



A lesson in safety

People rush to cities. Economic success has lifted millions of Chinese people out of poverty. But this is a dangerous journey.

Children who leave the poor rural areas may be kidnapped, exploited and isolated. Save the Children wants to change this.

PHOTO sophie ARNÖ **PHOTOGRAPHER** JÖRGEN HILDEBRANDT



In the 4th graders classroom at Fuzhuang school, in the city of Nanning in southern China, a picture of twelve small children is projected onto the whiteboard at the end of the room.

This little boy lived nearby. He was kidnapped when he was playing outside

his home; the teacher says pointing to one of the pictures. It is a lesson for the students about safety. After the slide show, the students act out various situations, like when a stranger approaches a child. A question and answer session then follows. What would you do if you were kidnapped, asks the teacher.

I would try to find a piece of paper and write on it that I need help, one boy says.

I would pretend to get very sick, and when they called for the doctor, I would tell him, says another.

I would say that I needed to go to the bathroom and then try to sneak away, a girl continues.

SINCE CHINA BEGAN its reform policy in 1978, the country has experienced history's most powerful economic transformation. Today it is the world's second largest economy after the United States. The development has created new opportunities for millions of people. Many people have left the impoverished countryside to seek their fortunes in the cities. The number of such migrant workers today amounts to over 200 million people.

The problem is that public services have not kept pace with the increase in mobility, says He Ye, project manager at the International Save the Children in China.

This particularly affects children. Many

are left alone when their parents are working. Children also lack knowledge of what can happen in a big city and become especially vulnerable.

Each year, thousands of children are kidnapped and sold.

The government's one child policy and the huge gaps in income have created a demand, especially for boys, He Ye says.

Poor people have very weak security nets and are dependent on having someone who can support them. Therefore, they want more children. Many "buy" a son, whom they take good care of and provide a good education, because he will later be able to take care of them.

Girls are more often sold to the sex trade or as wives - the deficit of women, caused by the abortion of female foeticid, make girls much sought after. But little girls are ➔



In the Fuzhuang school 98 per cent of the 2400 pupils are migrants.



➔ not as "valuable" for those who sell children: a boy can cost more than USD 4755 while a girl only costs just under USD 634.

Human trafficking occurs in many Chinese provinces. Some children are abducted to help to beg or perform other work.

Many parents are aware of the risk of their child being kidnapped, but there are also many who are very ignorant, He Ye says.

MOST PEOPLE COMING from poor mountain villages to cities lack education and knowledge to be able to identify the risks.

People coming from poor mountain villages come from a different culture, often speak a different language, everything is different, says Lily Lin, who works for Save the Children in China

Often they cannot afford to put their children in nurseries, but leave them alone with relatives or in the apartment. Frequently, children play by themselves in the streets.

Nanning is the capital of Guangxi province in southern China, and moving there is the goal for many

people from the surrounding impoverished countryside. Here moving earth, pile-driving and construction work continues

around the clock as new skyscrapers shoot up all the time. In some neighbourhoods more than 90 percent of the population are migrants from other parts of China. Their children are entitled to attend school in their new neighbourhood, but schools are under pressure and have not been able to keep up with the rapid increase in population. The resources available to state schools are not sufficient to accommodate everyone.

There is a lack of teachers, facilities and equipment, says Lily Lin.

In some migrant areas there have been efforts made to resolve the problem by opening private schools, like the Fuzhuang school. Here 98 per cent of 2400 pupils are migrants.

The children's families pay around USD 127 per term, the rest of the revenue comes from donations from businesses and individuals.

The advantage of this kind of school is that you can prioritize the investment of resources to match migrants' specific needs, says Lily Lin.

The downside of course is that migrants have to pay for school, and since their children are separated from the local population, not integrating with the local com-

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munity as well as they should be.

Save the Children in China is working to identify the most vulnerable children, establishing contacts with and mobilizing local authorities – as well as running education programs for children and parents so that they can learn to identify the risks they may face, as they do at the Fuzhuang school.

The best way to prevent children becoming victims of trafficking and other abuses is to focus on prevention. With increased awareness, the risks are reduced, says Lily Lin.

Since many of the migrant children lack ➔



Mò Qiàn, 12, moved to Nanning with her family since there was no school in their village.

Life in the city is very different from village life, she says. In the city you need information. Now I have learned many useful things, like one shouldn't touch electronics with wet hands, to always look at the traffic lights before crossing the street and that one should never talk to strangers.





Huang Yu Qi, 11, lives with his aunt. His parents are working elsewhere. Nobody ever asked me what I wanted, he says. They should have!



People's Republic of China / Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó

CAPITAL: Peking (Beijing)

CONSTITUTION: Republic, Unitary state

POPULATION: 1,35 billion (UN-estimation 2010)

NUMBER OF INHABITANTS PER SQUARE KILOMETERS: 141 (UN estimation 2010)

NATIVITY/BIRTH-RATE: 1.2 % (2008)

Life expectancy: Women 75 years, men 71 years (2000-2010)

GDP/INHABITANT: USD 3565 (2009)

READING AND LITERACY: 94% (2008)

RELIGIONS: The Government of the People's Republic of China today acknowledges five official **CHINESE RELIGIONS:** Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Confucianism is fully accepted but is not regarded as a religion.

SOURCE: The Swedish Institute of International Affairs

→ a proper social network, Save the Children has also worked to recruit and train volunteers who provide direct support to children with homework for example.

LIU YAN PENG, 22, has been a volunteer for four years, in parallel with her studies.

I wanted to help others. This is also a way for me to learn, she says.

One of the children she sees once a week is Chen Yun Wu, 15, who is in the eighth grade at the Fuzhuang school. He lives alone with his father who came to Nanning in search of a job as a construction worker. His mother remained in the village where she works in agriculture.

I have not seen her more than twice in the past seven years, he says sadly.

I hope we will be able to go home now over the New Year...

If we have any money, yes..., his father adds. But we won't.

The family is very poor. Father and son live in a simple hut a stone's throw away from the school, along with many other migrant workers. It is crowded and dirty.

I could do with a better place to live, says Chen Yun Wu. It is always so noisy here. I usually do my homework at school where it is easier to concentrate.

Support from Liu Yan has meant a lot!

Today she wants to encourage him to join this Sunday's activity. The volunteers at

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the Fuzhuang school and "their" children, will visit the elderly people in the area.

We always try to retain two perspectives in everything we do with young people: what they need and what they can give, she explains, and puts her arm around Chen Yun's shoulder.

He smiles shyly.

- It is important not to forget that you yourself are a person with assets, a person who can contribute to society and help others, even if you also need help, "says Liu Yan.. ■



Chen Wu Yun, 15, lives alone with his father in Nanning. He misses his mother and has difficulties doing his homework in the noisy environment in which he lives. The support from volunteer Liu Yan Peng, 22, (left) means a lot.

