

# SAFIRE



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SAFIRE is a Non Governmental Organisation which has been set up on the 24<sup>th</sup> Day of May 2006 with Registration No 9278.

SAFIRE regroups trained educators who have been operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security from 2002 to 2006. The Programme was terminated in 2006 due to a lack of finance and the Ministry has been compelled to close down the project and subsequently terminate the contracts of the Street Educators.

The work carried out with the children on the Street and those of the Street would have been in vain if we did not react to this situation and the decision to create SAFIRE arose among the educators who could not abandon the children without completing their rehabilitation programme. .

SAFIRE and other NGO's have been able to secure alternative sources of funding and funding from the Private Sector.

However, there has been a 'prise de conscience ' vis à vis the existence of street, neglected and socially marginalized children in Mauritius. The creation of the Women and Children's Solidarity Fund of the Ministry of Finance, illustrated in the Budget 2007-2008 allocating MUR50M for NGO's assisting street / socially marginalized children would be eligible to apply.

The initiative of the Corporate foundations have been a valuable complement to assistance the role of the State is of utmost importance as we should count entirely on the CSO's to carry out what would normally fall within the ambit of the Prime Responsibility of the State by insuring for instance the existence of a conducive Policy/ institutional environment, setting up efficient State - Civil Society coordination / cooperation mechanisms (as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Para 24-25 the Concluding Observation it issued for Mauritius in January 2006), perhaps as well strengthen its own Ministerial Departments / Services/ Units with additional staffs and competences.

It would be interesting to recall that national authorities had been considering the opening up of membership of the National Children's Council to NGO representatives. This could be a useful step among others to reinforce State-Civil Society dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to child welfare.

## ***The objects of the Association are:***

1. To identify street children and children living in difficult circumstances, provide support to them, guide with necessary life skills in order to avoid the pitfalls of delinquency, substance abuse and HIV /AIDS.
2. To ensure their integration in society and to help them become positive role models
3. To provide support and guidance to their families and to the community at large
4. To sensitise public opinion on the situation of children living in difficult circumstances including street children and advocate for their integration in society
5. To undertake such activities as is ancillary to enhance the welfare of children in general and

more particularly that of street children in Mauritius.

**Measures have been implemented by the Government in favour of Organisations to help in poverty alleviation by putting a ceiling on Corporate Tax at 15%. This seems to be a boon to corporate bodies. However, this New Tax Policy is coupled with Corporate Bodies being encouraged to have a Corporate Social Responsibility Programme but we should be very cautious as their responsibilities have not been defined clearly. To the exception of some well established companies which have the willingness to engage themselves in this fight against poverty and social ills.**

**The CSR has started operating with a certain measure of success to help in addressing social problems.**

**SAFIRE which had previously no funding is presently sponsored to a large extent by CIEL Properties through the Fondation Nouveau Regard, Fondation Medine Horizons and Fondation Espoir et Developpement.**

**SAFIRE is initiating on a tentative basis a networking arrangement with Public and Private Bodies and the NGO's to deal with problems emerging at grassroots level in different regions and better advocate for the marginalized ones.**

**For example, in Tombeau Bay, a region where SAFIRE operates, many children are actually suffering from scabies and were deprived of medical treatment, therefore this committee which has been set up brainstorm and work together for more efficient outcomes.**

**Moreover, NGO's working with socially marginalized children like for example SAFIRE, MPRB (Mouvement pour le Progrès de Roche-Bois) and Terre de Paix are trying to form a coalition with the objective of setting up a formal referral system amongst the NGO's, the Child Development Unit of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Brigade des Mineurs of the Police Department and other Government entities.**

**To better address the problem concerning street and marginalized children; first of all we have to understand the different categories that have been used to classify the street children. Though the terminology used to describe these children living without their fundamental Rights as stipulated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child is not comparable to countries like India, Mexico or Philippines but still the number of children living in exclusion is on the increase and special attention is to be given to prevent an increase in child labour, child exploitation, HIV/AIDS and STD's.**

**Furthermore, it is to be noted that the lack of consensus on the term 'street children' may in part explain the stance of skepticism or outright denial adopted by certain stakeholders, failing to recognize that 'street children' was not a rigid category but actually captured a whole gamut of situations specific to the socio-economic and cultural realities of each country, ranging from parental neglect, school absenteeism to actual 'street life' situations.**

## **The following categories are proposed by SAFIRE**

1. Those who have totally broken off with their families and the mainstream of society, and have adopted the street as their permanent “place of abode”.
2. Those who occasionally return home and are in conflict with their family.
3. Those who roam aimlessly, either alone or in groups far from their homes and return only late at night.
4. Those who are left on their own, without any parental supervision in the vicinity of their homes.

### **Areas of Concern:**

- **It is noted with deep concern that some areas concerning the rehabilitation and welfare of children need to be addressed with more commitment and interest. The absence of State –led rehabilitation initiatives since 2006 is felt as this issue is more the concern of the civil society.**
- **There is a lack of long term rehabilitation programme for teenage mothers and marginalised children. For eg, what is proposed for a 14 years old teenage mother and the 16 years old father. There is an urgent need for more regular and systematic teenage pregnancy and life skills Prevention Campaigns with a global approach to the problem being addressed. This in turn implies more investment by the Ministries concerned of additional field and social workers and perhaps as well as more integrated field level cooperation between the Ministry of Social Security, the Ministry of Women Rights and Child Development and the Ministry of Health in close cooperation with NGO’s.**

**This problem is not given due consideration as many teenage mothers who partner has taken their responsibility as they were minors, are rejected at the time they reach their majority and are very often involved in immoral acts.**

- **Marginalised children very often for some reason or other use illicit and harmful substances. To help the children abandon these practices, SAFIRE provides structured and pedagogical activities to make them spend their time and energy positively and in the long run develop their interest in specific field and at the same time reduce their anti social practices. The number of children concerned with glue sniffing and other substance abuse is increasing and statistics on this matter would help to better understand the trend and at the same time, appropriate actions would be taken. It is being proposed that data collection / monitoring system be put in place by the Ministries concerned, in cooperation with NGO’s under the coordination of the CSO for instance.**
- **Legal: It has been noted that Marginalised Street Children, being unable to afford legal assistance, are often misguided and unable to defend themselves.**
- **Many children are sent to the RYC (Rehabilitation Youth Centre) and CYC (Correctional Youth Centre) just because are unable to control them. May be the decriminalization of certain ‘offences ‘committed by minors de considered as a way to reduce the number of incarcerated children and channel them toward truly rehabilitating alternative care institutions.**

## **PROPOSALS**

### **1. Day Care Centre**

The Street Educators commonly known as 'Educateurs de Rue' are working mostly on the Street, at grassroots level providing assistance, counseling and education to the Street Children. There is a serious obstacle to the rehabilitation of these children as there is no appropriate space to carry out these activities.

It is recommended that in the six regions covered by SAFIRE, the authorities e.g Ministry of Youth & Sports, Ministry of Social Security and the Ministry of Women's Rights and Child Development put at the disposal of SAFIRE for a minimum period of 5 years a large room to accommodate a Drop-in-Centre / Day Care Centre. This Centre will be used for educational, recreational and counseling purposes to the children and their relatives with a view to reintegrate the children into the mainstream of society. The Centre will serve as a Transitional Rehabilitation Space for children 'prone to street roaming'.

As per the Education Act, Children under the age of 16 years need to mandatorily attend school. If the DAY CARE CENTRE as proposed in this paper is agreed upon, the Government will need to change the legislation to enable "street" children to attend the Day Care Centre as part of a fully recognized / accredited educational process, keeping open the possibility for children of reintegrating the educational mainstream, or opting for pre-vocational alternatives

### **2. Access to Health**

Certain regions are afflicted by diseases such as scabies. These regions are deprived of water supply, hygienic conditions and visits by health personnel. Marginalised children who are left on their own, and whose responsible parties are very often affected by social ills are more vulnerable and more affected by the prevailing unhealthy conditions.

As part of its programme in favour of Human Rights, especially in regard to Children, it is proposed that the Government Authorities provide the following:

- Adequate water supply
- Regular (monthly) home visits by a team of Health Personnel to include a medical officer, a nursing officer and a sanitary officer. It is a small policy of affirmative action and also a decentralised health service.

### **3. Low cost housing with leisure amenities**

Provision of housing free of cost for specific families having no resources at all i.e. below absolute poverty level and for children who have reached their majority and are partially or completely rehabilitated but are deprived of housing facilities.

Simultaneously the children and families should be supported for access to employment, development of economic potential, social and cultural consolidation and some education.

### **4. Training of Personnel**

To work at grassroots level with marginalised children, it is recommended to have trained personnel in order to rightly address the problems encountered on field. SAFIRE encounters much difficulty to gain additional funds for the training of personnel.

Also, this job, being a risky one, employees should be insured against diseases and any harm that might occur to ensured.

Moreover, there is a big gap between the theories learnt at the university and the field work. There should be adapted modules that relate to the reality of the situation and which address the social problem with professionalism and the respect of the individual as

**a human.**