

# Street connected children with communication disabilities and their caregivers in Western Kenya: Experiences, beliefs and needs

## The issue:

- \* Screening in Kisumu, Western Kenya, found that children with street-connections may also be living with communication disability (CD)
- \* Children with CD have difficulties in understanding or expressing themselves using spoken or signed language.
- \* These children and their caregivers may have different experiences and additional needs to other street-connected children.

## To find out more we talked to:

- \* 13 street connected children with CD (individual interactive sessions)
- \* 12 caregivers of street connected children with CD (individual semi-structured interviews)
- \* 12 Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) with experience of supporting street-connected children with CD in school (two focus groups).



## We asked them about:

- ⇒ What they understand and think about CD
- ⇒ What it is like living with CD
- ⇒ What it is like caring for and supporting a child with CD
- ⇒ What would help the child
- ⇒ What would help the people supporting the child
- ⇒ How do they imagine the future will be for the child.



We recorded the interviews and focus groups and analysed them using research methods.

Parents should be trained on how to handle and understand children with communication disability  
(caregiver)

There are some children who abuse me, at times they laugh at me  
(child)

These children need a lot of patience and understanding them  
(LSA)

If you tell him something you must slower the speed...slowly, slowly  
(caregiver)

Teachers should be good to me  
(child)

We need to be empowered in terms of training on how to help these children with communication disability  
(LSA)

## Key Messages

**Street-connected children with CD and their caregivers have additional needs**

**The impact of CD on children and caregivers can be reduced by promoting positive attitudes in others, including other children**

**Positive attitudes might be best promoted through experience and familiarity, in addition to any training**

**People need to know how to adapt their communication to the child; they need to learn to talk to them in a way the child can understand and that allows the child to communicate back**

**Emotional well-being and trusted relationships are important for street-connected children; adapted communication and increased understanding of CD will support these.**

**Caregivers and LSAs think they could do more to help the children themselves, with training and the support of others**

**Children, caregivers and LSAs believe some direct input from communication disability specialists would also be helpful**

## Implications and ideas for service development

**Screen for communication disability**

**Develop a team of role models to raise awareness and improve attitudes**

- ⇒ **Widen/reinforce role of LSAs (or community workers) as 'communication champions' in school and community**
- ⇒ **Involve people with CD as advocates**
- ⇒ **Consider peer mentor and buddying schemes for other children**

**Include caregivers in training; provide direct support**

**Train all programme workers to recognise CD and know how to adapt their communication**

**Ensure all additional interventions for street-connected children (e.g. counselling support) are adapted to child's level of communication**

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