



 **STREET LIFE | ISSUE 8**

Street Children in Central America - Children in conflict?

Birth Registration Appeal - See how you are changing children's lives

Toybox in Sierra Leone - Eyewitness report





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Hello and a warm welcome to the latest issue of Street Life, your Toybox magazine.

Here at Toybox, our supporters are so important to us. Without your time, generosity and action, the updates from the work you are about to read would simply not be possible.

Over the last year, we are grateful to have had some really exciting opportunities, which have enabled us to expand our work to reach even more vulnerable children around the world, in addition to the ongoing work in Latin America. In November, our BBC Radio 4 Appeal aired, where we shared the news of our new birth registration project in Nepal. This vital work is already beginning to make an amazing difference to children's lives, which you can read more about on page 5.

As well as opportunities like this, we have also faced some difficult challenges due to the changing economic environment here in the UK. However, your continued support has encouraged us to put Toybox's core value of courageous into practice and to face these challenges head on. You can read my round-up of the year on page 15.

Every day, encouraged by your support and generosity and the brave and inspiring stories from children who are taking those first hopeful steps away from the streets, I am optimistic that we are one day closer to the day that Toybox no longer needs to exist as there are no longer children who are forced to call the streets their home.

Sincerely, thank you so much for all you do to support our work. I really hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine.

Yours,

Lynne Morris CEO



STREET CHILDREN CALL FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL

Street and working children have taken to the streets of Delhi to take part in a series of rallies to raise awareness on Child Rights and the importance of education for all. These awareness-raising campaigns, which are part of the Street to School project, have so far taken place in 11 communities across Delhi, sharing this important message with over 3,000 people.

There are no current accurate up to date statistics on the number of children out of school in Delhi, however the figure is thought to be in the hundreds of thousands. Street-connected children in particular are often denied access to education, with key barriers including; lack of understanding on the importance of education amongst families and communities, children working to sustain household income, and discrimination from school staff and authorities resulting in children being refused enrolment.

Further rallies are planned for the coming months, with the hope that these initiatives are noticed by the Higher Authorities and that the Education Department in Delhi in particular is encouraged to take action to ensure street-connected children's rights to education are upheld and that education is accessible to all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.



*All children's names in the magazine have been changed to protect their identities

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Registered charity number 1084243
Photography: ©Toybox
Design: www.beanwave.co.uk
Print: Propak



US HELD RECORD 69,550 MIGRANT CHILDREN IN CUSTODY IN 2019

Recent figures show that the number of migrant children held in government custody, away from their families, was higher in the US in the last year than any other country in the world. Nine out of ten of these children were from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.



Being held in detention centres, particularly when separated from parents for extended periods of time, can be incredibly traumatic for children, putting them at-risk of long-term physical and emotional damage. Whilst children are legally required access to food, shelter, and medical and psychological care during this time, in reality, conditions in detention centres are often unhygienic, overcrowded and service provision inadequate.

Many children held in detention centres in the US in 2019 have already been deported. Around 4,000 children are still being detained. At least seven are known to have died, after almost a decade in which the number of children to die in US custody was zero.

Toybox's partners in Guatemala and El Salvador are working to protect children on the streets and those in at-risk situations; keeping them safe and providing them with opportunities so they are not forced to leave their homes and communities behind for further insecurity and volatility.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

Toybox would like to say a big thank you for the generous donations we receive from our long-term corporate partners.



Kingdom Coffee believe in 'coffee with a conscience'

and are an ethical Fairtrade coffee and tea supplier. In 2015, they made an amazing pledge of £100,000 to support our street outreach work over the next ten years. Their donations are helping

to provide hot drinks and food to vulnerable children on the streets of Guatemala.



PINK SUN are an organic wholefoods retailer with products sourced from South America, making their partnership with Toybox's work in Bolivia a natural fit. PINK SUN's regular donations support the outreach team to bring, not just practical support, but hope and comfort to street children's lives. Since their support began in 2013, they have given over £40,000 to support this vital work.



The Entertainer's partnership with Toybox began in 2002. Donations from the collection pots found in each of their UK stores help to support our birth registration work in Guatemala, with the vision that change from their customers pockets can help change the lives of street children who need it most. Last year, they raised an amazing £17,175.

If you or your company are interested in supporting Toybox, please give Nicky a call on **01908 360079** or visit www.toybox.org.uk to find out more.

BIRTH REGISTRATION APPEAL 2019:

UPDATE



As children, a good game of hide and seek can pass a whole afternoon in the blink of an eye. The best hiding places get passed on from generation to generation and, it's from the age of about 4 or 5, when you perfect the skill of holding your breath when you see the seeker's feet come through the door from underneath the bed, that you know you are a true master of the game that defines so many childhoods.

However, for street children in Nepal, hide and seek is not a game they play for fun. Toybox's Christmas Appeal and our BBC Radio 4 Appeal at the end of last year highlighted how, for street children in Nepal, hide and seek is a game of survival and one that they are forced to play to avoid being rounded up by the police and sent to residential homes, far away from their friends, communities and support networks. Just like our own games of hide and seek, the best hiding places are passed around – not between generations, but between groups of children, all of whom are looking for the best shadows to hide in to avoid being taken away.

As always, we have been overwhelmed and incredibly blessed by your response to our appeals to support our birth registration work. When we started this work in Guatemala back in 2013, we could never have imagined the support and solidarity that would be shown to invisible street children around the world by people like you. This support has since enabled us to expand this life-changing work into four of the seven countries where we currently work, which really is amazing – thank you.

This year, we have been truly amazed by the donations to our birth registration project appeals, focusing on Nepal and El Salvador. At the time of going to print, donations to both our Christmas Appeal and our BBC Radio 4 Appeal have helped to



SAG

raise **£245,113** to register children, providing them with their birth certificates and new opportunities away from the streets.

Every donation sent to Toybox is so special, as each one enables us to get one step closer to a world without street children. However, there is something incredibly special about the donations you give to help children receive their birth certificates and official names. The impact of such a simple thing is huge and your support is already changing the futures of children around the world.

As you may have heard, we are thrilled to be able to share that Kala (whose story you may have read or heard about in our appeal) has now received her birth certificate! Your support meant that our partner in Nepal was able to persevere with locating Kala's mother and work with her grandmother to secure all the correct documentation to register Kala and ensure she can officially exist.

We also received the news that Kala's mother has moved back to Nepal and Kala is now safely living with her. She is also attending school, which now she is officially registered, she can stay - for as long as she wants! In the future, Kala dreams of becoming a teacher and, now that she has her birth certificate, this dream really could become a reality.



JHUTA

So far, our partner in Nepal has already registered 13 children and are continuing to work on the cases of a further 10 children so that they too will hopefully be registered within the next few months. This long and complex process takes time as our partner works to identify unregistered children and build relationships with registration services and staff. Our partners in Latin America are also continuing their birth registration work, meaning that more children around the world can access the services they need and the opportunities they deserve.

Your support has helped to make all of this possible and we simply cannot thank you enough. Support like yours is changing the world for street children and we are so grateful to you for that.

There is still time to donate to our Christmas Appeal to help a street child in Nepal come out of hiding by giving them a truly life-changing gift – their birth certificate. Registration of a child is a one-off event, however the impact it can make is life-long. If you would like to make a donation to help another street child like Kala to receive their birth certificate, please visit www.toybox.org.uk/hideandseek or call **01908 360080** to donate today.



KALA



BAKANI

STREET CHILDREN IN CENTRAL AMERICA

CHILDREN IN CONFLICT?



CHILDREN SLEEPING IN GRAVES

Around the world, street children have different names. With descriptions ranging from urchin and street rat, to orphan and homeless child, the variety of guises under which people discuss this group of children is huge. How common is it however, for street children to be referred to as children in conflict? Toybox's Abbey Stewart investigates.

When discussing children in conflict, many words come to mind - child soldiers, guns, refugees, rebels... to name a few. Often, we associate children in conflict with the war zones we see on the news - Afghanistan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and beyond. However, if we dig below the immediate events and look at the day to day interactions with violence and the impact it has on children, could

street children in Central America be added to this list to encompass children in conflict?

I have spent the last ten years travelling to Central America, during which I have learned a lot about the factors that make this area a uniquely difficult and dangerous place to be a child. Over recent years, youth involvement in high-level gang violence in Central America has skyrocketed to some of the highest in the world; with five to 19-year-olds playing roles both as victims and perpetrators, more than ever before. While this statistic is shocking, sadly, it is not surprising, as gang warfare in the region regularly rocks the peace of daily life.

Street children in Guatemala and El Salvador face many similar challenges to children

in traditional conflict zones: neglect, abuse, addiction, hopelessness, lack of support systems, pressure from armed groups and lack of access to basic needs including food, water and shelter. These factors contribute to children in both groups having to mature more quickly than they would if they were in a safe loving environment, whilst simultaneously denying them opportunities to develop life skills and knowledge they may learn in school or through groups and activities. Childhoods are often discarded out of necessity, which in turn, denies children the opportunity to develop as they would otherwise.

Street children are vulnerable, exploitable and malleable to the desires of the adults who may come along to take advantage of their isolation and, much like

children in conflict who join rebel groups, street children in Central America often seek solace and protection in gangs. This is generally more through necessity than choice; either they are forced to join by gang members themselves or they deem it a necessary survival mechanism so they aren't killed for refusing - a virtually impossible decision that any of us would struggle to make.

For children used to having to care for themselves, gangs offer a network to rely on, protection, a sense of belonging and access to basic needs. Initiation into gangs is often non-negotiable yet gradual; what starts off as being a look-out for intruders on gang turf can quickly turn into assassination tasks with a simple ultimatum attached - it's them or you. Child soldiers have spoken

about similar tasks in various war zones around the world, leaving no doubt as to the similarity of the challenges faced by street children in Central America.

These challenges are part of the reason why Toybox works in Central America. Our projects work with children and young people living in some of the most notorious gang communities and aim to support children who are already on the streets (and sometimes already involved in gang activities), as well as those who are at-risk. Toybox projects give children the chance to gain skills, knowledge and education to empower them to stay off the streets. By gaining these experiences, children feel able to create fruitful futures where they can provide for themselves and achieve their dreams. They are also given the tools and knowledge so

that they do not need to rely on gangs to meet their needs.

Of course, change doesn't happen overnight. Street children have generally been exploited and exposed to situations which mean that it can take a while for them to even talk to outreach workers, let alone trust them to support them to leave the streets behind. However, by recognising the shared characteristics of street children in Central America and children in conflict zones around the world, support and programmes can be better adapted to support children more keenly in the reintegration processes so that they are able to deal with any traumatic experiences in the best way possible and work through ongoing issues in a safe environment.

Although the wars children on the streets of Central America are facing are less about bombs and smoking buildings, they are clearly still suffering through the violence inflicted by gangs. Toybox's partners always persevere to reach the most vulnerable children and young people who are growing up on some of the world's most violent streets. Your support is enabling this vital work to continue; helping to give street children someone they can always turn to for support and guidance.



MEET SHIRLEY

Shirley is a Social Worker for Toybox's birth registration project in Bolivia. Her day to day work involves identifying children and families who are unregistered and supporting them through the life-changing process of receiving their identity documents.

How long have you been a Social Worker and how did you get into this type of work?

I have been working with Alalay as a Social Worker for the past 18 months. Before this, I worked in Alalay's residential centres as a teacher for two years. When I was offered the job, I was thrilled because I knew that this work would have an immediate and lasting impact on street children and families and allow people to exercise their right to identity as well as education and health.

Tell us about your job. What do you do on a typical day?

On a normal day I do a wide range of activities and one day is always different to the next. Some of the activities in my job can include; identifying children who are unregistered through outreach and other activities on the streets and with families; referring cases to the social services when children need additional support; supporting children through the legal and administrative processes of getting their identity documents; teaching children about their rights including their right to an identity and how to access services once they are registered; and training registration offices on how to make their services more accessible and encouraging them to treat street children as a higher priority for registration.

What motivates and inspires you in your work?

My main motivation is the children who are on the streets right now who do not have their registration documents and, as a result, come across incredibly difficult circumstances. It is so rewarding to see the smiles on their faces when they get their birth certificates and realise that they can now go to school or see a doctor if they get sick.

Why did you want to be a Social Worker?

Since I was very little, I've always wanted to have a job that had an impact on changing society for the better. Even though it's only a tiny grain of sand in the wider scheme of things, I know that my work can improve people's lives and make a difference to some of the most vulnerable and overlooked.

What are the biggest challenges that you come across in your job?

One of the main challenges in my job is making sure that each case, however complicated, is treated with the detail that it deserves to ensure that a registration is always completed.

What do you think are the main challenges facing the children, families, and communities you work with?

The greatest challenge is encouraging children to stop taking drugs and drinking and leave the streets and move forward with their lives. It is also a challenge for many young people to rebuild good morals and ethics because of the many things they may have experienced on the streets.

Is there a particular child who has inspired you?

There isn't one child in particular who has inspired me - I do my work for every child and young person who I have met on the streets.

What has been your proudest moment whilst you have been a Social Worker for the birth registration project?

My proudest moment is always when I'm putting together case studies of the children who I've helped through the registration process who finally have their official identity documents. It is so rewarding to see them happy and grateful for their new identity.



BLANCA

5-year old Blanca was born on the streets where she lived until she was almost a year old. Fortunately, it was then that her grandmother was able to take her in, however because Blanca wasn't registered at birth, she wasn't accepted into pre-school and would often have to accompany her grandmother to work instead.

With Shirley's support, Blanca's grandmother was helped through the process of registering Blanca and she was able to receive her birth certificate. Blanca has since enrolled into pre-school where she loves singing songs and playing with her friends. For Blanca, and many other children like her, a birth certificate represents a lifetime of opportunities, away from the streets.



SPOTLIGHT ON:

VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN KENYA

Since Toybox's work in Nairobi began in 2015, we have been working to support children and families living in the city's notorious slum settlements; home to an estimated 2.5 million people. In this article Toybox's Emilie Hunter explores how Toybox-supported vocational training programmes are empowering young people, particularly young mothers, to find a pathway out of the slums and towards a brighter and more hopeful future.

The majority of children living in Nairobi's slums come from marginalised backgrounds and have little or no access to basic services. Many are cared for by young single mothers who may not have chosen to become parents and are not prepared for the role emotionally or financially. Some are still children themselves. Levels of unemployment in urban slums are high, particularly amongst women. For those who do find work, jobs are often unskilled, unstable and poorly paid. This leaves many unable to meet their own and their family's basic needs, which in turn, pushes children out onto the streets to live and work.

Children on the streets of Nairobi are exposed to some of the worst forms of child labour. Here, they are not only at-risk of abuse and exploitation on a daily basis, they are prevented from getting an education; damaging their future opportunities irreparably. For many, this results in an intergenerational cycle of poverty and street-life that is difficult to escape.

Isla is 19 and lives in the Korogocho slum, one of Nairobi's largest slum settlements. Growing up, Isla would often accompany her grandmother to work, collecting rubbish on the Dandora dumpsite. Reflecting on this time, Isla says, "It was really hard. The smell was awful, and we would often get injured. My grandmother would get very sick and I would skip school to take care of her. During the worst times, we used to eat leftover food collected from the dumpsite."

When Isla became pregnant at 15, she left school entirely. In Kenya, and in many of the other countries where Toybox works, girls who fall pregnant whilst still at school are often discriminated against and pushed out of the education system, where they are unlikely to return. This was the case for Isla, who returned to work on the dumpsite shortly after the birth of her son. When her grandmother sadly died, Isla became the sole carer of her young son and her eight-year old brother.

An important part of Toybox's work is helping to break the cycle of poverty that families like Isla's experience by improving opportunities for street children to go to school. However, for some young people on the streets, formal education is not always available or appropriate, or it may be too late for them to (re)enrol. Therefore, another key area of our work is helping young people to learn skills and prepare for, and access, safe and meaningful employment.



In Nairobi, as part of the Safe from the Streets project, street-connected young people living in slum communities, particularly young single mothers, can participate in professional vocational training courses in areas including hairdressing, catering, tailoring and mechanics. Throughout their training, they are supported by project staff and encouraged to join a mentoring programme where they can learn additional life-skills as well as receive counselling and support. Following completion of their courses, young people are supported to find formal employment or provided with start-up kits to help them set up their own small businesses.

As well as improving skills and opportunities for employment, these programmes help to build young people's confidence and self-worth and offer them a vital sense of purpose and hope. For many, this can mean the difference between a future where they feel excluded and disillusioned by society versus one where society values them, and they are empowered to contribute. Furthermore, by supporting young people to be better able to provide for themselves and meet their children's basic needs, children both now and in the future are no longer forced to turn to the streets for survival.

Since enrolling onto a catering course earlier this year, Isla has stopped working on the dumpsite and instead spends her time studying and running a small business peddling tea and snacks in her community; the income from which enables her to buy food for her family and cover the costs of childcare for her son and her brother's school fees. When asked about her ambitions, Isla smiles and says, "I wake up every day, believing the future is bright. Sometimes you just need someone to hold your hand and set you on the right path, and that changes everything."

ANNUAL REVIEW ROUND UP

Toybox's CEO Lynne Morris shares her highlights from the last financial year.

Last year, Toybox's projects reached 58,469 children, families and communities around the world. This is an outstanding achievement and I would like to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to you, our loyal supporters, as without you, this would simply not have been possible.

Other exciting news from the last year was that we began projects in two new countries – Sierra Leone and Nepal. In Sierra Leone, we are working with children forced onto the streets by poverty, abuse and the Ebola crisis. In Nepal, we are focused on helping children enslaved in child labour, working long hours in extremely dangerous conditions.

We have also continued our work with street children in Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia, India and Kenya, and a key focus area for us

once again has been our birth registration projects. I am delighted to share with you that, over the last five years, we have registered over 5,500 children in Latin America. This is something we are incredibly proud of and truly grateful to all those who have donated to support this life-changing work.

The uncertainty around Brexit has impacted our financial position throughout the year. However, despite the challenging and ever-changing environment, we still managed to raise £1,681,761 and spent £1,748,823 (including investment from reserves), with the best news here being that 10% more was sent to our projects and UK costs were reduced by 7%. 78p in every £1 was spent on our charitable activities, with 22p being invested into fundraising activities to help raise more money to reach more vulnerable children.

You can read more about our year in our Annual Report, which can be found on our website at www.toybox.org.uk/finances

As always - thank you so much for all of your support over the year.

58,469

CHILDREN, FAMILIES
& COMMUNITIES
REACHED

REBUILDING LIVES

TOYBOX IN SIERRA LEONE

In this eyewitness report, Emily Malcolm shares her experiences during her recent trip to Toybox's work in Sierra Leone, where she visited children and communities surviving the after-effects of the devastating Ebola crisis.

"5 years ago, I was at school... but then my mother and father died to Ebola, and everything changed. I had to drop-out and work on the streets to survive."

On my recent visit to Toybox's work in Sierra Leone, I heard this heartbreaking story again and again. Everyone in Sierra Leone seems to know someone who has lost someone to Ebola. With its 60% mortality rate, the disease heightened the already existing vulnerability of the country, which was still recovering from over a decade of vicious civil war. Ebola shook Sierra Leone to the core, taking the lives of almost 4,000 people and leaving behind over 12,000 orphaned children. Four years on, the epidemic is still having major consequences, particularly on the younger generation.



Many children in Sierra Leone are living or working on the streets because of Ebola and its effects. On the streets of Freetown, I spoke to a group of young boys who are being supported through our local partner's street outreach work. They were bright and articulate, with a good level of English which they told me they had learnt at school - before Ebola hit. Now, instead of going to school, they were sweeping the streets to survive. When I asked where any of the girls on the streets were, I was told most of them sleep during the day as they do most of their work at night.

I met Gloria, who is 15 and lost both of her parents to Ebola when she was just ten-years old. When this happened, Gloria lived on the streets for a while before an elder in her village took her into their care. However, during this time she struggled with losing her independence and as a result, soon turned back to the streets to escape. Alone and in need of a way to earn money to survive, Gloria soon became involved in commercial sex work.

There is no quick fix to incredibly complex situations like these. Yet one of the ways Toybox are working to rebuild the lives of street children and young people in Sierra Leone is by supporting them to enrol into school. Education is known as a key to change. And I saw this to be true for many of the children and young people, like Gloria, who proudly told me that now with support from our project, she has enrolled back into school, where she really enjoys mathematics and science.

Another part of Toybox's work in Sierra Leone is supporting caregivers of street-connected children to help them improve their financial stability by setting up community-led savings groups. Savings from these groups can then

be used to support some of the costs involved in sending children to school, like paying for school uniforms and textbooks. Group members are also able to use these savings to set-up small business ventures and for a social fund which can be used if they or their children fall ill.

On one of Freetown's many dumpsites, a group of mothers meet each week to facilitate their savings group. These women, like thousands of others across the city, earn a living through sifting through waste in search of items that can be swapped or sold. Some of the women live on the dumpsite with their families, in shelters formed below piles of burning rubbish. It is terrifying to think how much living and working in this way must affect their own and their children's health. Despite the hardship this group of women face, they welcomed me with open arms from the moment I met them, with

song and dance being our shared language. This contagious joy, despite every challenge life has thrown at them, epitomises the amazing heart of the people of Sierra Leone.

This group of incredible women, as well as Gloria and the many other children and young people I met in communities and on the streets in

Sierra Leone, filled me with a resounding feeling of hope - for the children and families in our project, and beyond. Since

Toybox's work in Sierra Leone began in April last year, 100 children have already been enrolled into school. This year, there will be 100 more. There will also be further support for caregivers of street and at-risk children to improve their financial security, and a focus on providing outreach to some of the most vulnerable children living and working on the streets to help them move towards a more hopeful future.



REFLECTION:

FINDING THE GOOD

Pushed from home due to a breakdown in family relationships, Choco has lived on and off the streets of La Paz for almost 15 years. On the streets, he earns money by washing windscreens at traffic lights and performing his own songs, poetry and raps. At night, he sleeps in makeshift camp under a bridge.

For the past five years, Choco has been supported by the street outreach project in Bolivia, where he attends life-skills workshops and receives healthcare and psychological support. Here, Choco shares a personal reflection with us on how to find the good in ourselves and each other.

I never used to feel good in myself. Lots of people recognised me, but they didn't know my name or that I had goodness inside me. They only knew that I robbed, and thought I was a nobody.

[Since joining the project], I feel so much better. I think that I can face anything that comes to me, and I think of myself as a



productive person who can have a positive impact on the world. I now believe that I can add something to society and that when people look at me, they can see the good in me.

Because I no longer steal or take drugs as much as others around me - my life has changed. I have learned that the values I have can be shared with others and that it is important to do so. It doesn't matter what other people think of you, as long as you know you are a good person and not hurting anyone.

Everybody can teach themselves to be a good person if they really want to. Every day, it is possible to get a little bit better; through who we talk to, through the games we play, and through the good and the bad things that happen to us, they all help us to learn and use our experiences to grow and improve our lives.

There are moments when you think that you can't keep going and that everything is just going to get worse, but you just have to trust in yourself and everything can get better.

To find out more about how our street outreach projects are supporting children and young people like Choco, please visit www.toybox.org.uk/our-work



TOYBOX

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THEIR MOST BASIC RIGHTS AT THEIR
MOST VULNERABLE MOMENTS**

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Together we can change the world for street children.