

# **“We Know Something Someone Doesn’t Know...” Children Speak Out on Local Conditions in Johannesburg<sup>1,2</sup>**

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## **Comment on This Article**

### **Abstract**

*This article summarizes a four-site study within the process to transform Greater Johannesburg into a child-friendly city. Applying the Growing Up in Cities model of UNESCO, it presents the voices of 10- through 14-year olds in four diverse but representative areas of the city as they describe their use of their local environments, the problems they face, and their own priorities for making Johannesburg a better city in which to grow up. Based on the children’s experiences, a number of program and policy responses are recommended, many of which will be relevant to other cities as well.*

**Keywords:** [Johannesburg](#), [South Africa](#), [participation](#), [child-friendly cities](#), [urban children](#), [children and neighborhood](#)

## **Making Greater Johannesburg Child Friendly**

Johannesburg is the mining and industrial center of Gauteng, the most densely populated province in South Africa. Since the early 20th century, it has been a magnet for people from neighboring provinces and countries seeking work in its mines, factories and shops. About a third of its population of approximately 3 million is under 19 years of age. The settings in which these young people live range from luxurious suburban homes to the makeshift structures of squatter families and the homeless. For children in Johannesburg and other cities of South Africa, there is no single urban reality. Yet one condition that children in these different areas share is that they are seldom asked how they feel about living where they do; it is taken for granted that their parents and other adults know how they feel and what they need.

In 1999, the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (GJMC) passed a resolution to make Johannesburg child-friendly, and the mayor signed a partnership agreement with UNICEF to make this a reality. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children have a right to express themselves in decisions that affect their lives (Article 12); ways now had to be found to include children's input into city structures and policies. In August 1999, the GJMC commissioned members of UNESCO's Growing Up in Cities initiative to build on previous work in Johannesburg, and to enable children to speak out about their lives in four different Johannesburg neighborhoods.

Growing Up in Cities (GUIC) is a program to involve children in evaluating their urban environments and planning how to improve the conditions of their lives (Chawla 2002). With the ultimate goal of influencing municipal policies through the inclusion of children's perspectives, it seeks to build broad alliances of people committed to taking action on children's behalf in community-based and nongovernmental organizations, and across different sectors of government.

The four site studies reported here show there is an urgent need to hear what children have to say about conditions in their neighborhoods. Adults appear complacent about difficulties that children face, but children's daily experiences at these four sites, when measured against international qualitative indicators, show cause for alarm. It is clear that these neighborhoods are hostile for children and that action is needed on many fronts to realize the goals of a child-friendly city. This article reviews the GUIC approach to participatory action-research with children, summarizes children's descriptions of their lives at the four sites, and closes with recommendations.

## **The Four Site Study**

The four sites in Greater Johannesburg were in different geographic and socioeconomic areas: western Joubert Park precinct in the inner city, Malvern/Kensington, Riverlea Extension, and Pimville. Researchers used participatory methods to work with children aged 10 to 14 at these four sites to enable them to express their views about their daily living conditions and to offer recommendations for improvements. Key problems that children identified at each site were documented to enable council officials to consider improvements in these areas—or, for common problems, to take them into account in urban planning for the metropolitan area in general.

In addition to these improvements that might result, other benefits were expected. Children's inclusion facilitates *direct and honest discussion* of daily life issues, and opportunities for *reflection* on problems and solutions at personal and group levels. These processes are important in *raising levels of awareness*; and often lead to an *understanding of larger issues* that impact on communities.

The study was finally approved in August 2000 and undertaken with children in the school break during September and early October. At all of the sites, lists were compiled of children aged 10 through 14 who lived at different points in the locality, and who represented varied socioeconomic backgrounds whenever possible. Once target groups were identified, potential participants were randomly selected from each gender group, and consent was sought from parents and the children themselves. Multiple methods were used. This made it possible to cross-check information: for instance, information obtained from children's drawings could be verified during group discussions. Children drew images of their daily routines and of themselves in various settings (home, school, neighborhood). They used green stickers to show favored places and red ones to indicate problem areas. Following on transect walks (except in Joubert Park where this was felt to be too dangerous) the children located their homes on a formal map. Separate-gender groups identified and prioritized problem areas. Otherwise discussions were in mixed-gender groups. Children worked in pairs to draw proposed solutions to problems on small cards; they stuck these on relevant places on the formal area map. Children prioritized area improvements by voting with stickers: each girl placed a red sticker alongside the project she felt it most important to implement and each boy did the same with a green sticker.

The following sections describe briefly the features of each site, children's lives in their local environment, and their views about issues that need to be addressed to make Johannesburg a friendlier place for its young citizens.

#### **a. Western Joubert Park**

Western Joubert Park, which lies within Johannesburg's inner city, has been defined as a precinct for the purpose of piloting a new inner city regeneration strategy initiated by the GJMC. The demographic profile of the central business district, of which Western Joubert Park is a part, is 88 percent Black African and the remainder divided among Colored, Asian and White (1996 census). Those 19 and younger comprise only 18 percent of the population.

Joubert Park, a central park in the inner city, forms the core of the area, and is surrounded by high-rise flats, a variety of businesses, informal sector activities and transport services, with a heavy volume of taxis. Within the park are the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Metro Parks inner city service depot, and a Neighborhood Centre, set up in 1999 to service the community as part of the Pilot Precinct Project which has catalyzed numerous improvements in the area. There are a number of medical services in the area, including two mother-and-child clinics; and there are two community schools and two private schools. Since these do not accommodate all pupils in the area, many are enrolled elsewhere.

Many high-rise flats around the park have small businesses at street level, including spaza shops,<sup>3</sup> bottle stores and taverns, clothing and accessory stores,

electronics shops and fuel stations. The residential buildings are in various states of repair—some well run and maintained, but several in severe disrepair despite residents' continued rent payments. In some buildings, tenants have formed their own management committees, and set up trust funds and measures to ensure that their buildings are serviced and maintained. Smaller buildings with organized committees appear to have a low turnover of tenants, originally drawn to the area for its access to job opportunities. Tenants in larger, more disorganized buildings seem transient and include immigrants from other African countries. The area is popular as a first entry point into the city. Discussions with the 14 area children (seven boys, seven girls), for instance, revealed that many have strong links to rural KwaZulu-Natal. They either consider it their permanent home or enjoy visiting close relatives there.

The research showed that the children felt constrained in their use of the neighborhood by the dangers outside home. Although they live alongside Joubert Park, they are fearful of using it. Girls, as a rule, come straight home after school. After doing homework, they start household chores, and many look after younger siblings as well. Parents prefer their daughters not to play outside because they feel it is unsafe, but they also want them not to make noise indoors:

*I'm not allowed to play during school days, after school, because I won't get enough time to play after I have done homework. When I finish to do my homework, it's too late to go and play. You can't play outside at that time because it is dangerous. Also my Mom don't allow me to play outside because it is not safe (Girl, 12).*

Although boys also describe the flats as the focus of their lives, their descriptions of the area show that they navigate the outside world more than girls do. Most boys appear to have few household responsibilities and come home after school only to eat before going out to play, returning later to study. Some play video games in local shops and soccer in Joubert Park. They also visit each other's buildings if they feel secure there and if there is some space for play.

Some children mentioned visiting Ellis Park for soccer lessons or swimming. Most mentioned or drew the Carlton Centre where they shop, eat out, or go to the movies on weekends. They also find it exciting to visit more distant shopping centers with their parents. Many also said that they attend church. Despite these resources, every part of their environment holds a threat of one kind or another for them (see Table 1).

Improvements in park security are a high priority for both boys and girls. Although Joubert Park is the main recreational space in the precinct, the children say they always feel insecure there. This is a vivid example of the rule that what may appear to be adequate provision of green space according to municipal records does not always translate into adequate access to recreational space for children. Both boys and girls linked insecurity in the park with hobos, street children, and strangers from local flats who threatened, hurt them, or stole from them. A girl pointed out that the park is patrolled by security personnel at night, but no security personnel are on duty during the day to ensure children's safety. In the words of a 14 year old boy, "The park is not clean. Kids are harassed when playing there. Also some children get raped there. But still we would like

to play in the park." Children are preoccupied by problems related to the transport they rely on to get to school: not enough buses, buses that make them late to school, high bus fares, and taxi drivers who harass them. Children feel safer in buses, but often cannot afford the ticket price and have to use taxis instead. They were vociferous in their diatribe against the taxi industry, citing bad driving, sexual harassment—especially of girls—and a general violence and lack of care for passengers. Even on foot, children were most fearful of the streets congested with taxis. They reported that taxi drivers harassed and bullied children whether or not they were passengers.

**Table 1. Children's priorities to improve the Joubert Park area**

<b>GIRLS' PRIORITIES</b>		<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS</b>	<b>BOYS' PRIORITIES</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>JOUBERT PARK</b>	Build a tuck-shop in the Joubert Park Have a monitor at the jungle gyms Employ more people to clean the park Introduce daily security via patrols, cameras	<b>1</b>	<b>STREET CHILDREN</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	Prevent/control child harassment in taxis Bus service to be faster; more routes and stops Have bigger, safer taxis for long distance travel	<b>2</b>	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>ABUSE BY TAXI DRIVERS</b>	Have street patrols to prevent child harassment Move taxi business off streets to ranks Control taxi industry better	<b>2</b>	<b>ABUSE BY TAXI DRIVERS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>LIQUOR OUTLETS</b>	Increase legal age for liquor purchase to 21 Parents to stop sending children to buy liquor Enforce laws against under-age purchases Set and enforce closing times for shebeens Bottle stores to stop people drinking on site Close taverns in residential areas	<b>2</b>	<b>JOUBERT PARK</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>RECREATIONAL SPACE</b>	Create safe place with sports facilities Improve waste management in apartment buildings Stop residents from throwing things at children Organize a "juniors meeting" to share ideas Build higher walls around rooftops Set a good example and share ideas	<b>3</b>	<b>LIQUOR OUTLETS</b>

4	<b>STREET CHILDREN</b>	Have caring adults look after them Build more homes for them Help them to stop sniffing glue	4	<b>THEFT IN CBD</b>
5	<b>THEFT IN THE CBD</b>	Install more security cameras Have more policing to prevent crime Link security cameras with phones to police	4	<b>RECREATIONAL SPACE</b>
6	<b>BAD LIVING CONDITIONS</b>	Solutions not discussed, but some aspects are reflected in solutions for "recreational space"	5	<b>BAD LIVING CONDITIONS</b>
6	<b>LACK OF STUDY RESOURCES</b>	Solutions not discussed	6	<b>LACK OF STUDY RESOURCES</b>
6	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>	Solutions not discussed, but inherent in many of the recommendations for other problem categories.	6	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>
6	<b>SWIMMING POOLS</b>	Solutions not discussed	6	<b>SWIMMING POOLS</b>

The children faced other social threats in their environment. On the streets returning home from school, they feared street children who might mug them to take their money, clothes and possessions. They also feared pickpockets in the city center. Drunken people who congregated around the bottle stores and shebeens fought and cursed, and sometimes hit out at passing children. As a 13 year old boy explained, "It's not good for parents to send children to buy beer because it's not safe. Anything might happen to them and they might also be abused." In the girls' discussions, sexual harassment was a constant theme. Although none of the girls in the workshops had been raped, they all knew of other girls who had been. Children lived in buildings where they were exposed to drunkenness, violence and bullying in the passages and courtyard. Overall, children faced an acute shortage of places to socialize and play, and in some cases, even to do homework quietly.

**b. Malvern/Kensington**

Malvern and Kensington lie east of the city center. Originally a white, lower middle-class suburb of the city, they reflect the demographic transition typical of land close to the center. The 1996 census for Malvern shows the area is 45 percent White, 42 percent Black African, 7 percent Colored, and 5 percent Asian. These figures probably do not include illegal immigrants living and trading in the area. The suburb has a mixed residential and commercial character. Some streets are quiet, whereas others have heavy traffic and many formal and informal sector activities.

The changing nature of the area is clearly visible in its housing. Many conventional suburban houses previously inhabited by a single family are now occupied by numerous tenants, sometimes as many as 50 to 100 people in larger houses. Slum-lords allegedly sublet these premises and retain the greater part of the income, only paying a small rental to the owners. In many instances where electricity and water bills are not paid, municipal services have been terminated and slum conditions now prevail. Residents feel there is a growing

crime rate, and regard certain sections as "no go" areas. There are five schools in Malvern and neighboring Kensington. Other facilities include a library and two swimming pools. The eight boys and ten girls who participated in the GUIC workshops all attend Malvern Primary School, four traveling in from nearby Kensington.

On the whole, boys and girls considered Malvern to be dangerous. In the words of two 12 year old girls: "We don't usually walk around there by Malvern. People that drink make it dangerous. They walk around the streets and look for fights. I only walk to the library because it's across the road from our house. I feel safer there. Or else I stay home and play by myself." Boys often go to the local parks, to swim in the Malvern pool, or to Rhodes Park to swim or to play soccer or tennis. According to an 11-year old boy: "I play in the park up there in the hill. It's dangerous when it gets dark. During the day it's fine." Parents send girls as well as boys to make small purchases in the local shops in the afternoons and evenings. The children usually do not go alone to larger shopping centers such as the Eastgate or Bedford Centre, but they enjoy shopping and watching movies there with their parents. Some children also mentioned going to church on Sundays.

Children's main concern in Malvern is to improve the quality of the open space behind their school, a field full of litter that is never cleaned and rubbish bins that are not emptied. People also park their cars behind the field under the trees to drink. Yet the field is one of the only communal spaces available to Malvern children. When school gets out, it is the most convenient place for them to play. If it were cleaner and safer, they feel it would play an important role in their daily lives.

**Table 2. Children's priorities to improve Malvern/Kensington**

<b>GIRLS' PRIORITIES</b>		<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS</b>	<b>BOYS' PRIORITIES</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>TOP FIELD</b>	Install security fencing and entry gate Control access	<b>1</b>	<b>TOP FIELD</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>POLICE AND SECURITY</b>	Address police corruption Increase police numbers Increase police patrols Stop children's 10111 hoax calls	<b>1</b>	<b>POLICE AND SECURITY</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>RAT FIELD AND LITTERING</b>	Erect more 'no littering' signs Have campaigns to stop littering Provide more concrete bins Convert the stand to a soccer field Fence securely Force the landowner to meet municipal regulations	<b>2</b>	<b>RAT FIELD AND LITTERING</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>CRIME</b>	Police the area more extensively Fence parks and open places securely Security companies to patrol Install alarms linked to the police station	<b>2</b>	<b>CRIME</b>

2	<b>FAULTY ROBOTS / CROSSING STREETS</b>	Officers to control traffic when robots not working Have scholar patrols Install speed cameras Close St. Frusquin Str behind the school in school hours	3	<b>FAULTY ROBOTS / CROSSING STREETS</b>
3	<b>STRAY ANIMALS</b>	SPCA to collect them Owners to contain or leash them	3	<b>STRAY ANIMALS</b>
3	<b>SHEBEENS AND DRUNKS</b>	House all drinking places in one building Monitor activities in this building 24 hour security by non-drinking guards Check ID books of young patrons Under-18s to be rigorously excluded Stricter control over issue of licenses	3	<b>SHEBEENS AND DRUNKS</b>
3	<b>STATION</b>	Dogs to sniff for dagga and drugs Scan for weapons Police to confiscate drugs and weapons	3	<b>STATION</b>
3	<b>SWIMMING POOLS</b>	Install secure lockers with keys Divide girls' and boys' bathroom with a door Life guards: more, and active patrolling	3	<b>SWIMMING POOLS</b>
3	<b>STREET CHILDREN</b>	Return to parents if possible Govt to pay jobless people as caretakers	3	<b>STREET CHILDREN</b>
3	<b>STREET LIGHTS</b>	Cut back foliage in Frere Str and behind the school on St Frusquin Str	3	<b>STREET LIGHTS</b>

Lack of adequate municipal services in the Malvern/Kensington area makes children's lives difficult in many ways. When traffic signals are broken on busy streets, children, many with baby sisters or brothers in tow, find it dangerous to cross. The dumping and littering in vacant fields attract rats, which then come to children's homes. Police take a long time to come when called, which leaves children feeling insecure both at home and on the street where they face drunks, street children who hit them and extort money, drug dealers, and general crime. As in Joubert Park, girls spoke out about sexual harassment and their fear of rape.

**c. Riverlea**

Riverlea is a suburb in western Johannesburg, below Industria West which hosts a range of industries. Residents characteristically have low incomes, but as one moves northwards, its neighborhoods become more affluent. Demographic data for Riverlea show that it is 91 percent Colored and that 76 percent of the population is under 40 (1996 census). The children in the workshops came from Zone 1 (or "Riverlea proper") and Extension 1, which are separated by a railway line. In both sections, housing was originally council-owned but tenure is being transferred to the residents. Riverlea proper, immediately north of the railway line, has blocks of flats and suburban brick housing. There are two primary schools, a high school, a clinic, a recreation center, a swimming pool, small shops, three small parks, playing fields, a number of churches and a mosque in Riverlea Extension 1, south of the railway line, consists mostly of dilapidated

two-roomed houses with small yards, some with added corrugated iron shanties. Many are occupied by extended families, and residents consider overcrowding a major problem. The area is served by a single clinic, a primary school, a mosque and various small shops. Residents have to cross the railway line to reach the recreation center, many of the churches, and most of the schools in Riverlea proper. Unemployment is widespread in both Riverlea proper and Extension 1, and there is allegedly a high level of alcohol and drug abuse, which are linked by residents to theft, rape and domestic violence. There is no police station in Riverlea, but there is an active Community Policing Forum.

Of the six boys and seven girls who took part in the study, four live in Riverlea Extension and the rest in Zone 1. Most children walk to school in the morning. Those who walk from Extension 1 to Riverlea Primary School cross the railway line to get to school; they do not use the pedestrian bridge because they say it is too far away and not safe.

Some children—mostly boys—play sport after school; children also visit friends, watch TV or play pool. They sometimes swim in the afternoons and over weekends. Those from Extension 1 who cannot afford the swimming pool entry fee swim in the polluted river or dam below the mine dumps. Children also attend various activities at the recreation center and visit the library there. They go to the shops for their parents, but they also spend time playing on the streets and in the vacant lots near their homes. Some boys admit playing on the large mine dumps at the southern and western boundaries of the area, although their parents forbid it. They also play at the many waste dump sites around Riverlea and spend hours looking for interesting bits of metal and wood to construct things. On weekends, some children travel to nearby shopping centers by taxi with adult family members.

**Table 3. Children's priorities to improve Riverlea**

<b>GIRLS' PRIORITIES</b>		<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS</b>	<b>BOYS' PRIORITIES</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>THE BULTJIE</b>	Fence it and provide safe access for children Convert it into a park with play facilities	<b>1</b>	<b>THE BULTJIE</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>WASTE DUMPS</b>	Identify and report trucks that dump Limit access to the area, for trucks Provide feeding scheme for needy people	<b>2</b>	<b>OPEN FIELDS AND WILD PLACES</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>OPEN FIELDS AND WILD PLACES</b>	Erect a police station near the clinic 24 hour police patrol in Riverlea	<b>3</b>	<b>RAILWAY LINE</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>RAILWAY LINE</b>	Fence tracks off from school grounds Erect another pedestrian bridge, usable by all	<b>3</b>	<b>WASTE DUMPS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>RIVERS AND DAMS</b>	Pool in Extension 1 with free access for children	<b>3</b>	<b>RIVERS AND DAMS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BUSY ROADS</b>	More speed humps needed	<b>3</b>	<b>BUSY ROADS</b>

3	<b>MINE DUMPS</b>	Grass or fence them off	3	<b>MINE DUMPS</b>
3	<b>ADULT DRUNKS</b>	Stop liquor sales to under-age youth	3	<b>ADULT DRUNKS</b>
3	<b>HIGH SCHOOL BULLIES</b>	Provide effective security at the school Erect prevention signs Counsel pupils who use drugs	3	<b>HIGH SCHOOL BULLIES</b>
3	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>	Riverlea women to form a club to change male attitudes	3	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>

One of the key places for recreation for children in Riverlea is the *bultjie*, a small hill with a flat open area on top behind the recreation center. Because the parks have been taken over by adults engaged in illicit activities, the *bultjie* has emerged as an important place for all the children in the group. It is not completely safe, but they feel they can handle the problems that arise—mainly with young people in their late teens or older who go to there to drink, smoke dagga, and have sex in the bushes. Adding fencing and play facilities would enhance this special place.

The children regard other open fields and wild places as dangerous, where people have reportedly been attacked and raped. They also fear busy roads with reckless drivers, waste dumps where people scavenge for food, the large mine dumps that tower over the area, the river where they swim if they cannot afford the entry fee for the swimming pool in Riverlea proper, and the railway line that they often cross because the pedestrian and subway tunnel are too remote from the hub of the neighborhood. For some of these places, they feel ambivalent fear and attraction. Crossing the railway line is dangerous, and older boys who hang out on the pedestrian bridge extort money or kisses; but putting stones and coins on the line is also a favorite game. The mine dumps (*doomps*) blow dust down on their houses and form a hangout for motorbike gangs; but they also provide excitement for boys in particular. As two ten-year old boys explained:

*We go to the doomps and run up and down them and slide on them and fall down them and we make somersaults... We take our bicycles to the doomps and ride them down the sand.*

As at other sites, children complained about drunks and bullies, and girls repeatedly raised the topic of sexual harassment.

**d. Pimville**

Pimville is part of Soweto, a large township south of Johannesburg proper. Demographic data indicate that 99 percent of the population is Black African, and well over a third is under 20. The area is divided into six contiguous zones, typical of the older, more established parts of Soweto. The 16 children who took part in this study (seven boys, nine girls) came mostly from Zone 6.

Four-room houses and high density are typical here: on average, six residents in each house. There are also a number of new bigger houses. As in other parts of Soweto, many people live in backyard rooms, often corrugated iron shanties. Most houses have small gardens, but there are no designated play spaces for children. Residents have tried to make the environment safer: home-made

speed bumps have been created to slow down cars in some of the roads.

Pimville has two main shopping complexes and a clinic. The Northern Metropolitan Local Council has set up a forum to address social problems in the suburb, which include the neglect of children and the physically disabled; the non-involvement of youth in development programs; domestic violence and the abuse of children, women and the elderly; lack of parental support in their children's education; lack of health-related education and job skills training; substance and drug abuse; and crime. Pimville is not characterized by deep poverty, but there are a number of very poor families living there. About a third of adult residents are in formal employment, another third are unemployed, and the remainder work in the informal sector.

All but one of the children in the study walk to school along busy roads. Many of them take younger brothers and sisters to preschool on their way, and fetch them again on the way home. After school, they do chores, including house cleaning. Both girls and boys play in the streets. Girls also play in their yards, but boys often go further afield to open places where they can play soccer. Some children use a pool, a library, and basketball courts in neighboring zones. In their own area, they shop at local spaza shops, play pinball and computer games at the Pimville Square shopping center, and on the weekends, go to church, play with friends, and visit shopping centers.

**Table 4. Children's priorities to improve Pimville**

<b>GIRLS' PRIORITIES</b>		<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS</b>	<b>BOYS' PRIORITIES</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>BUSY, BADLY LIT STREETS</b>	Build speed humps Improve lighting Fix robots	<b>1</b>	<b>LACK OF NEARBY POLICE STATION</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>SANDI CENTRE</b>	Break down walls Transform into play space	<b>2</b>	<b>PARKS AND PLAY SPACES</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>SWIMMING POOL</b>	Have various pools of different depths Get lifeguards	<b>3</b>	<b>CLINIC</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>CLINIC</b>	Another one needed Stop nurses' rudeness to patients	<b>3</b>	<b>BEING SENT BY PARENTS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BEING SENT BY PARENTS</b>	Security guards at shops to act against bullies	<b>3</b>	<b>SWIMMING POOL</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>PARKS AND PLAY SPACES</b>	Create more, and safe, parks Transform open places into football and netball fields	<b>3</b>	<b>BUSY, BADLY LIT STREETS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>DUMPING</b>	Fence open places and dumps Convert them into play places	<b>3</b>	<b>SANDI CENTRE</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BUSHY OPEN AREAS</b>	Chop down trees or fence them off	<b>3</b>	<b>DUMPING</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>GUNS</b>	Don't sell toy guns with realistic bullets	<b>3</b>	<b>GUNS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>LACK OF</b>	Erect one closer to Pimville	<b>3</b>	<b>BUSHY OPEN</b>

	<b>NEARBY POLICE STATION</b>			<b>AREAS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>	Found impossible to suggest a solution	<b>3</b>	<b>HARASSMENT OF GIRLS</b>

Every child in the group considers busy streets to be a problem. Crossing streets is complicated by the fact that traffic signals are often out of order or nonexistent. In some parts of Zone 6, street lighting is also inadequate or missing. The children fear dangerous people who hang out at a small burned-down shopping center and in rocky areas and open veld, and bullies in more distant parks which they visit because they have no park of their own with playground equipment. Other risky attractions are the swimming pool, where there is no lifeguard, and the waste dumps where poor people scavenge for food. The children wish their parents would not send them out on errands after dark, when they are afraid to be alone, and that there were a police station in Pimville. As at other sites, girls complain about being harassed by older boys and men.

The Pimville workshop shows that "found" places where adults tolerate children's play can provide havens in this harsh landscape. At the intersection of a busy road near where the children live is a Total garage with a wonderful green lawn where the children love to gather. They sit on it, roll on it and play ball there.

### **Overview of Workshop Results**

The results of this study show that many children in Johannesburg currently live severely constrained lives due to the many indignities and risks that they face in their everyday environments. Often the various problems that children face are viewed in isolation whereas they tend to compound one another. In Joubert Park, for instance, the children who took part in the study live in congested high-rise buildings without safe play spaces and adults throw rubbish at them as they play below the high-rise buildings. If electricity is cut off in their blocks of flats, sometimes for weeks at a time, they are without access to lifts, to hot water, to adequate light for reading and homework, to television, and to household appliances. Like the children at the other sites, many in Joubert Park are expected to do a wide range of housework and the lack of electricity makes life very hard for them.

It is not only the rights of children in Johannesburg to participate in decisions that affect their lives that are in question, but also their rights to play, recreation, participation in their culture, preparation for responsible life in a free and tolerant society, and the development of their personalities, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential—all rights ostensibly guaranteed by the CRC.

This four site pilot study shows that children are well able to evaluate their environments and to recommend thoughtful ways to improve them. They were also pleased to have been asked for their ideas. They reported in their written assessments that they learned things, had fun, and felt that they had something to give:

*This workshop was very fun and funky. We know something someone doesn't know (girl, Pimville).*

*I am very proud of the workshop because we were now researchers (boy, Riverlea).*

*I feel very happy about the workshop. It made me learn more things than I learn at school and I can also teach my friends what I learned (girl, Joubert Park).*

*It was the boom because I did everything well and hope to do it again (boy, Malvern/Kensington).*

At the report-back sessions to parents and representatives of city offices and community organizations, held within a fortnight of the data collection workshops, children reported that having their ideas and viewpoints genuinely listened to had increased their self-confidence and bolstered their self-esteem. They also said they had learned more about the areas where they lived, developed their communication skills, and learned to listen to their peers.

At these report-back sessions, children themselves prepared the report format and means of presentation. Although they were asked to follow a formal framework, they invested it with personalized color and form. Their self-esteem was reflected in the confident manner in which they ushered adults into the venue, exhibited their materials, and interacted with adults in discussion groups.

The children's experiences and recommendations were shared not only at these sessions, but through a report to the GJMC and the Mayor's Office via the manager of the Child Friendly Cities office. In addition to site-specific concerns that need to be addressed at a local level, a number of issues about access and safety recurred at all four sites and required attention at the metropolitan level. Selected recommendations related to these issues are listed in Box 1. Many small—and some not so small—changes are needed at the local level, which together could add up to a major transformation of urban quality. If these recommendations were implemented, the result would be a better city for all. Making cities child-friendly means that they become people-friendly.

**Box 1. Recommendations to improve conditions for children in metropolitan Johannesburg**

**Theme 1: Insufficient and unsafe places to play**

Even when children have nearby parks and play spaces, they may not be able to use them due to bullies, hostile adults, broken equipment, littering and rules prohibiting many forms of play.

- Identify areas where there is insufficient protected and multifaceted recreation space relative to population density and play space in the home environment.
- Train staff in parks and swimming pools to work with children to reduce harassment and violence in recreation areas.

- Work with children and local residents to identify spaces near schools and homes that can be upgraded and secured for play.
- Consider creating protected rooftop play.

### **Theme 2: Pedestrian problems**

Pedestrian accidents involving children are a major public health issue.

- Establish children's routes of movement in local areas, and provide frequent and safe crossings to children's amenities such as parks and schools.
- Consult children about the placement of these crossings.
- Repair faulty traffic signals rapidly.
- Provide mechanisms to slow traffic in residential areas.
- Install adequate street lighting and prune trees that obscure lights.

### **Theme 3: Public transport**

Children suffer a range of difficulties in using inefficient and expensive public systems, which often force them to use taxis where they feel more vulnerable to abuse.

- Introduce a range of public transport types and sizes.
- Consider a single ticket for all types of public transport.
- Offer free or reduced fares for children below a certain age.
- Consider special weekend and holiday buses to take children and their families to popular recreation places.

### **Theme 4: Harassment and public safety**

Children are harassed in multiple ways in their daily living environments, by other children and by adults.

- Train members of the police force to listen to and assist children and to take threats against children seriously.
- Produce public awareness programs about children's need for protection from bullying, harassment, crime and abuse.
- Create safe haven programs for children with local businesses and community organizations.

### **Theme 5: Waste management and littering**

Waste and litter worry children. Children understand that they pose health hazards, and it damages their sense of self-worth when people dump rubbish in the places where they live and play.

- Priorities places that children occupy for clearing litter and waste.

### **Theme 6: Taverns, shebeens and bottle stores**

Children experience verbal and physical abuse from patrons of drinking establishments near their living areas.

- Zone drinking establishments away from residential areas

Commissioning this four site study was an innovative step in the city government's efforts to make Johannesburg child friendly. Even when they are consulted and identify problems, however, children cannot accomplish change on their own. It is adults who hold the reins of power for urban transformation. To continue to integrate children's voices into planning, responsible officials need to set up processes to enable children to routinely play a part in identifying needs, setting priorities, and evaluating new development proposals. The formats for doing this should be appealing to children rather than replicating adult consultations. At every level of city government, specific people need to be given authority for considering the impact of policies and planning decisions on children and soliciting children's views. These people should be connected in intersectoral networks under the coordination of a Child-Friendly Cities Manager. So that children do not lose faith in government, they should be kept informed concerning the uses made of their input.

To make Johannesburg child friendly, strong and unified political commitment will be required. The metropolitan government will need to enlist the strength of families, communities and social institutions by fostering confidence that they can work with their government on every level to solve the problems ahead. Along the way, it will be important not only to monitor provisions that can be counted-such as access to health services, clean water and sanitation-but also to gather more qualitative measures such as children's reasons for feelings of loneliness, boredom, anxiety and fear. To monitor progress in these areas, it will be necessary to consult with children themselves. Effective urban transformation requires that a clarity of vision, goals and values be developed and shared by all stakeholders-and core stakeholders include children. Adults may hold the reins of power, but children hold the reins of hope for building a better future.

## **Endnotes**

1. The study was finalized at a time when there was a change in local structures and hence uncertainty about implementation. The project director welcomed an opportunity for a full inquiry into what outcomes had been possible some years after submission of the final research project report.
2. The researchers for this work were Jill Swart-Kruger (director), Alistair Clacherty, Desmond Khumalo, Dorah Lebelo, Glynis Clacherty, Ingrid Woolf, Jessie Kgomongoe, Joy Pelo, Kgethi Matshai, and Vanessa Black. Support from Mayor Isaac Mogase and Mr. Wandile Zwane (manager, Child-Friendly Cities, Johannesburg) is gratefully acknowledged. Editorial assistance by Sheridan Bartlett is gratefully acknowledged.
3. A spaza shop is a very small sales outlet which stocks basic goods. It is often a small room in a house or a garage or shipping container.

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## **References**

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