

SOS-We Care 4U: An initiative to enhance the street children's security and protection

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Abstract

“SOS-We Care 4U” was innovatively designed to provide emergency contacts for street children to enhance their security and protection while they are on the street. This initiative has been translated into various forms, which were: (1) SOS-necklace; (2) SOS-laminated card; (3) SOS-sticker; (4) SOS-key chain; and (5) SOS-We Care 4U website; aimed at widening the accessibility of street children to get help from the relevant agencies such as Royal Malaysian Police, Department of Social Welfare, public hospital, local authority and non-governmental organizations. Notably, “SOS-We Care 4U” has been presented during the Invention, Innovation and Design Exposition 2016 (iindex 2016) on 20 – 23 September 2016 at Dewan Agung Tuanku Canselor; and has been awarded Silver Award for Young Inventor (Post-graduate) Category. “SOS-We Care 4U” was developed based on the findings of the Master Degree research, entitled: “Survival strategies of street children and their consequences: A comparative study between the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah”; and a research grant, entitled: “Social construction and identity formation of street children in a Malaysian context”. Based on the findings of these two research, the life of street children full with hardships and difficulties. While they are on the street, street children are exposed to high risks such as street violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, gangsterism and many others. Since they are still children, the majority of them do not know how to seek help when they are in dangerous situations. They only have their street friends as the ‘sources of help’. Hence, SOS-We Care 4U as one of the initiatives that is highly needed to uphold the street children’s rights for security and protection because they are our children; they are among the victims of our failure; and they require adequate protection and security from all of us.

Keywords: *Street children, SOS for Street Children, security, protection*

INTRODUCTION: VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED STREET CHILDREN

Street children issue is being discussed and debated by many scholars around the world since the 1800s until the recent year (Mayhew, 1861; Patel, 1990; Ball, 1994; Berhanu, 1998; Aptekar, 2001; Amury & Komba, 2010; Ahmad, Latif & Sulaiman, 2011; Aliaas, Bajunid & Abdullah, 2011; Taib, 2012; Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015; Ahmad, 2016; Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2016; Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2017). Living independently on the street without a proper supervision and protection by the responsible adults has thrown the majority of street children around the world into inhumane conditions such as exploitation, labor, social problems and many others

(Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2016). This situation portrays that the life of street children full with difficulties and challenges while on the street. Although street children can be considered as ‘young-independent survivors’; however, they still exposed to the high risks while on the street. This is because they are children that still requiring care and protection by many parties including family, society, relevant agencies and government. Ironically, the right of street children to be cared and protected remains invisible and subsequently, worsen this issue. In the worst case scenario, the existence of street children on the street has been recognized as the ‘social disturbance’ (Mert & Kadioğlu, 2014). This situation isolated street children to be apart from the society and live in their own ‘street world’. Until now, street children have been recognized as a group of vulnerable and marginalized children.

Similar to street children in other countries such as India (Sharman & Joshi, 2013; Pietkiewicz-Pareek, 2012; Patel, 1990), Africa (Human Right Watch, 2014; Ofosu-Kusi & Mizen, 2010; Grundling, Jager & Fourie, 2009), Vietnam (Hong & Ohno, 2005), Philippines (Boholano, 2013), Indonesia (Plan Indonesia, 2012; Amrullah, 2014) and many others, street children in Malaysia are also exposed to the high risks while on the street. The majority of street children in Malaysia live in fear of being exploited, abused, bullied, discriminated and many others (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2016). This situation requires street children to develop various distinctive strategies to survive and stay alive such as stay in a group of friends (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2016; Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015; Berhanu, 1998). Notably, street friends have been associated with the ‘sources of help’ among street children—they help each other by sharing food, money, find medicines when their friends are sick and save their friends from been bullied (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2016; Ofosu-Kusi & Mizen, 2010). A study on survival strategies of street children undertaken by Abd Hamid, Ahmad and Tahir (2016) revealed that friendship is recognized as the main survival strategy among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah*. However, this situation ponders an important question to adults: “whether children as young as 7 years old deserved to take the responsibility like an adult?”. If the answer is yes, every child’s right to be protected and cared is been undermined and manipulated. Thus, this proved that they are the victims of our failures.

Street children as a social issue have been recognized as a long-standing issue in Malaysia (Singh, 2007). However, it is argued that street children issue in Malaysia is

* Notably, the majority of vulnerable street children reside the area of Kuala Lumpur and Sabah (Child Rights Coalition, 2012). Hence, the need to develop friendship among street friends is required to survive and stay alive on the street.

still under-researched and less emphasized by many parties such as educational institutions and government agencies. Although, it is observed that only non-governmental organizations have taken the noble initiatives to help these vulnerable children by providing food, clothes, healthcare, informal education and many others; however, these initiatives can only give a short term impact on street children issue. Besides, the initiatives were undertaken by the non-governmental organization only covers the development, health and educational aspects. Again, this situation ponders an important question: “who is responsible towards the street children’s security and protection?”. In effectively addressing street children issue in any country including Malaysia, all parties, including family institution, close society, community, relevant government agencies, non-governmental organizations and nation as a whole should take the responsibility to save, care and protect street children regardless which family they came from; and which country they belong to.

Recently, the street children issue in Malaysia called for an effort from a group of researchers from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies (FSPPP), Universiti Teknologi MARA, to explore further about this issue in the Malaysian context. The researchers have conducted two research entitled: (1) ‘The social construction and identity formation of “street children” in a Malaysian context’[†] and (2) ‘Survival strategies of street children and their consequences: A comparative study between Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah’[‡]. The key findings of these two research proved that street children in Malaysia exposed to the high risks while they are on the street including street violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, gangsterism and many others. Following to this situation, the researchers have come out with one initiative known as ‘SOS-We Care 4U’ to enhance the street children’s security and protection in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This initiative focused only on these two areas because according to Child Rights Coalition (2012), the majority of street children in Malaysia reside the area of Kuala Lumpur and Sabah. Thus, SOS-We Care 4U was specifically designed for street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

[†] The research entitled: ‘The social construction and identity formation of street children in a Malaysian context’ was a research grant under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) funded by the Ministry of Higher Education. This research grant was led by Dr. Yarina Ahmad, from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies (FSPPP). Notably, this two and half years-research grant has been completed in December 2016.

[‡] The research entitled: ‘Survival strategies of street children and their consequences: A comparative study between Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah’ was a research work of the main author of this paper, who worked as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) and has completed her Master degree in January 2017.

SOS-WE CARE 4U: EMERGENCY CONTACTS FOR STREET CHILDREN'S SECURITY AND PROTECTION WHILE ON THE STREET

As discussed earlier, SOS-We Care 4U was developed specifically to enhance the street children's security and protection while on the street. This initiative provides emergency contacts of the relevant agencies including Royal Malaysian Police, Department of Social Welfare, public hospital, local authority and non-governmental organizations in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah that allows street children to seek help when they are facing the hazardous and dangerous situations on the street. The outcome of the development of SOS-We Care 4U is presented in the Invention, Innovation and Design Exposition (iDEX) 2016, on 20th to 23rd September 2016, at Dewan Agung Tuanku Canselor (DATC), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia. During the iDEX 2016, this innovative initiative was awarded 'Silver Award for Young Inventor (Post-graduate) Category'. Notably, the outcome of the development of SOS-We Care 4U has been translated into several forms, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Five forms of SOS-We Care 4U

No. Forms	Picture
1. SOS-necklace	

2. SOS-laminated card



3. SOS-sticker



4. SOS-keychain



5. SOS-We Care 4U website



Various forms of SOS-We Care 4U

As indicated earlier, SOS-We Care 4U was translated into five different forms: (1) SOS-necklace; (2) SOS-laminated card; (3) SOS-sticker; (4) SOS-keychain; and (5) SOS-We Care 4U website. The main focus of this innovative idea aimed at widening the accessibility of street children to get help from the relevant agencies. SOS-necklace is designed based on the characteristics, behavior, nature and living environment of street children by using a necklace made from a corrosion-resistant metal. This necklace has been engraved with the emergency contacts of relevant agencies that deal with street children issue in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. SOS-necklace is mostly designed for male street children; however, it also can be given to female street children in both areas. The necklace is the most preferable form of SOS-We Care 4U as it gives a form of identity to the street children. Each necklace has identity code (an example of code: SCR_1) that represent the identity and information of each street child. Presently, there is no official record of street children in Malaysia; hence, this initiative will help to keep the record of street children in Malaysia, particularly in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

The SOS-laminated card is another form of SOS-We Care 4U that consists of the emergency contacts and identity code of street children. Similarly, the identity code is crucial to keep the record of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. SOS-sticker is another tool to provide the emergency contacts for street children. This sticker can be printed in various sizes and place in the public areas, schools and others to create the awareness among street children to seek the right help from the relevant authorities. Another form of SOS-We Care 4U is SOS-keychain that covered by hard-plastic container where street children can attach this keychain to their keys, belts, bags and many others.

Last but not least, SOS-We Care 4U website is designed specifically for street children in Malaysia. This website does not only provide the emergency contacts for street children; but, it also provides the relevant information for street children, close society, community, relevant agencies and government. Further, SOS-We Care 4U website is utilized as a forum for street children to communicate with the researchers through an email and telephone. The development of this website also aimed at encouraging the public, relevant agencies and other parties to help these vulnerable children by donating any relevant resources that will be channeled to street children in Malaysia. It is believed that all the five forms of SOS-We Care 4U can enhance the security and protection of street children as well as uphold their rights as children.

The usefulness of SOS-We Care 4U

In discussing about the usefulness of SOS-We Care 4U, the findings of the two research undertaken by the researchers from the FSPPP not only informed the relevant information to the government to strengthen the existing policy and formulate the new policy to deal with street children issue; but, the contribution of SOS-We Care 4U is also considered as one of the useful outcomes of research taken by the researchers. This contribution can benefit the right target audience which is street children. Further, this initiative shows the effort to uphold the street children's rights for survival, care and protection as well as an interpretation of 'caring society' towards the difficulties and challenges faced by street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Thus, it is urged that the close society and community should never differentiate street children because the National Child Policy 2009 stated that: "every child has the right to live and given protection, care, compassion, health services, support and social assistance". For a quite sometimes, street children remains invisible and suffering from hunger and pains; and it is about time, street children's rights as children need to uphold and protected (Department of Social Welfare, 2016).

The novelty of SOS-We Care 4U

In terms of novelty, SOS-We Care 4U was designed based on the original outcome of the two research: (1) ‘The social construction and identity formation of “street children” in a Malaysian context’ and (2) ‘Survival strategies of street children and their consequences: A comparative study between Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah’. The key findings of these two research proved the need to enhance street children’s security and protection in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This is because street children are still young and fragile; they do not know how to seek the right help when they are facing the hazardous and dangerous situations. SOS-We Care 4U is considered as one of the platforms for the researchers to contribute back to street children in the form of ‘service to society’ by educating them on the way to be saved and rescued. “People who giving are better than people who receiving”—by giving an opportunity for street children to be cared and protected by the relevant authorities through this initiative, the street children issue in Malaysia can be innovatively and effectively addressed. Thus, this is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that focuses on the welfare and lives of children; this covers the aspects of survival, protection, development and participation of all children (Department of Social Welfare, 2016).

THE WAY FORWARD: ENHANCING AND STRENGTHENING STREET CHILDREN’S SECURITY AND PROTECTION

As discussed above, SOS-We Care 4U is considered as an innovative initiative taken by the researchers from the FSPPP. Notably, the development of SOS-We Care 4U to enhance the street children’s security and protection is considered effective, only if the researchers are able to sustain and provide the benefit particularly for street children and continuously educate the society, community, relevant agencies and government regarding the street children issue in Malaysia. The discussion on the way forward to enhance and strengthen street children’s rights for security and protection is divided into two phases.

The First Phase: Introduction of SOS-We Care 4U

SOS-We Care 4U was firstly introduced in the Invention, Innovation and Design Exposition (iIDEX 2016). All the five forms of SOS-We Care 4U were presented upon two panels (one panel from the educational institution and one panel from the industry).

Notably, before the execution of iDEX 2016, SOS-We Care 4U is already registered under the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia (MyIPO) on 17th September 2016 (No. MyIPO: LY2016002398), to protect the copyright of the researcher's effort and initiative. Further, SOS-We Care 4U received a recognition (Silver Award) on its usefulness, novelty and impact towards the street children's rights in Malaysia. This calls for an improvement to be made on all the five forms of SOS-We Care 4U which were designed to enhance the street children's security and protection.

The Second Phase: Implementation of SOS-We Care 4U

The second phase covers the implementation of SOS-We Care 4U in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Following to this, street children in both cities will be given SOS-laminated card, SOS-sticker and SOS-key chain. The majority of male street children will be given the SOS-necklace; however, it is also can be distributed to female street children, if necessary. This is because although male street children are mostly visible on the street; however, female street children are recognized as the most vulnerable street children—they can easily be abused, exploited and bullied. Further, the SOS-We Care 4U website ready to play its role in educating the close society, community, relevant agencies and government as a whole. The main focus of SOS-We Care 4U website is to publicly inform all the relevant information discovered from the two research undertaken by the researchers. Thus, the information pertaining to street children issue on this website can be utilized by many parties to further strengthening the street children's rights for protection, care, compassion, health services, support and social assistance. At the same time, this website will encourage the public to help street children in Malaysia through voluntarily donate the relevant resources such as money, clothes, food, healthcare and many others. These resources will be channeled to street children and the donation can be used to develop a specific program for street children in the country.

CONCLUSION

SOS-We Care 4U was originally designed based on the findings of the two research undertaken on the street children issue in Malaysia. Notably, the findings proved that street children in the country are suffering from hunger and pains. The majority of them were thrown into inhumane conditions such as street violence, abuse, gangsterism, bullying; and in the worst case scenario, they have been exploited.

Following to this situation, SOS-We Care 4U aimed at enhancing the street children's security and protection while on the street. This innovative initiative provides the emergency contacts of relevant agencies including Royal Malaysian Police, Department of Social Welfare, public hospital, local authority and non-governmental organizations in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. SOS-We Care 4U begins to focus specifically on two areas because it is argued that the majority of street children resided the area of Kuala Lumpur and Sabah (Child Rights Coalition, 2012).

The development of SOS-We Care 4U was designed specifically for street children based on their characteristics, behavior, nature and living environment on the street. Due to this situation, SOS-We Care 4U has been translated into five different forms, which were: (1) SOS-necklace; (2) SOS-laminated card; (3) SOS-sticker; (4) SOS-keychain; and (5) SOS-We Care 4U website. One of the main focuses of this innovative idea is to widen the accessibility of street children to seek help when they are facing the difficulties and challenges while on the street. Although SOS-necklace, SOS-laminated card, SOS-sticker and SOS-key chain have different functions, shape and sizes; however, these products share the same interest which is to educate street children on how to seek the right help from the relevant agencies when they are facing the hazardous and dangerous situations. On the other hand, SOS-We Care 4U website was developed to inform all the relevant information regarding street children issue in the country to further strengthening street children's rights for security and protection. In addition, this website encourages the public to donate the relevant resources for street children's growth, development and survival.

Enhancing street children's security and protection is not the responsibility of street children themselves; but, it is our responsibility to care, secure and protect street children in the country. This is because regardless who they are, street children are our children too. They deserved to live a better life like other children; they deserved to receive care and compassion from adults; they deserved to benefit from all basic services provided in the country; and the most important thing is they deserved to be secured and protected from any forms of violence, abuse, neglect, abandonment, bullying, exploitation and many others. Street children are our children that still requiring for care, protection, supervision and direction from the family, close society, community, relevant agencies and government. Thus, it is urged that the nation should not differentiate street children because they are among the most vulnerable group in the country resulted from our failure.

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