



“We know something someone doesn’t know”: children speak out on local conditions in Johannesburg

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SUMMARY: *This article summarizes the findings of a four-site study of children’s needs and priorities, part of the process to transform Greater Johannesburg into a child friendly city. Applying the Growing Up in Cities model, it presents the voices of 10 to 14-year-olds from four diverse but representative areas of the city. For each of these areas, boys and girls describe their use of their local environments, the places they value or fear, the problems they face and their own priorities for making Johannesburg a better city. Based on these children’s experiences, a number of programme and policy responses are recommended, many of which will be relevant to other cities as well.*

I. MAKING GREATER JOHANNESBURG CHILD-FRIENDLY

JOHANNESBURG IS THE mining and industrial centre of Gauteng, the most densely populated province in South Africa. Since the early twentieth century, it has been a magnet for people from neighbouring provinces and countries seeking work in its mines, factories and shops. About one third of its population of approximately 3 million is under the age of 19. 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 neighbourhoods.

Growing Up in Cities (GUIC) is a programme to involve children in evaluating their urban environments and planning how to improve the

conditions of their lives.⁽¹⁾ 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 non-governmental organizations, and across different sectors of government.

The four site studies show an urgent need to hear what children have to say about conditions in their neighbourhoods. 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. These neighbourhoods are hostile for children and 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.

II. THE FOUR-SITE STUDY

THE FOUR SITES in Greater Johannesburg were in different geographic and socioeconomic areas: Western Joubert Park in the inner city, Riverlea Extension, Malvern/Kensington 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 include them 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 also 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 formally approved in August 2000 and was undertaken with children during the school break in September and early October. At all of the sites, lists were compiled of children aged 10 to 14 who lived at different points in the locality and who represented, wherever possible, varied socioeconomic backgrounds. 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, neighbourhood). They used green stickers to show favoured places and red ones to indicate problem areas. Following 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 then 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.

1. See Chawla, Louise (editor) (2002), *Growing Up in an Urbanising World*, Earthscan/UNESCO, London, for a summary of the findings.

The following sections outline the features of each site, children's lives in their local environment, and their views about how to make Johannesburg a friendlier place for its young citizens.

a. Western Joubert Park

Western Joubert Park, in 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 part, is 88 per cent black, with the remainder divided among coloured, Asian and white (1996 census). Only 18 per cent of the population is 19 or younger.

Joubert Park 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 neighbourhood centre, set up in 1999 to service the community as part of the pilot precinct project which has catalyzed numerous local improvements. There are medical services, including two mother-and-child clinics, as well as two community 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, 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 because of 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 point of entry 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 neighbourhood by the dangers outside the 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.

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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 at the weekends. They also find it exciting to visit more distant shopping centres with their parents. Many also said that they attended church. Despite these resources, every part of their environment holds a threat for them of one kind or another (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 that 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

Table 1: Children's priorities to improve the Joubert Park area				
Problems ranked by girls		Recommendations by girls and boys	Problems ranked by boys	
1	Joubert Park	Build a tuck shop in Joubert Park Have a monitor at the jungle gyms Employ more people to clean the park Introduce daily security via patrols, cameras	1	Street children
2	Transport	Prevent/control child harassment in taxis Bus service to be faster; more routes and stops Have bigger, safer taxis for long-distance travel	2	Transport
2	Abuse by taxi drivers	Have street patrols to prevent child harassment Move taxi business off streets to taxi ranks Control taxi industry better	2	Abuse by taxi drivers
3	Liquor outlets	Increase legal age for liquor purchase to 21 Parents to stop sending children to buy liquor Enforce laws against underage purchases Set and enforce closing times for <i>shebeens</i> Bottle stores to stop people drinking on site Close taverns in residential areas	2	Joubert Park
4	Recreational space	Create safe places 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	3	Liquor outlets
4	Street children	Have caring adults look after them Build more homes for them Help them to stop sniffing glue	4	Theft in CBD
5	Theft in the CBD	Install more security cameras Have more policing to prevent crime Link security cameras with phones to police	4	Recreational space
6	Bad living conditions	Solutions not discussed but some aspects are reflected in solutions for recreational space (see above)	5	Bad living conditions
6	Lack of study resources	Solutions not discussed	6	Lack of study resources
6	Harassment of girls	Solutions not discussed but inherent in many of the recommendations for other problem categories	6	Harassment of girls
6	Swimming pools	Solutions not discussed	6	Swimming pools

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 them, hurt them or stole from them. A girl pointed out that the park is patrolled by security personnel at night but that 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 relating to transport to school: not enough buses, buses that make them late for 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 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.

The children faced other social threats in their environment. On the streets, when 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 centre. 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 courtyards. 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 to the east of the city centre. Originally white, lower-middle-class suburbs of the city, they reflect the demographic transition typical of land close to the centre. The 1996 census for Malvern shows the area as 45 per cent white, 42 per cent black, 7 per cent coloured and 5 per cent 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 visible in its housing. Many conventional suburban houses previously inhabited by a single family are now occupied by numerous tenants, with as many as 50 to 100 people in larger houses. Slumlords allegedly sublet these premises and retain the greater part of the income, paying only a small rental to the owners. In many instances, where electricity and water bills have not been 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 neighbouring Kensington, plus a library and two swimming pools. The eight boys and ten girls who participated in the GUIC workshops all attend Malvern Primary School, four travelling from nearby Kensington.

Table 2: Children's priorities to improve Malvern/Kensington				
Problems ranked by girls		Recommendations by girls and boys	Problems ranked by boys	
1	Top field	Install security fencing and entry gate Control access	1	Top field
1	Police and security	Address police corruption Increase police numbers Increase police patrols Stop children's 10111 hoax calls	1	Police and security
2	Rat field and littering	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	2	Rat field and littering
2	Crime	Police the area more extensively Fence parks and open places securely Security companies to patrol Install alarms linked to the police station	2	Crime
2	Faulty robots/ crossing streets	Officers to control traffic when robots (traffic lights) are not working Have scholar patrols Install speed cameras Close St Frusquin Street behind the school during school hours	3	Faulty robots/ crossing streets
3	Stray animals	Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to collect them Owners to contain or leash them	3	Stray animals
3	<i>Shebeens</i> and drunks	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 licences	3	<i>Shebeens</i> and drunks
3	Station	Dogs to sniff for <i>dagga</i> (marijuana) and drugs Scan for weapons Police to confiscate drugs and weapons	3	Station
3	Swimming pools	Install secure lockers with keys Divide girls' and boys' bathroom with a door Lifeguards: more, and active patrolling	3	Swimming pools
3	Street children	Return to parents if possible Government to pay jobless people as caretakers	3	Street children
3	Street lights	Cut back foliage in Frere Street and behind the school on St Frusquin Street	3	Street lights

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 Malvern pool to swim 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 on 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 at the local shops in the afternoons and evenings. The children usually do not go

alone to larger shopping centres such as the Eastgate or Bedford centres 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 felt it would play an important role in their daily lives.

Lack of adequate municipal services in the 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 into the children's homes. Police take a long time to come when called, which leaves children feeling insecure both at home and on the streets where they face drunks, street children who hit them and extort money from them, 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 neighbourhoods become more affluent. Demographic data for Riverlea show that it is 91 per cent coloured and that 76 per cent of the population is aged 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 centre, a swimming pool, small shops, three small parks, playing fields, a number of churches and a mosque. Riverlea Extension 1, south of the railway line, consists mostly of dilapidated two-room 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 centre, 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 is 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 at the weekends. Those from Extension 1 who cannot afford the swimming pool entry fee swim in the polluted river or dam below the

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mine dumps. Children also attend various activities at the recreation centre 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. At the weekends, some children travel to nearby shopping centres by taxi with adult family members.

One of the key places for recreation for children in Riverlea is the *bultjie*, a small hill situated behind the recreation centre, with a flat open area on top. Because play equipment in the parks is broken and adults who drink heavily or take drugs there are abusive to children, the *bultjie* has emerged as an important place for all the children in the group. It is not completely safe but they feel that they can handle the problems that arise – mainly young people in their late teens or older who go to there to drink, smoke *dagga* (marijuana) 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 and the railway line. There is a mixed fear and attraction for some of these places. 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 favourite game. The mine dumps (*doomps*) blow dust

Table 3: Children's priorities to improve Riverlea

Problems ranked by girls		Recommendations by girls and boys	Problems ranked by boys	
1	The <i>bultjie</i>	Fence it and provide safe access for children Convert it into a park with play facilities	1	The <i>bultjie</i>
1	Waste dumps	Identify and report trucks that dump Limit access to the area for trucks Provide feeding scheme for needy people	2	Open fields and wild places
2	Open fields and wild places	Erect a police station near the clinic 24-hour police patrol in Riverlea	3	Railway line
3	Railway line	Fence off tracks from school grounds Erect another pedestrian bridge, usable by all	3	Waste dumps
3	Rivers and dams	Pool in Extension 1 with free access for children	3	Rivers and dams
3	Busy road	More speed humps needed	3	Busy roads
3	Mine dumps	Grass or fence them off	3	Mine dumps
3	Adult drunks	Stop liquor sales to underage youth	3	Adult drunks
3	High school bullies	Provide effective security at the school Erect prevention signs Counsel pupils who use drugs	3	High school bullies
3	Harassment of girls	Riverlea women to form a club to change male attitudes	3	Harassment of girls

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 dooms and run up and down them and slide on them and fall down them and we make somersaults... We take our bicycles to the dooms 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. Ninety-nine per cent of the population is black and well over one-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 densities are typical here, with an average of six residents for 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: homemade speed bumps have been created on some of the roads to slow down cars.

Pimville has two main shopping complexes and a clinic. The Northern Metropolitan local council has set up a forum to address social problems, which include the neglect of children and the physically disabled; the non-involvement of youth in development programmes; domestic violence and the abuse of children, women and the elderly; lack of parental support in 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 a number of very poor families live there. About one-third of adult residents are in formal employment, another third are unemployed and the remainder work in the informal sector.

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

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 non-existent. In some parts of Zone 6, street lighting is also inadequate or absent. The children fear dangerous people who hang out at a small burned-down shopping centre and in rocky areas and the 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 complained about being harassed by older boys and men.

The Pimville workshop shows that "found" places where adults toler-

Table 4:		Children's priorities to improve Pimville	
Problems ranked by girls		Recommendations by girls and boys	Problems ranked by boys
1	Busy, badly lit streets	Build speed humps Improve lighting Fix robots (traffic lights)	1 Lack of nearby police station
2	Sandi centre	Break down walls Transform into play space	2 Parks and play spaces
2	Swimming pool	Have various pools of different depths Get lifeguards	3 Clinic
3	Clinic	Another one needed Stop nurses' rudeness to patients	3 Being sent by parents
3	Being sent by parents	Security guards at shops to protect against bullies	3 Swimming pool
3	Parks and play spaces	Create more, and safer, parks Transform open places into football and netball fields	3 Busy, badly lit streets
3	Dumping	Fence open places and dumps Convert them into play places	3 Sandi centre
3	Bushy open areas	Chop down trees or fence them off	3 Dumping
3	Guns	Don't sell toy guns with realistic bullets	3 Guns
3	Lack of nearby police station	Erect one closer to Pimville	3 Bushy open areas
3	Harassment of girls	Found impossible to suggest a solution	3 Harassment of girls

ate 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.

III. OVERVIEW OF WORKSHOP RESULTS

THE STUDY SHOWS that many children in Johannesburg live severely constrained lives due to the indignities and risks that they face in their everyday environments. Often, the problems that children face are viewed in isolation: in fact 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. If electricity is cut off in their blocks of flats, sometimes for weeks at a time, they are without access to lifts, hot water, light for reading and homework, television and household appliances. Like the children at the other sites, many in Joubert Park are expected to do housework and the lack of electricity makes life 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 a 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 recommend thoughtful ways of improving them. They were also pleased to have been asked for their ideas. They reported in their written assessments that they had learned things, had 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 that they had learned more about the areas where they lived, had developed their communication skills and had 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 colour 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 also 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, which require 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 are implemented, the result would be a better city for all. Making cities child friendly means that they become people-friendly.

Commissioning this four-site study was an innovative step in the city government's efforts to make Johannesburg child-friendly. However, even when they are consulted and identify problems, 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 play a routine 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 the authority to consider the impact of policies and planning decisions on children, and to solicit 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 about the uses made of their input.

To make Johannesburg child-friendly, strong, unified political commitment is required. The metropolitan government will need to enlist families, communities and social institutions, fostering confidence that they can work with government at every level to solve the problems ahead.

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 because of bullies, hostile adults, broken equipment, littering and rules prohibiting many forms of play.

- Identify areas where there is insufficient protected and multifaceted recreational 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.
- 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 down 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 forces 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 to children below a certain age.
- Consider special weekend and holiday buses to take children and their families to recreational 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 police officers to listen to and assist children, and to take threats against children seriously.
- Produce public awareness programmes about children's need for protection from bullying, harassment, crime and abuse.
- Create safe-haven programmes 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.

- Prioritize clearing litter and waste in places that children occupy.

Theme 6: Taverns, *shebeens* and bottle stores

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

- Zone drinking establishments away from residential areas.
- Enforce regulations against open drinking in public areas.

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 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.