



# HELLO!

## A warm welcome to the latest issue of Street Life.

### Emergency appeal update

You may remember earlier this summer I wrote to you asking for your help with an emergency appeal we launched in response to the upsurge in gang violence in Guatemala and El Salvador, which has left many of the children we work with at-risk. Your response to this appeal so far has been truly humbling and both myself and the wider team here at Toybox are in awe of the kindness you have shown despite the incredibly difficult times we find ourselves in. At the time of going to print on this issue of Street Life, the appeal had raised over £117,000 and I want to take this opportunity to personally thank you for the part you have played in helping to protect vulnerable children from the influence of these gangs.

Your generosity is ensuring children in San Salvador like Fabiola and Ricardo are given the support and care they need during this critical time. Fabiola and Ricardo both have parents who work at one of the city's busy central covered markets and, as a result, spend a lot of their spare time in this environment. Over the last few years, the market has fallen into disrepair and is now known as being a space where some of the country's most notorious criminal gangs have a presence.

Thanks to support like yours, Fabiola and Ricardo have been attending a Toybox-supported project which provides them with a safe space to escape from the challenges and negative influences surrounding them at the market and on the streets. Under the patient and watchful eye of our wonderful project workers, children get help with their homework, and have the chance to play games, read books, and get creative; enjoying a range of arts and crafts activities. They also have the chance to learn about their rights and ways to keep safe. This support is a real lifeline to vulnerable children who risk being caught up in gang activity. Ricardo told us,

"Before, I used to use a lot of bad words, but now I just want to do good things. I'm better at maths and I always do my homework. The project is my favourite place. I feel so happy when I'm here." Thank you so much for the kindness you have shown at this time and for helping to keep vulnerable children safe.





### **New partnership launches in Guatemala City**

I am pleased to share that we have recently launched a project with a new partner in Guatemala City. Puerta de Esperanza (Door of Hope) is delivering a new Toybox funded project called "You can be different", based at La Terminal, the largest market in Central America. The project is focused on supporting 9 to 13-year-olds who live in the area, many of whom work part time to support their families through informal jobs such as rubbish recycling, street vending and packing and unloading vans. This daily connection with the street exposes children to multiple forms of violence such as sexual and labour exploitation, human trafficking, and the risk of being recruited by criminal organisations linked to drug trafficking. The project is addressing this challenge by working with children to increase their resilience, nurture their existing skills and reduce the pull to a life on the streets.

We are really excited about this new partnership and what we can learn together. Puerta de Esperanza are well known and highly regarded within the community and have already built strong relationships of trust with the children and families through the creation of safe places for children to learn and play. This new project will enable the team

to take a group of children through a process that concludes with them designing and implementing their own project, showing them that they can be part of change in their own community. We look forward to sharing more news and stories from this project with you over the coming months.

### **Education in Sierra Leone**

Finally, as children and young people here in the UK begin a new academic year, with the opportunity to learn and develop key skills that will support them for life, I was again reminded of how many of the children and young people we work alongside face so many barriers to attend school. Inside, we share an update on some of the life-changing work that is currently underway in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, supporting street children to get an education. The project is seeing some positive progress and has really benefited from establishing strong relationships with influential community members, who play a significant role in the day-to-day lives of street children.

I do hope you enjoy this issue of Street Life and once again thanks for everything you do to support street children around the world.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne" with a small heart and a flourish below it.

Lynne Morris OBE  
Toybox CEO



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[www.toybox.org.uk](http://www.toybox.org.uk)



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# HELPING CHILDREN FROM THE STREET TO SCHOOL IN SIERRA LEONE

The Toybox-supported 'Pul Pikin Na Trit For Learn' project, which is Krio for Take children from the street to school, has been operating in Freetown for just over a year and is run by Toybox partner Saint George Foundation Sierra Leone (SGF). Through their work on the streets, SGF staff identified a number of children who might benefit from involvement in the programme and they worked closely with local school authorities to negotiate their enrolment. For this first year, a total of 120 children were successfully enrolled into school.

This was a significant achievement – as SGF's project worker Mabinty (above, right) explained, "The enrolment brought so much excitement to the children. Many had been out of school for the past three to four years as there had been no provision from the government to support street children, which in turn had deterred many of them from accessing school. Originally the school authorities were not willing to enrol street children into their schools because people in the local community believe that street children are criminals. They believed that their enrolment would cause a negative effect on the other children." However, the SGF team were undeterred and gave the school authorities assurance that as part of the project they would be regularly monitoring and supporting the children while they attended. This resulted in the authorities finally agreeing to the children's admission.

Project staff knew the costs associated with purchasing the basic materials required for school would be another major barrier for

many of the children. Therefore all children in the project were given the essentials they needed, including school uniform, shoes, bags, exercise books and stationery. Over the past 12 months, the team have continued to speak-up on behalf of these children. Mabinty explained, "One major reason responsible for children not going to school is the high demand of school authorities for money, especially for extra charges like development fees, sports, thanksgiving, printed pamphlets sold to children by their various subject teachers, money for extra lessons and feeding." SGF's work has resulted in many waiving some of the additional costs that are affecting the education of children. The project is certainly making an encouraging start and has seen high numbers of participants stick with the programme. Mabinty continued, "I have been able to ensure that 90% of the original children are still in school. This is because they now trust me and are always willing to share their problems with me anytime I visit their homes and schools."

Yayah Kamara oversees the 'Pul Pikin Na Trit For Learn' project. He explained how engaging key members of the community has helped ensure the best possible outcomes for street children involved in the project.



YAYAH

"As part of the project it has been really important to work with the 'bras and 'sisys'\* in the areas we work. Their role on the street is effectively a guardian to the street children, so if we educate them well about the role they have with the children, it can have a phenomenal impact on the children's education. When they are not educated on how to take care of the children, some of the bras and sisys have tended to misuse the children at some point. The bras ask the children to go out and scout for food or for money – in any way – by stealing or pickpocketing - and in return, they offer the children protection.

Many of the sisys run small food stalls and they have the children washing dishes. In return the children are fed and are able to sleep around the front of the shops.

We engage with the bras and sisys and educate them about the negative impact that getting these children to sell drugs or scout for money is having. Some of them take this education very seriously and they now tend to play a parental role. So now, instead of sending them out, they are ensuring that the children are going to school. When we visit the communities, they give us updates on the children's attendance - they are now really helping us to ensure that the children go to school."

After escaping an abusive home life, 16-year-old Archpong has been on the streets for six years. To earn enough money to survive, he works as a cleaner on the ferries that operate out of one of Freetown's busiest ports. In return for food, he also helps his sisys\* with her businesses. In September 2021, Archpong first met SGF who have supported him in going to school. Archpong shares,

"Life on the streets is hard. The biggest challenges for children are lack of access to medical facilities, being in constant conflict with the law and not having proper shelter. Children feel sad when they have no food to eat and being at sea in the ferry boats makes us feel unsafe. Before I knew SGF, I felt hopeless and I lost focus. I wanted a better future and to go to school to get a better life – this is why I started going to the project.



ARCHPONG

At the project, I've learned that education can help me become what I want to be in life. I've also learned that I should not give up too easily. The thing I enjoy most about the project is my schooling – going to school gives me unending joy. The enrolment process was difficult because schools were not willing or ready to accommodate street kids, especially kids from the ferry terminal. But Saint George staff constantly assured them of good behaviour from us once we were accepted. When that happened, I felt good. I felt that at last, I have the chance to follow my dreams.

In the first and second terms after enrolment I've taken the second position twice in my class. At the project and through school, I've learned to believe in myself and be positive. I've also learned to be friendly with others. Now I feel happy – I believe it's now possible for me to achieve my dreams. In the future, I hope to become a military officer."

# STORIES

Jose has called the streets of Freetown home for the last four years. She left home, aged 11 after both her parents passed away. In September 2021 Jose met a member of the street team from SGF and her journey back to school began.

"I needed help to change my story which is why I engaged with the project. I get mental health support, educational support and training on good menstrual hygiene practices. I've learned about care, love and compassion at the project because that's what I get from the SGF team and my new friends at the project. This love, care and friendship is the thing I enjoy most about coming to the project. SGF helped me to enrol in school. The enrolment process was difficult because I had no previous academic record so it was challenging for me to be accepted into the class I wanted



JOSE

to be in. But thanks to the SGF staff, I got in because they didn't relent at all.

My favourite thing about school is the empowerment. School gives me hope and I believe I can do anything I want in life once I'm educated. It gives us knowledge\* and I believe that knowledge is power. My life has changed since coming to the project – I've stopped doing most of the things I used to do, especially smoking.

I have learned to believe in myself. Now I believe it's possible to achieve my dreams. I hope to become a medical doctor in the future. Street children do not have access to medical facilities so I will establish one to help them."

To read Archpong and Jose's stories in full, please visit [www.toybox.org.uk/stories](http://www.toybox.org.uk/stories)

# PRAY WITH US

Toybox's Director of Impact and Programmes, Naomi Hall Opiyo, recently returned from a trip to Nepal, where she was able to see some of the birth registration work underway in Kathmandu and hear first-hand about some of the challenges associated with obtaining a birth certificate in Nepal.

"During my trip I was amazed to hear of the significant complexities surrounding the issue of birth registration in Nepal. For example, even though there are policies in place, practical difficulties, such as how local government officials' understanding and personal judgement, influences the processing of birth certificates. I heard how legally a mother can register her child, yet because culturally it's a very patriarchal system, local government officials often expect the father to do so and may reject the case unless a relative on the father's side is involved. I also heard how having a birth certificate in Nepal entitles you to land and property rights. Whilst this is a good thing, for children whose parents have passed away or cannot be found, it means that other relatives are often reluctant to agree that they are related and to sign the documentation for them to get their birth certificate as they are afraid this will mean they have to share their property or land."



## PLEASE JOIN US IN PRAYING FOR:

- Toybox partner, SathSath as they navigate the challenges and bureaucracy surrounding the registration process and work with the Government for needed improvements to the system - particularly for vulnerable children.
- For children and parents to not lose hope that they will access their identity documentation one day.

\*Bras (slang for brothers) and Sisys (sisters) are leaders of small groups of children and young people living on the streets. They are often older adults who have grown up on the streets too who 'adopt' younger street children to do jobs for them in return for safety, shelter, protection and food.

# REFLECTION

**Roz Elliott, Programme Manager for Latin America, recently returned from a trip to Guatemala. Here she shares a reflection on her time visiting Toybox's partner CONACMI and stories from some of the children whose lives are being helped to change.**

I walk beside Miriam as the group of adolescents show us around their community. As we walk, the kids chat. It's not the usual topic of conversation – instead they are debating when the last murder took place in their area, and who was the victim. This is Santa Faz, a designated 'red zone' in Guatemala City.

A few metres away from our partner's building where they run a range of project activities, there is a blood stain on the road. A young man was killed there just last night – he was 20 years old. They say it's because his mother couldn't pay a gang extortion fee. Tragically for these children, fatalities amongst people they know are all too common are all too common.

Toybox partner CONACMI offers a safe space to the children and young people of Santa Faz. Their building is a mass of bright colours, many of the walls painted by the children themselves. Children and young people come here for advice, to learn, and in some cases for therapy to deal with consequences of abuse. Many of these children live in unstable family environments and are often escaping violence or abuse at home.

During my trip, I hear encouraging stories of success too. I meet Eli, 22, who has been off drugs for a year now. Various factors contributed to his journey away from the street, but he talks of his personal decision and will to forge a new life for himself. This, alongside the encouragement and support of a local pastor who has given him a home, have been key to his rehabilitation. CONACMI met Eli many years ago. When his mother died, Eli ended up in a children's home, where he suffered abuse, so escaped to a life on the streets. He talks calmly to me of these horrors, but it is clear he is still working through them. He shares how one day someone offered him water, but instead threw petrol over him and set him alight.



Simply because he was a street child. Fortunately, Eli received the medical attention he needed quickly and CONACMI supported him as he recovered, however he still carries both the physical and

mental scars. Now, through the help of our partner, Eli's studying an intensive English course to help him secure a job on a cruise ship. His life is transformed and he has hope for a happier and safer future.



I was amazed by the courage of these children in the face of their daily struggles and overwhelmed by the dedication of our partner staff. Each activity may seem small but contributes to offering a different life for these children and helping them to reach their full potential. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of their journey.



Registered charity number 1084243

All children's names have been changed to protect their identities

Thank you to our partners SGF and Viva El Salvador for capturing the photos used in this edition of Street Life

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