

## Biographies

Greg W. Burch is currently a candidate for the PhD from the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary and a professor at ESEPA Seminary in San José, Costa Rica where he teaches in cross-cultural studies and children at risk issues. After ministry of six years in Caracas, Venezuela among street-living and working children Greg is now dedicating his time to research and advocacy on behalf of children at risk. He is a member of the Latin America Mission. Greg is author of the book, *Community Children: A Ministry of Hope and Restoration to the Street Dwelling Child*.

Andy Sexton is currently on study leave from his job as Oasis International Director – Children at Risk. He is studying for a Masters in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Certificate in Business Management from University of Southern California. Prior to joining Oasis, he worked to prevent and facilitate positive change with children living on the streets in Australia and Zimbabwe from 1994 to 2003.

## Article

### **Strategic Impact: Multiplying our Effectiveness Among Children at Risk**

By Greg W. Burch and Andy Sexton

Have you any idea how many children live on or work on the streets of the cities of the world? Phyllis Kilbourn estimates that there as many as 200 million children either sleeping on the streets or making a living on the streets every day of their lives. It is hard to accurately assess the numbers because of the mobility of these children (and their families). However, no matter what the actual number is, we know it is huge and we know how vulnerable these children are to violence, disease and exploitation. How can we ever hope to assist this vast multitude of children? There is a way, and that is to be strategic! This article uses examples from work with street children, but its principles are applicable for work with all children at risk.

What does being strategic mean? Strategy can be defined simply as determining: where we are at, where we want to be, and how we will get there.

Is being strategic biblical? Shouldn't we just obey God's calling and follow the Holy Spirit's leading? Jesus was strategic. He chose twelve men to invest most of his time in. At key decision points he took time to pray. He was careful not to be distracted from his ultimate purpose, strategically choosing when to go to different places so that the crowds would not try and make him ruler of Israel in order to restore Israel's sovereignty. His Kingdom was different from what they envisioned, and he had to be strategic in order to make it happen. Another example of strategic planning in the Bible is Nehemiah's successful rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. There are numerous other Biblical examples, therefore, being strategic is clearly Biblical, and important in order to fulfill a vision.

Who should be strategic? Individual projects can be strategic to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes for the children they work with. Projects can work together and form alliances with Churches and Government in a city-wide, national, or even sub-regional strategic approach. Globally we can come together to strategically multiply

impact with children at risk.

Practically what does being strategic mean? It involves:

1. Research and networking
2. Participation of stakeholders
3. Setting the vision and objectives
4. Planning
5. Resources
6. Implementation and Monitoring
7. Evaluation

In order to answer the question “Where are we at?” research needs to be conducted. Raju made the mistake of not doing research when he established his street youth project. He saw a need, and met that need based on a series of assumptions. He did not find out why the youth were on the streets, why they were not at school, or who else was working with the street youth? In reality he caused more harm than good. The local schools in which he enrolled the children were basically non-functional. He employed youth, that could not go to the local school, to assist him with outreach, and broke child labor laws. The youth were already enrolled in a skills training program with another project, but because they started to go to school and were not attending training, they could not graduate and missed a whole year. If only Raju had done his homework. Research involves finding out all that can be known about the issues facing the children, and who is working with them already. This will ensure appropriate responses, and avoid duplication. Stakeholders (that is anyone who has a vested interest in the issues) can and should, where possible, be asked to define the issues, and also have input into the solutions. Importantly, this includes the children and their families.

A vision for transformation, with a clear set of measurable objectives, will emerge from this process. The next step is to establish a detailed plan for how to make this vision a reality. This needs to include: what to do, by whom, by when. It also should indicate not only the people resources necessary, but all the other resources as well. Once you write this up you have the basis for a funding proposal to donors, as well as a clear strategy for your team to follow. Caution: do not wait until you have a fancy purpose-built facility before you start. Instead get working on the streets where the children are, and borrow a facility if you need one.

In an earlier Barnabas Letter, Andy talked about monitoring and evaluation. As a reminder, monitoring is about making sure that the activities in your strategic plan are being done, and to budget. Evaluation is about making sure that those activities are having the desired impact, or put another way, your vision and objectives are being met. This is an essential part of being strategic. If you don’t evaluate you can never celebrate!

On a wider scale, what does a city-wide strategic initiative look like? A city-wide strategy seeks to pull together interested parties in responding to the issues that street-living and working children (or other at-risk children) face within one particular city. In the words of Angela Murray the approach seeks to pull together a “comprehensive network across the city.” The strategy must involve several key components if we aim to be successful in mobilizing God’s community to impact children in crises. These components are:

1. A facilitating body
2. Kingdom mindedness

3. Commitment to quality care
4. Child/youth participation

Take for example the *Encuentro Temprano de Cochabamba* (Early Encounter Cochabamba or EEC) project. EEC is a city-wide strategy being carried out in Cochabamba, Bolivia by 17 Christian child-care projects committed to impacting children at risk in the city. In addition to the 17 projects working directly with the children, 11 local churches are also involved praying and supporting these projects. The first key component to the on-going success of EEC is the facilitating body. In the case of EEC, Viva-Together with Children of Bolivia is coordinating the strategy with help from Toybox charities and the Regional office for Viva in Costa Rica. But the complexity of the facilitating body does not need to be as sophisticated as the EEC. An important principle to keep in mind is the context in which the city-wide strategy is going to take place. In some contexts the facilitating body might just simply be a committee or group of people elected from within the representative organizations committed to the strategy. In other cases, as in EEC, this might be a fully supported, independent facilitating organization. We believe it is important to allow the cultural and organizational contexts speak into this issue as you move forward.

A second component of the strategy should include kingdom mindedness. God's reign and the extension of his kingdom should be a common value held by those participating in the city-wide strategy. This inherently creates an exclusive community, but we should be mindful that exclusion does not imply isolation. We must find ways to work with organizations, including governmental, inter-governmental and secular bodies that are essential players in any given context. As a group of organizations and causes dedicated to extending God's values in society and among children at risk we must not isolate ourselves from other institutions that are essential in providing care for children in any given context. In the case of EEC, all of the 17 representative projects are Christian organizations committed to holistic ministry to children.

A third area that we must not forget in the creation of our strategies consists of a commitment to quality care. This implies several concerned targets involving (1) holistic development, (2) protection policies, (3) financial transparency, (4) child participation and (5) member care. Quality control should take place gradually and progressively but proves to be a major emphasis within the implementation of the strategy. These policies should affect the care of children in both residential and non-residential programs, as well as personnel issues, volunteer placement and our relationship with donors. Quality control can be positively developed through planned capacity building workshops and training sessions which include inviting outside experts who specialize in the different themes. Projects can identify their own needs and bring attention to these needs through inter-governmental meetings conducted by the representative group or committee. Special focus should be given to the mission and vision statements of the organization as part of the quality control process. Ultimately some of the questions we might hope to answer in our quality focuses are: What is it that we are doing? How are we? Where are we at? And, where do we need to improve?

A forth area of focus is on child and youth participation. This is a critical component to the city-wide strategy. If we truly seek to establish a city-wide strategy, we must realize that the very children and youth that we are seeking to reach are highly involved with the design, plan and implementation of the project. One example is found

in the EEC strategy. As a network of organizations committed to working with children at risk they have developed a place where children are given a voice to speak into issues affecting the projects they belong to. In the case of EEC, a child ambassador program has been initiated. Child ambassadors are democratically elected from within each of the represented organizations. Two ambassadors are elected through a democratic vote by the very children that are being cared for. The ambassadors are elected to help represent and speak up for the children in the project. Monthly meetings are carried out by the ambassadors and are organized with the help of an adult facilitator who provides training and general orientation for the children. The ambassadors have represented their projects before governmental bodies, professional athletic departments as well as churches and NGO's. Children are an essential group within the city-wide strategy that should be given the space to participate if we desire to include all of the key players within any given city.

Ultimately, the development of city-wide strategies will provide us with the opportunity to come together as a community that is committed to care for children in crises. The effectiveness of our city-wide outreach to children at risk will have its greatest impact when we come together and think strategically.

On a global scale, in 2005, the 180 degrees Alliance was formed with the specific aim of multiplying impact with street children across the world. The strategy was to bring together people who had significant experience working with street children, former street children, and donor partners, to improve current work with street children globally and incubate creative, and strategic local initiatives. Some of the key outcomes so far have been: establishing a project accreditation tool, accrediting a number of projects who have received capacity building funding as a result, establishing two project-support hubs (one in Brazil and one in the Philippines), setting up a user friendly website [www.180degreesalliance.org](http://www.180degreesalliance.org) with lots of downloadable resources, documenting existing strategic initiatives, and successfully advocating for an end to forced roundups of women and children living on the streets of Kampala, Uganda.

You can be strategic and multiply impact among the children at risk. At project level, step back, and look carefully at the work. Celebrate the team's successes, and take action together to improve areas of weakness. Ensure that you have a strategic plan. Check it has all the elements above. Use it as a guiding document for day to day activity, not as a document stored in an untouched file on your hard drive. You can be strategic by working with others, in partnership, to affect a city, a nation, or a sub-region. You can be strategic by joining the 180 degrees Alliance, or other alliances go to [www.viva.org](http://www.viva.org) It is only together that we can make any real impact on the global situation facing children at risk today. Be strategic and you will multiply impact among children at risk.