

TRASH CITY



YOUTH WITH A MISSION HERRNHUT

“These people are monsters, they are covered in tattoos, sleep in the filth, eat garbage, drink poison and do not die!”



WELCOME TO THE TRASH

Last year, my friends and I were travelling to the capital city of Addis Ababa after our outreach to the Karo people in the south of Ethiopia. The drive north had taken three days and we were finally back in an urban setting. As we drove into the city, we noticed on the left-hand side of the road a huge garbage dump shrouded by the fumes of smouldering fires. An unbearable smell assaulted us and between the dark smoke clouds we saw a group of children and young people sitting on the garbage.

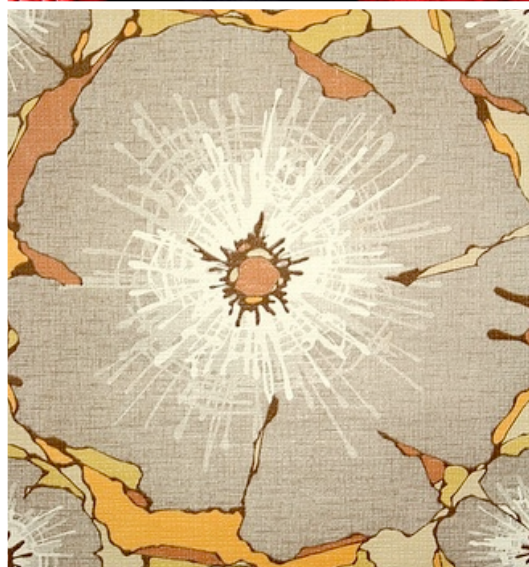
We questioned our driver, wanting to know if children really worked or lived over there. We were shocked that he told us that there were many people living there. Unfortunately there was not enough time for us to go inside the garbage dump and investigate. However, we did have another Discipleship Training School (DTS) outreach team leaving for Ethiopia for a few months and so when we met them in Germany, we asked them to find out more about this issue.

In March of this year, that team went the garbage dump and since then several other teams have visited this terrible place. I write this after just returning from an outreach to

this garbage dump where I visited and supported a discipleship outreach team. With this story, I would like to take you back there with me.

Our team knew we would find children and young people in the dump, but not much more. First, we tried to find out if any other organisation had already begun a project to help these children and young people. As we tried to get information from locals, we were told that the people there were a violent gang whose members were addicted to alcohol and drugs. Many warned us not to go to this dangerous place! In every place we went we were confronted with a lack of understanding and one person even warned us, "Those people are monsters, they are covered in tattoos, sleep in the filth, eat garbage, drink poison and do not die!" The truth was heartbreaking: our team found 25 children and young people simply struggling to survive. One thing was clear to us from the beginning: no human being should live there – it is simply wrong! No child should grow up or have to work in such a toxic environment – that cannot be right! How were we supposed to help?







At first it was not easy to gain the trust of the children. Many people had come here before us and had taken photos and promised to help them but then never returned. That is also what the “trash kids” expected of us, except we did come back, and each time we did we brought new and larger numbers of people. We sat down with them, celebrated with them, laughed with them, and increasingly they began to trust us.

One day they invited us to eat with them. We knew where they got their food from: out of the garbage – scraps from the Hilton hotel that guests had left on their plates were thrown into a large container. All of this was then tipped out onto a plastic sheet, sorted by the older ones in the group, and then we sat on the ground in front of our set table to eat together. An unbelievable sight, but we were all deeply resolved to eat with them. We had chicken-or rather the already gnawed chicken bones where, here and there, a little bit of meat could be found. So we ate this interesting meal with them and they looked at us and were amazed. Everyone ate together...they gave us the best pieces, then the younger ones got their food and finally Brahano, the one who has taken charge of this whole group. On another plastic sheet the same food was spread out for the dogs to eat and then at the end the pigs that they raise got the last scraps.

It was here at one such community meal time that we experienced a breakthrough! They saw that we were not just talking about respecting them, but that we were really serious! No other visitors had ever dared to eat with them. They brought us some black tea that had been made with water gathered from the puddles around the garbage. It was served to us in cups made out of cut open plastic bottles. The sugar to sweeten the tea came from different airlines that had thrown out the sugar packets with the garbage while cleaning out the cabins. It was an incredible moment for everyone there where we really felt that Jesus was right there with us. We had guitars with us and a few drums were very quickly made out of different cans and bottles that were lying around. We started a different kind of praise party right in this very wicked place. It was a real highlight. The terrible smell of the garbage and the many smouldering fires seemed to evaporate, and so we danced, laughed and were full of joy.

All of this took place in the ruin of a storage hall that was half filled with aluminium cans. The other cleared space was used as housing for the guys. There were dogs running everywhere, and from time to time a pig would run wildly through the hall and the garbage.

It became dark, and with the night came the cold. Brahano sent some boys out to get some material to burn: not firewood, but rather broken flip-flops were gathered, piled onto the fire pit, and set ablaze. A massive black cloud formed under the roof and the yellow green fire brightened the hall a little. We turned towards the fire and tried to warm ourselves without breathing in any of the toxic fumes. It became quieter around the fire and small groups formed. Some girls began to tell us their life stories. Brahano and the boys, with smiles in their faces, gestured to the fire and the whole situation as if to tell us – This is life!

After this evening so many things went through our minds. On the one hand we recognised how precious and unique this group was and what a great privilege it was for us to be with them. Although we could not have been more different and came from completely different worlds, we became friends-slowly we began to see a hope germinate inside of them. That had always been our prayer: to see these children get new hope and believe in change. Without such a hope it would have been near impossible for us to help them at all.

The girls of the group do not live on the garbage dump but in the nearby slums and only come to this area to work. Many of them have no parents or were kicked out of home and live with an aunt or grandma. The only income for them is the little money (roughly 30 cents) they get at the end of the day for collecting useful materials from the garbage. Being young girls, they are not officially employed by the city and for that reason they earn only a small percentage of what an official garbage worker earns. I have written more about some of these boys and girls later in this letter – but now back to it – as this remarkable evening and the night afterwards were still not over.

We were not only invited to eat with them but also to spend the night with them. As they invited us we knew immediately that this was the way for us and that we had



Brahano is now 23 and the “Dad” of the family. He has lived in the garbage dump for 16 years. His parents did not have the money to look after him and so he left his parents’ house. We asked him about his dreams and hopes for the future. He shared, “Here, we have learned to live as a family in the garbage dump...that has changed all of our lives in a very good way. I would like to build a chicken farm upon which all of us could work together. The youngest of us should go to school. Naturally I would like to get married one day but before that the work has to be done here, the children and the young people must be safe and looked after.” We asked what he thought the most important thing is that he learned here: “We have learned to live with the hyenas...we have slept outside where we bury ourselves in the garbage to hide from the hyenas while they walk around looking for us.”



Subalew is now 16. She too left her home because there was not enough money to feed the whole family. When she was eight-years-old she left her shanty. From time to time she visits her parents and her brother. Since she arrived here she has never left the garbage dump except for a few times when she went onto the loading area of a garbage truck. We asked her why she had not left already. “I wanted to a few time but I was ashamed because I have no money and somehow I do not fit into the world outside the dump. Here I feel safe and at home.” She says life in the dump “is very cold here and it is hard; but, I have no other choice. The most important thing for me is family, that we are for one another here where we can be there for one another.”

to accept this invitation. It was clear to us that we should not come with our inflatable mattresses and sleeping bags but should spend the night exactly as they do.

The girls were sent home by the older boys and after a short time we were ready to go to bed. They brought us into a little side room and laid out a blanket on the floor for us. The window was covered with cardboard so that we were protected, to some extent, from the smoke fumes of the toxic fires. We lay down on the floor close to one another and then Brahano and his boys laid next to us in the direction of the missing doors. They said that we were safe here. We did not know exactly what they meant by that.

However, it was hard to think about sleeping in this unusual situation. We shivered from the cold of the night. We saw now why the many dogs were there – growling and barking, they alerted the hall to the hyenas that roam through the night. Suddenly an animal ran into our room: one of the pigs had in its panic fled to us seeking protection. We heard the howls of the hyenas and suddenly Brahano stood up and said that the hyenas would come now and we should go with him. Nearly every night they have to drive the hyenas out with metal bars. Now we were on our way, running in the weak moonlight over the garbage fields, often sinking to our knees in all sorts of water holes or fresh garbage. We were happy that we could now only see the hyenas from a distance and that tonight they were successfully driven away by the dogs. Exhausted, but well warmed by this nightly exercise, we went back to our sleeping places. Yet, none of us slept and we only wanted the night to pass by. Thousands of fleas made their way onto us and our whole bodies were covered with red, painful flea bites. What we experienced was a nightmare. We experienced it just once, but for these children and young people this is a bitter reality every night. Every day and every night in the Garbage dump is another day of survival for them!

We sat, in the meantime, on the floor and waited for the first sunbeams that would warm our frozen bodies. They brought us breakfast, again from the Hilton Hotel, and again prepared for us some black tea over one of the spare flip-flop campfires.

We spent time with Brahano to find out how we could really help here. First, we thought we should start small and act straight away. We wanted to take five of the

youngest children to stay with us at the house rented for the mission team. However, the more we heard from Brahano, the more it became clear to us that this would not work because the group is a family that should not be separated.

We saw after only a short time that these garbage dump children were an extraordinary group that behaved differently from any other group of street children: honest towards one another, protection and provision for each other, friendliness, openness. The biggest look after the smallest and for the girls as well. We were deeply impressed by them: no violence, no drugs but true friendship and a community that had learned to share everything with each other.

Finally, we heard an unbelievable story from them. There used to be a man named Mike who belonged to the community. At the age of six, Mike's parents died and he moved to the garbage dump to survive. He went to school from time to time, learning to read and write a little English. One day, as he walked across the garbage dump, he saw a picture of Jesus lying in the garbage. He pulled it out and was moved by this picture. A few days later, he found a Bible in the garbage and after a few days of reading it, he gave his life to Jesus. He was the first in the Garbage City to believe, and Jesus increasingly became a part of the whole group.

When we asked Brahano and his group what their biggest need was, he surprised us with his answer: that someone would teach them the Bible and guide their faith. We did not expect such an answer. It was not money, clean water, better housing, or work. They want to follow Jesus and want to be taught how to do it. Then Brahano said something that stunned us: "Every day that we have something to eat, we share it with each other. If we do not have anything, then we thank God and go to bed."

So after breakfast, we led the first Bible study. My friend Nathan talked about God's love and that we should love God. They all sat on tin cans and listen attentively. Then one of the youth in the group asked "How does it work that we love God – how does that look?" Afterwards there are a few moments of quiet and then one of from amongst them said, "If we want to love God, then we must love other people!" They all agreed and decided: "We want to love people." We prayed together and then a few of our group talked about their relationships with Jesus.



Naturally they said to us later that they want to get away from the garbage, but they do not know how. Even if someone gives them a chance, when they find out where they come from, they pull back. One girl said, "They think we are thieves or criminals and that we are dangerous. They call us the children of the dirt."

These 15 boys and 10 girls are not just like a family but also like a church or house cell group. They wear clothes collected from the garbage and are dirtier than one can imagine. They eat the city's garbage and are also verbally abused and humiliated by the neighbors who live on the dump's perimeter. No one wants to have anything to do with these children; they are not even considered people. They are a part of the poorest of the poor and live as outcasts in conditions that could not be any more inhumane. Yet, exactly here is where we find Jesus – Jesus with the orphans, he is the father to the fatherless. He cares for the lowest of the low and those who are broken-hearted. Also, He says: "Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers, you have done for me."

will move there once it is ours. We are also working on helping the oldest boys find jobs to reintegrate them into society. The youngest of them will go to school in the area. The girls will also move and we are currently talking to their family members about this plan. From the beginning, a staff member will live in this house to look out for the children's rights and help them. We want to employ an English teacher, who would in the next few months teach the whole group an intensive English course so that we can communicate better with the children and young people without a translator. Furthermore, speaking English would open more doors for the group.

We will set up a bible and discipleship program and we also hope to find professional trauma counsellors who would live there to walk through some of the experiences and traumas of the boys and girls. Much in their way of thinking must change.

Here in Herrnhut, a team from the fall discipleship school is preparing to go and build them a chicken farm. In January



Where do we go from here?

Since February 2009, small teams have been going in and out of the garbage dump. Much has happened since then. Trust and understanding of one another has grown. Something not so joyful happened first: a gang heard about our intention to get Brahano and his group out of Garbage City. They seem to not wish them this chance. Furthermore one night they overran the hall where the boys sleep, set fires inside the rooms, and destroyed their few belongings. The police searched the place because the gang falsely reported that Brahano was hiding guns there and was planning a big coup. Many of his boys were arrested for that reason, but they were later freed.

From the first day it was clear to us that: no human should live that way! It is just wrong! Everyone deserves a fair chance at a better future! Something must happen and we must help! We spent many hours in conversation with Brahano and a few local Christians from Addis Ababa working out a plan. In all of this we believe strongly in the leadership, help, and provision of God.

Starting next week, we want to rent a house at the other end of the city. It is spacious and clean. The whole group

this team will move to Addis Ababa for several months. Since we heard about Brahano's dream to build a chicken farm the staff here have begun to look after chickens to gain some experience. We want to see this chicken farm become a reality!

We have photos, music, and a message that allows you to feel God's heart for the poorest of the poor and we have the story of the children that cause us to reflect. That is why we want to go churches and youth groups to find partners for this project.

This is a risk for certain! We do not know how long this project will last and what else will come our way. Many staff members have committed themselves to this project long term and are ready to do everything necessary, but we cannot do any of this without your help and support. Please pray for a victory! Please support this project financially. Become a partner! If you are interested in coming to Garbage City for a few weeks to help, please get in contact with us. In particular we are searching for partnership with a church that would stand behind this project.

An Arts focused Mega DTS

Calling through different Arts the global and young Generation to end extreme poverty and to focus at different situations of injustice in the world.

September 16th to April 24th

Musician! Photographer! Graphic Designer! Dancer! Painter! Yeah, you! Have you ever asked yourself, "What does God want me to do with my talents?" Don't limit yourself by conforming to the world's idea of an artist. We believe God empowered artists to change the world.

God uses art! Our photographs saved the lives of children targeted for death due to tribal superstitions. Our music was the soundtrack accompanying homeless people out of a Garbage City. Our drawings inspired young women to leave prostitution. What will He do with your art?

Most young people "get" art. We love that art is universal, limitless, and powerful. Art speaks louder than trumpets and connects audiences to truths beyond our normal understanding. Great art demands attention.

We want to use art's power to call a global generation to bridge cultures, fight injustice, and END EXTREME POVERTY! We hope you are starting to get excited...excited that someone else feels that itch to make a change in the world. Lots of people try to convince us that our dreams are unrealistic. Well, poop on that! Dreams don't have to stay dreams: they can be explored and made a reality. God doesn't see dreams as fantasies. God sees dreams as the future he wants to give you.

We are Pick a Pocket. We love God. As a team, we use our passion and talent to inspire our generation to join the fight against extreme poverty. More people are hearing our message and we need more peo-

ple to join forces with us. Our DTS is specifically created to share our passion for the poor and to train and equip you to respond to God's desire for social justice.

"We are gathered here today..." for a very special wedding, a Marriage of the Arts. This union will result in a learning community peopled by artists from many mediums, beginners and professionals, all eager to explore God's vision for their art. Our staff is excited to invest in your life and skills. Together, we will discover the great purposes for which God has prepared you.

All great marriages require love, passion, commitment, determination, and selflessness. Our DTS is not simply "Christian tourism" or a self-help program. We are looking for people who want to shake up this fallen world and make art for the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, let's together do something new. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "Enough had been thought and said and imagined, it's about time that something should be done."

More Information at our website
www.mission-live.com.

With love,
Pick a Pocket Team from YWAM Herrnhut



Youth With A Mission Herrnhut, Germany

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