes and
- Organisations that **want to work directly** with adolescent street girls.

This toolkit is designed to help organisations globally to develop their capacity, programme delivery and monitoring and evaluation so that they can work more effectively with adolescent girls. It can be used to support the delivery of programmes that prevent girls from going onto the street; who spend time on the street; and/or live on the street.

It outlines many of the challenges and good practices shared by organisations across the world. However some of these may not be applicable to, or effective for every organisation.

**Why focus on adolescent street girls?**

Adolescent girls face specific challenges on the street, including gender-based violence, discrimination and gender-specific health issues: they need programmes that address these. Effective girl-focused programmes provide girls with safe spaces where they can talk openly, sharing their life experiences and goals without judgement. They offer girls holistic support which enables them to develop practical and life skills.

To offer safe, effective programmes, organisations need to have the capacity (knowledge, time, skills and resources) in place, otherwise they may be putting girls at risk of harm and failing to meet girls’ needs.
**Format**

This toolkit contains 3 sections, as well as an overview and appendices:

**Section 1: organisational capacity building**, outlines the key organisational requirements that need to be in place before any programmatic work is developed. Most tools in section 1 are done with staff, trustees and volunteers.

**Section 2: programme delivery**, provides information, ideas and tools for supporting adolescent girls with some of the key issues they face. Organisations can select the units that are relevant to their programmatic work. All tools in section 2 are done with adolescent street-connected girls.

**Section 3: monitoring and evaluation** of programmes for adolescent street-connected girls places girls at the heart of information gathering and interpretation. Most tools in section 3 are done with girls, though some involve both girls and staff.

Each section starts with **guiding principles**: guidance that summarises overarching good practices. **These are applicable to all organisations**. Each section is then divided into units which cover specific topics and contains **tools** and **activity sheets** that support organisations to explore topics and implement the guiding principles.

Next to each tool you will see a series of symbols that indicate how long an activity is likely to take, what preparation and materials you will need, who and how many should participate. Each tool has **key learning points** to help facilitators summarise what has been covered during an activity. It also has **facilitator’s notes** to outline any steps required before, during and after an activity; advise on alternative approaches for participants with low literacy levels; and respond to potential issues that may arise during an activity.

There is a list of useful resources in the **appendices** to help you further develop your work with girls.

The toolkit is primarily an on-line resource. Each section can be downloaded and printed out from the Consortium for Street Children’s Global Resource Centre (www.streetchildrenresources.org). Additionally voice recordings of case studies and experiences of staff and girls are available for download.
Using the toolkit

Your organisation may choose to use:
• The complete toolkit
• A section of the toolkit (organisational capacity building and/or programme delivery and/or monitoring and evaluation)
• Unit(s) within sections (for example, staff recruitment and training in section 1; supporting girls’ physical health in section 2).

If you do not use the complete toolkit, as a minimum make sure your organisation reads the guidance for facilitators (page 15) and upholds the guiding principles at the start of each section (pages 21, 74 and 183).

When deciding how your organisation will use Nothing about us without us, think about:
• What are your organisational capacity gaps and challenges?
• What gaps and challenges do you have in your programmes for adolescent street-connected girls?
• What issues have girls said they want more support in?
• When and what location(s) best suit participants?
• How much time can your organisation commit to using the toolkit?

You might choose to set aside a block of time to hold toolkit workshops, selecting appropriate units and tools to meet your organisational needs and the needs of the girls you support or want to support. Or you may choose to allocate one day a week to putting the toolkit into practice.

Don’t forget to use the toolkit regularly to check that your organisation continues developing its organisational capacity, programme delivery and monitoring and evaluation.

Let us know your feedback on Nothing about us without us so that we can make it as useful as possible: go to www.streetchildrenresources.org/toolkitfeedback
“We used the toolkit because we want to start running programmes for girls who live on the streets. We spent three days on section 1 to help build a picture of our capacity to run girl-only programmes on top of our existing programmes and the day centre. Next, we spent a week with girls doing activities from section 2 to better understand their needs. Most of the girls knew us because they attend the day centre, so they trusted us to talk about their lives. However, we didn’t anticipate the boys’ frustration at not being allowed into the centre for a week, so we adapted the sessions and now run them once a week. Together we are shaping what our girl-focused programmes will look like.”

– Glad’s House, Kenya

“Amhauta mainly supports working children. We are not looking to start new programmes at the moment, but we really wanted to work with the girls we support on new topics, especially rights and friendships. We chose units from section 2 and used the activities in our weekly sessions with girls. It has helped them to learn about new things and develop their life skills.”

– Amhauta, Peru

“We did activities from sections 1, 2 and 3 of the toolkit with girls on the streets in Bogota. We adapted some of the activities as we were outside in open spaces. For example, we didn’t have walls to stick up girls’ drawings or post-it notes, but we could stick them to the pavement during an activity. We also took photos of their drawings and notes as a record. We found that girls tended to get distracted more quickly on the streets, so we tried to find quiet locations. We also split activities with multiple steps into different sessions. One of the things we had to be particularly aware of was the lack of support girls had access to after the activities, so we chose not to do the activities where they were discussing particularly sensitive issues, and we always made sure a member of staff was available to talk to after each session.”

– Parces, Colombia

“We decided to start girl-only sessions on Saturday mornings using the activities in the toolkit. Our work with girls focuses on preventing them from going onto the streets. All the girls we support are in school, so they particularly enjoyed activities that involved discussing and writing down their ideas. We found that some of the activities took longer because everyone in the room wanted to give her view and go into a lot of depth on each of the topics. As a Muslim country, some of the topics are quite sensitive – the units on sexual health, sex work, substances and relationships. So we started with the less sensitive units and adapted topics to include local examples.”

– Moroccan Children’s Trust, Morocco

“Section 3 really helped us to understand what works and what needs changing in our girl-focused programmes. Girls loved being involved in monitoring the programmes and they especially enjoyed making a video. We set aside two days a week to go through section 3 but we plan to use some of the activities regularly, so that we get on-going feedback from girls.”

– War Child, Goma
Recommended minimum use of this toolkit

Guidance for facilitators

Section 1: guiding principles

Section 1: select relevant units and tools

Section 2: guiding principles

Section 2: select relevant units and tools

Section 3: guiding principles

Section 3: select relevant units and tools
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Introduction to adolescent street-connected girls

The information in this introduction is based on interviews with street-connected girls in eight countries, the organisations that support them and a literature review. Summaries are available in the appendices (page 209).

There are many reasons why girls become street-connected but poverty, violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation in the home by family and/or community; and gender-based discrimination are some of the most commonly cited reasons.

The biggest challenge cited by girls on the streets is sexual violence and exploitation. Whilst both boys and girls experience sexual, physical and emotional violence, girls report a higher frequency of sexual violence than boys. The impact on girls includes having more of a tendency towards depression and self-harm; more emotional dependency on substances; and a higher risk of physical health needs including sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Some girls use their bodies to acquire money, food, clothing and protection, including from boyfriends. They tend to be less visible on the street than boys and harder for organisations to locate and have access to, with some girls reporting that they exchange sexual favours for shelter whilst others work in brothels.

Girls report gender-based discrimination as a key challenge. This includes having less access to education than boys and being excluded from school if they become pregnant. Some only have access to gender-stereotyped training and employment, giving them fewer choices and opportunities than boys.

Staff report that they find it particularly challenging to engage girls in programmes and girls have a higher drop-out rate than boys. The most cited reasons for this are because girls have complex physical and emotional needs; they struggle to build trusting relationships, confidence and self-esteem; can have strong dependencies on drugs and boyfriends; sex work pays more than alternative trades; pregnant girls and young mothers cost more to support; and male staff sometimes feel uncomfortable working with girls.

By being street-connected, girls challenge gender stereotypes in many countries, using survival skills often attributed to boys including fighting, substance use, begging and/or stealing. Girls who have spent time on the streets, especially those involved in sex work, may find themselves unwelcome in their communities.

Whilst acknowledging the many challenges, Nothing about us without us seeks to provide support for working more effectively with girls.
**Glossary of terms**

**Adolescent:** a child aged between 11 and 18 years old

**Child:** any person under the age of eighteen years (as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

**Child protection:** protecting a child from violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation through preventative and responsive guidance, policy and action

**Child marriage:** a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18. Though it affects both boys and girls, it is more commonly an issue faced by girls worldwide

**Emotional ill-health:** An emotional state in which an individual is unable to realise their own potential, unable to cope with everyday life or work productively. Emotional ill-health can include depression (difficulty in maintaining concentration or interest in life) and anxiety (concern or worry about uncontrollable events)

**Emotional well-being:** A state in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with everyday life and function productively

**Empowerment:** Strengthening an individual’s personal ability to make choices, build assets and develop confidence and self-belief

**Exploitation:** Using or mistreating an individual or group unfairly in order to benefit from them financially and/or sexually

**Gender-based discrimination:** The different treatment of individuals because of their gender, rather than on the basis of their skills or capabilities

**Gender-based violence:** Physical, sexual and/or emotional violence and/or exploitation inflicted on a person because of their gender

**Gender stereotypes:** Socially constructed beliefs about the different characteristics, roles and relations between women and men. Gender stereotypes can be reproduced and reinforced through education and upbringing, as well as influenced by the media. They can shape people’s attitudes and behavioural patterns and can lead to social exclusion

**Holistic support:** taking into account all aspects of an individual’s needs including physical, mental, emotional and social needs

**Monitoring and evaluation:** The systematic and routine collection of information on projects and programmes to learn from positive and negative experiences and improve practices for the future (monitoring). Assessing a completed project or programme to learn from it and inform programme development (evaluation)

**Organisational capacity building:** the process of developing an organisation’s structures and processes so that the organisation is more efficient, effective and responsive to its staff, volunteers, trustees and beneficiaries

**Peer mentoring:** structured support that takes place between an individual who has lived through a specific experience (peer mentor) and a person who is new to that experience (peer mentee)

**Post-exposure prophylaxis:** a preventive medical treatment started immediately after exposure to a virus (especially HIV), in order to prevent infection and the development of the disease

**Power imbalance:** A person or group having influence and/or control over others
**Sexual violence and exploitation:** Any unwanted sexual act (sexual violence) which can be through manipulation into sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status (sexual exploitation).

**Sexually transmitted infections (STIs):** Infections acquired through sexual contact. The organisms that cause sexually transmitted diseases pass from person to person in blood, semen, or vaginal and other bodily fluids.

**Street-connected child:** A child for whom the street is a central reference point, shaping their identity. It can include children who spend time on the street but live at home, children who work on the street and children who live on the street.

**Street work:** Work by non-government organisations that takes place on the streets where children spend time.

**Substance misuse:** Overindulgence in or dependence on a drug or alcohol. When consumed, substances can affect the way people feel, think, see, taste, smell, hear or behave.

**Trauma:** On-going adverse effects on an individual’s well-being caused by experiencing a physically or emotionally harmful or threatening event or long-term exposure to a damaging situation or relationship.

**UNCRC:** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was launched in 1989 as a set of international principles on children’s rights. It has been signed and ratified by every country in the world except the USA and Somalia.

**Violence:** Physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, neglect and/or exploitation of an individual or group by another individual or group.

**Youth:** A young person between the age of 15 and 24 years old (as defined by the United Nations).
Before you start: guidance for facilitators

Choosing the right facilitator

Getting the right facilitator helps participants to feel more comfortable joining in and benefiting from an activity. Consider:

- Do you want someone in your organisation to facilitate or an external facilitator? Think about the pros and cons of someone who is more objective and who knows your organisation better. For activities with adolescent girls a member of staff with facilitation skills who the girls know and trust is recommended.
- Do you want a male or female facilitator? For activities with adolescent girls consider which gender they may feel more comfortable with.
- Do you want more than one facilitator? Whilst this can require more resources, it can help in terms of giving participants more support, securing a gender balance in the room and/or in situations where there is a local language that only some participants use.

Your organisation should obtain references for external facilitators and give them copies of your organisation’s child protection policy and Code of Conduct, as well as an induction to the organisation. External facilitators should not be left unsupervised with children and young people.

The facilitator’s role

It is the facilitator’s responsibility to:

Before the activity:

- **Prepare well:**
  - As a minimum, read the entire unit and relevant terms in the glossary before beginning an activity. It is recommended that you read the complete toolkit.
  - Familiarise yourself with the activity and do background research that will make you feel more comfortable leading the activity.
  - Look at feedback from previous relevant activities.
  - Make sure you have the required materials or use the materials you have available and adapt the activity accordingly.
  - If possible, try to observe someone else delivering the same activity before you try it. Alternatively, you can practice facilitating a session with your colleagues.
- **Choose a safe, quiet location for the activity to take place.** This might be a room in the organisation, on the street, or in another location. Girls need to feel safe and able to focus on the activity to be able to participate and learn.
- **Know which member(s) of staff are available** to support any participant who becomes upset during an activity or who chooses to leave the activity before it ends. These should be people who know participants and who the participants trust.
- **Know or find out about participants** – some groups may only be able to concentrate for a short time; others might all want to respond to each question asked. Tailor the length and content of each activity to suit the group. Be aware that some activities may raise particularly sensitive issues. If a participant has experienced trauma in relation to the focus of the activity, talk to her first about whether she wants to participate and what support she will have available.
- **Adapt tools and activity sheets** so that they are relevant to participants:
  - Incorporate local examples.
  - Add or remove questions to make sessions more relevant.
  - Adjust the length of the sessions to meet participants’ needs and the number of participants. If you’re working with a big group, the activity is likely to take longer.
  - Tailor activities to match participants’ literacy levels. If literacy levels are low, participants can give verbal feedback and/or draw their responses.
During the activity:

- **Set ground rules** with participants at the start of activities, including turning mobile phones to silent; listening to each other; not judging each other; being able to stop participating in an activity; and maintaining confidentiality (see page 19)
- **Start with an icebreaker:** a short, fun activity to encourage participants to relax and get to know each other. It can be as simple as telling the person next to you what your favourite pastime is; they then feedback to the whole group
- **Start each activity by outlining its purpose and length of time it will take.** Give participants the opportunity to ask questions and check that participants understand the instructions clearly before beginning each activity
- **Lead and monitor activities** making sure everyone has opportunities to participate and be listened to
  - **Do not force anyone to participate.** Make the group aware that they do not have to participate and can stop participating at any point throughout the activity
  - **Respond appropriately** – take action if you observe that a participant does not feel listened to or able to participate, unsafe or in need of additional support. It is important to highlight that bullying and disruptive behaviours are not acceptable
  - **Keep promises** you make - to let participants speak, take breaks or not take part if they don’t feel they want to.
- **End each activity on a positive note** outlining the key learning points so participants understand why the activity took place and what they can take from it.

After the activity:

- **Follow up with any participant who was upset during an activity.** Some girls may choose to talk about sensitive issues during an activity. It is extremely important that they are supported practically and emotionally after the activity by the organisation. If the facilitator is concerned about a participant’s well-being, they should support the participant to access support
- **Follow up on any concerning information raised during an activity.** If any child protection concerns are raised during an activity, it is vital that the participant is supported to inform the appropriate member of staff in the organisation who can follow up on the concern
- **Deliver on any follow-up promised.** If you told the group they will be given additional information or follow-up after an activity, make sure this happens promptly
- **Keep the team updated.** Whilst respecting girls’ confidentiality, it is helpful to share general updates and insights that emerge from activities with the rest of the organisation. Team meetings can be a good time to share this information
- **Refer back to and develop learning from each activity.** Staff should aim to continue discussions on key topics with participants to develop learning and action. You might consider using the case studies in the toolkit; getting in local experts to speak to the girls *for example a nurse or business woman*; and developing your own activities.
“I started an activity on girls’ rights and realised that everyone wanted to give their views! During the activity, I decided it was better to split the activity into two separate sessions, instead of hurrying through it. This worked really well because it gave the girls a chance to explore their views in-depth.”

– Moroccan Children’s Trust, Morocco

“Two of the girls have had their babies taken away from them. As the session was on being a good enough mother, we decided to talk to them beforehand to check whether they felt comfortable taking part. We also tailored the scenarios for the activity to make them locally relevant.”

– Glad’s House, Kenya

“I had a parents’ meeting coming up, so I prepared and conducted a session on active listening with my group. Just before the parents’ meeting we all discussed the listening skills the group had learnt. Their parents were really surprised to see their children listening and able to participate in the meeting; previously they had played outside whilst the meeting took place.”

– Amhauta, Peru

“During one of the activities, Barbara became upset and told us that the boys were stealing her HIV medication. It meant that she was not able to take her medication regularly. After the activity, we took Barbara to hospital for a check-up and to get her more medication. We now keep this safely at the centre and she comes daily to take it. With Barbara’s permission, we informed staff at the team meeting and we are now checking with all the girls whether they also want to store their medication at the centre.”

– Glad’s House, Kenya
Facilitator skills

During each activity, the facilitator should:

- **Listen** to participants and not interrupt. As a facilitator, aim to speak for no more than 20% of the activity.
- **Learn** from participants: they are best placed to outline their challenges and solutions; a facilitator supports this process.
- **Communicate clearly**, check participants understand activity instructions and the length of time given for activities.
- **Encourage** a wide response from everyone in the room, not just those who respond immediately or the loudest.
- **Clarify responses.** If a response is vague or unclear, ask participants to elaborate on their answer.
- **Be positive**, supporting participants to learn from each other, challenge negative perceptions, identify solutions that meet their needs and grow in confidence.
- **Be flexible** with activities so that participants are engaged and feel safe throughout the activity.
- **Be aware** of and **responsive** to participants’ emotions that may arise during activities and make sure they feel supported during and after the activity.
- **Manage participants’ expectations.** Girls may highlight some of their wants and needs. Be clear how the organisation can and cannot support them, the timeframe, and where else they can access support.
- **Be non-judgemental** at all times.
- **Never criticise girls’ points of view.**

Handling emotion

Some activities within the toolkit may trigger emotional responses from participants. Where activities involve adolescent street-connected girls, facilitators should react sensitively if a girl becomes visibly upset during a session so that she feels safe and not embarrassed. Without drawing attention to her, acknowledge she is upset and remind her she can stop participating in the activity. Do not force her to share what is upsetting her. If she chooses to talk to you, listen, acknowledge her feelings, ensure she continues to feel safe (either in the activity or if she stops participating) and make sure she is supported by a member of staff she knows and trusts during and after the activity.

Staff, volunteers and trustees can also become upset during an activity. Respond sensitively and give them the opportunity to stop participating and/or share what has upset them. We all have personal experiences that can impact on our work; recognising and getting support for them is important. Staff, volunteers and trustees who are mentally and physically as well as they can be are much better placed to support girls.

Some of the tools require the facilitator and participants to discuss sensitive issues, some of which may be culturally sensitive. Use non-judgemental language at all times and encourage participants to speak openly if they feel comfortable doing so. Remind participants that unless there is a child protection concern, all information shared during the activity will remain confidential (see page 19).

Before engaging in activities with adolescent street-connected girls, it is important to ensure that that your organisation's staff, volunteers and trustees have excellent listening and communication skills (see section 1, unit 3 page 44). If possible, your organisation should have regular access to a qualified counsellor or social worker.
Confidentiality

It is important that everyone who participates in activities understands that whatever is said during the activity is kept confidential (not shared outside the activity). The only exception to this is if any participant is concerned about their own or someone else’s safety and well-being. If this is the case, it is very important that they share their concerns with a member of staff, who is responsible for following up on the concern.

Child protection

Before starting any work with children and young people, it is key that your organisation has clear child protection guidelines in place, including a child protection policy and Code of Conduct. These help to keep your organisation and the children you support safe from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation and give clear guidance on how to respond to child protection concerns.

Many street-connected children have experienced violence. The activities in the toolkit can trigger young people talking about some of their experiences, sometimes for the first time. It can be far more detrimental to talk about an issue and then receive no follow-up support, than not talking about it at all. It is therefore vital that your organisation has the capacity and skills to respond appropriately to issues raised during (and after) every activity.