

"Women wind up on the street for many different reasons. Perhaps their husbands have died, or they may have been kicked out by their husbands. They may have children or be pregnant from men coming and taking advantage of them. Many men make promises to women on the street, but their words turn into rape. Afterwards, they kick them back out on the street, and then the women find out they are pregnant.

"Often when a husband dies, his wife is thought to be a witch or a bad spirit. She may be thrown out of her home and community.

"If a child is chronically ill, a bad spirit is thought to be to blame; and so the child is often not fed and is abandoned to the streets. Some children who are malnourished are bled

to death because the family believes the problem is an evil spirit and wants to drain it out of them."

"This is the type of thing we are up against," Chi sighs, "not the government, as some may suggest. It will take a long time to educate them differently because these things are so ingrained in my culture. But we must be patient. Patience is everything in this work."

Who Stays at Right Steps?

During a stay at Right Steps, a woman begins understanding what it is like to belong to a family and become a productive member of a community. Each woman is taught a trade such as hair braiding, sewing, cooking or cleaning. Literacy classes are also provided as these are becoming a requirement for many jobs in Nigeria. In these classes, the women learn to count and add, read and write, sometimes in English but always in the local language. Many learn useful agricultural skills for when they set up their own homes.

The mothers are also offered religious and moral instruction while forming new social relationships in their new homes and communities. Women who had no home before have hope of a new life for themselves and their children when they leave Right Steps. Most of the mothers go back to the streets where they once were – not to return to their old way of life but to bring food and medication to those still languishing on the streets.

The impact on their children is extraordinary. "One woman left her extremely sick child with me for

an entire year," Chi reflects. "When the mother came back, she did not recognize her child at all. It is not that she was older but that she was no longer a skeleton. When you see the change in a child from almost dead to vibrant, you know what you are doing is of God. Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but many of God's children still have no place to lay their heads."

Barbara Barnes, Right Steps board member, says, "I work with foster children here in the States, and it is discouraging because we're so caught up in red tape that it seems we take a backwards approach even in this country. Kids get lost in the cracks or end up with families who don't want them or who just want the money. Chi's system is geared to keeping the family intact, regardless of whether it's a complete family or not."

Who Would Do This?

This program was not initially understood in Abia State/Nigeria for this very reason. The question most posed was, "Who would do all this work for people and not require anything of them except to see them become self-sufficient?"

"To me," continues Barbara, "it is a true example of what a Christian should do. You don't put conditions on people; you just love them, serve them, teach them, and let them make their own better choices."

Members of the Right Steps board say that their first response to Chi's proposal was skeptical, especially because Chi did not plan to draw a salary.

"If she needs to do something," says Geisemann, "she asks. She eats and works there. The project seems to run itself. I can't tell you how many times she's said, 'Geoff, we need money.' I say, 'Chi, we don't have it.' Her response has always been, 'Don't worry, then. It will be there.' And somehow it always is!"

In two years, this amazing project has served more than 2,000 people. The numbers are growing, and phys-



These two women have been provided shelter in one of the homes sponsored by Right Steps.