



**“I LIKE HAVING A PET  
BECAUSE I CAN SPEND  
TIME WITH THEM AND  
THEY GIVE ME SO MUCH  
LOVE IN RETURN.”**

# HELLO!

**A warm welcome to your latest issue of Street Life and a very happy New Year to you.**

## **Your compassion knows no boundaries**

Where do I begin?! From the very bottom of my heart, thank you for opening your heart to Toybox, and to children, who through no fault of their own have ended up on the streets.

Your unwavering belief that all children deserve a fighting chance helps push open so many doors for unrecognised street children, like Alma (featured below).

Your kindness has given the divine gift of opportunity to many more unregistered children, previously trapped in a cycle of hopelessness; unable to go to school or access medical care.

In the lead up to Christmas, despite the dark, economically challenging times we faced, your compassion shone brightly. You have helped to raise over £215,595 to register street children around the world. Now, thanks you, children like Alma in San Salvador have their birth certificates and can finally have the start in life they deserve.

Thank you once again for your steadfast belief in the transformative power of registering street children.

## **Alma's story**

Alma was born into an incredibly chaotic life on the streets of San Salvador. She was raised by her mother, Bessie, who struggled with alcohol dependency and, as a result, was unable to feed or care for Alma herself.

Alma's maternal grandmother, Vinciana heard that Alma and her siblings were often left alone for long periods and tried many times to help and take the young children to her house to care for them. By the time Alma was three, the situation for her and her siblings had deteriorated further and Vinciana was officially granted custody of her and her brothers.

Free from her life on the streets, as Alma grew older, she began to sharply feel the sorrow of not being registered as a baby.

"My parents didn't get my birth certificate for me when I was little - I think just because they didn't want to. It made me feel so sad because I didn't feel like I legally belonged in my country. Not having my birth certificate meant I wasn't legally recognised and I couldn't go to school very easily because they wouldn't accept me without proof of who I was.

Now I've got my birth certificate, I feel happy because when I'm older, I'll be able to do my dream job. I want to have a good job and I want to be bilingual! Now I can go to school, and go to other places to play, and can legally work when I'm older."



## Tackling malnutrition in Guatemala and Kenya

I wanted to take this opportunity to also express my gratitude for your resolve. Thanks to you, we are funding two new start-up projects in Guatemala and Kenya. These projects are focusing on addressing malnutrition and hunger, which have unfortunately been on the rise in many of the communities we work due to global inflation and rapidly rising prices, especially of food and energy, which are causing hardship for households, particularly for the poor and marginalised.

In Guatemala, as part of our emergency response efforts, we are supporting 75 malnourished children by offering nutrition supplements to families, as well as running education sessions and monthly clinics where caregivers can take their children to be weighed. Families at the project are also learning how to grow fruit and vegetables in limited spaces to support dietary diversity. They are also being taught basic business skills to help them sell their produce effectively.

In Kenya, we are trialling a new initiative working with young people on the streets to create urban farms. Through the project, young people are trained in urban farm techniques and supported to grow produce, with the hope that this could become a long-term business for them in the future.

I look forward to sharing further news and stories from these start-up projects with you in the coming months.

## The healing power of pets

Finally, as you know, here at Toybox we regularly share the stories of street children from our projects and look at why initiatives focused on health, education and birth registration are so important for their development and well-being. Inside this issue of Street Life, we explore well-being from a slightly different angle. Do turn over to hear directly from some of the children you are supporting, as they share their

perspective on the difference owning a pet has made to their lives. I was particularly touched by the positive difference pet ownership is making to children's feelings of loneliness.

Thank you so much for your ongoing concern for children living on the margins of society. You continue to bring hope and opportunities to children when they most need it - and I couldn't be more grateful for your support at this time.

Yours,



Lynne Morris OBE  
Toybox CEO



To see all our latest news and for regular updates, please visit our website  
[www.toybox.org.uk](http://www.toybox.org.uk)

## RELIEVING LONELINESS WITH

# FURRY FRIENDS

When everything else in a street child's life is falling apart, pets can show the love and affection they may never have experienced before. For children living on the fringes of society, companionship plays a key role in supporting wellbeing and mental health. While children often form strong friendships with others they encounter on the streets, in many cases, it can be a child's connection with a pet that offers the greatest comfort. Many children who are forced to live or work on the streets have escaped unimaginably abusive home lives, yet a life on the streets can be equally unpredictable and dangerous. Stray animals are often adopted by children who go on to form special and unique bonds with these animals, who quickly become their pet.



ESTHER

Toybox partners have seen first-hand the positive impact that pets can bring for street children. As Esther Mwangi, from PKL, explains, "In Kenya, owning a pet is perceived as a preserve of the rich because buying and caring for an animal that does not bring financial benefits is seen as counterproductive. The therapeutic impact of pets is always seen as a western concept and less appreciated. But, among the street connected children (specifically boys), this has been a little different.

Dogs have been embraced as pets and have become members of their bases\*. Since street connected children often feel ostracised by society, they tend to feel that they share a

similar fate with stray dogs and seem to form a strong bond with them. Some pets are group pets (cared for by the entire base) and some are individual pets, where one child assumes overall responsibility for the animal.

Children who own pets in the bases have exhibited a higher level of kindness and care. They are more protective of younger children in the bases. One child reported being less lonely when he is with his pet because he can talk to the pet and the pet can give him company wherever he goes."

The positive impact that a pet can make to a street child's well-being is remarkable. Esther continues, "A few children who own pets have shown a reduced intake of drugs. They report that when playing with their pets they feel happier and do not feel stressed, and therefore they use drugs less, since they mostly turn to drugs when stressed. Generally, pets have been seen to give the children some sort of a purpose as they feel the pets look up to them for care, protection and food and they must ensure they measure up to this expectation. This tends to make them happier and feel a sense of achievement."

*\*Children on the streets in Nairobi live with peers/family in groups in open spaces they identify as safe. These 'bases' are normally located in unused public spaces such as flyovers or disused land.*

**"HE PROTECTS US FROM DANGEROUS PEOPLE AND COMES TO WORK WITH ME WHEN I'M LOOKING FOR SCRAP" - KANCHA**

## ISHMAEL & WHITE TEE



# STORIES

**Kancha has lived on the streets of Kathmandu for many years after conflict between his parents at home caused him to run away. A few years ago, Kancha adopted a street dog, a German Shepherd cross he named Baby, who lives with him and his friends in a shelter they constructed and now call home.**

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Toybox's partner Sath Sath met Kancha on the streets during an emergency outreach session and supported him with first aid, clothes and food. More recently, Kancha has also started regularly attending the learning centre, where he receives support with his studies.

"Living on the street is hard because there is lots of discrimination and bad behaviour towards us as street children from the community. They hate us and think we are very bad people who drink and use drugs and steal from them. As children, we are naturally weaker than adults so they think they can bully us. Whenever we are outside someone's shop or house, they tell us to go away and to stop disturbing them and their business. It's hard.

I love my friends. We all live together with our dogs. I love dogs so much. Spending time with Baby and our other dogs makes me so happy, I really try to spend time with him every day. It's fun playing with him. He also protects us from dangerous people and comes to work with me when I'm looking for scrap. I think having a dog has made me more loving, caring and happy. He's taught me how to be friendly and loyal too."



KANCHA & BABY

**Himanshu's family lives in a precarious slum community which is nestled right up alongside one of the busiest railway lines in and out of Delhi. As the youngest of five brothers, 10-year-old Himanshu was often left alone while his mother and brothers went off to work.**

Since the beginning of 2022 however, his loneliness has been helped by two things - his new involvement in a project run by Toybox's partner in India, CHETNA, and his deepening relationship with his dog, Julie.

"For as long as I can remember, all my family have always all gone out to work, leaving me at home on my own. Before, I felt so lonely and had no one to play with or spend my time with. Then, four years ago, I got Julie, my pet dog. Now I play with her and spend most of my time with her - since I've had her, I never feel lonely anymore as I always have someone to play with and take care of. I've provided her with a place to sleep and I feed her. During the winter when it's cold, I wrap her in woollen clothes to keep warm. And I make sure that she doesn't run onto the railway tracks all of a sudden. She listens to my commands and makes me feel happy. I have learnt what it means to care for someone. She teaches lessons for my lifetime and helps me learn to be faithful and respect others."



HIMANSHU & JULIE

**In September 2021, Ishmael, 14, first met Toybox partner, Saint George Foundation Sierra Leone (SGF). At the time, Ishmael was being cared for by his bra\*, a local nightclub owner, and would often work and sleep at the venue. SGF supported Ishmael to enrol back in school and through his involvement with the project, successfully passed his end of year exams.**

"I live with my bra\* and his wife in Freetown. Before, I was on the street and life was tough. Children like me face a lot of difficulties like joblessness, drug abuse, gambling and pressure to work in the commercial sex trade.

The community is not friendly to us, and we suffer a lot, mainly for lack of basic social services like no access to water or healthcare.

I've had my dog for four months since I rescued him off the street. His name is White Tee. I love having dogs and he makes me feel happy. We always have fun, even when I'm sad. He comes with me when I'm on the street to prevent attacks from other animals. He does eat a lot though!"

*\*In Sierra Leone, a bra is an informal guardian. They often 'adopt' younger street children to do chores and errands in return for shelter, food and protection.*

**"SINCE I'VE HAD HER, I NEVER FEEL LONELY ANYMORE AS I ALWAYS HAVE SOMEONE TO PLAY WITH AND TAKE CARE OF" - HIMANSHU**

**Naomi Hall Opiyo, Toybox's Director of Impact and Programmes shares her thoughts on the role pets have played in the lives of street children during the pandemic.**

"Neither ourselves or our partners explicitly encourage pets to promote or enhance children's wellbeing. As any pet owner knows, the task comes with responsibility - a time and financial cost to ensure the animal's wellbeing which is not always easy- or possible. However, as these stories illustrate- and as our own or children's experiences of looking after pets may have taught us- it can have huge positive benefits emotionally, mentally and even physically. For children with so few material possessions, so little consistency and a life of hardship, trauma and abuse- a pet can provide that unconditional love and friendship they may never have known. A pet may also help them to love and care for others when they haven't experienced it for themselves.

In the past six months, myself and my colleagues have been fortunate to have been travelling again to some of the cities where Toybox works. Each of us came back from different countries with stories of the companionship which was evident between children and their pets (mainly dogs). Given the loneliness and additional stress experienced during the pandemic, these furry friends have been more important than ever. There is also something very special about the way children and their dogs "choose" each other as their companion - both homeless, abandoned and searching the streets for food but feeling safe and secure in each other's company. These friendships haven't needed Toybox or our partners to make possible but they have given some stability for children to engage in complementary interventions such as education and counselling."

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION YOU ARE CHANGING LIVES**

To read more stories of children and their pets go to [www.toybox.org/stories](http://www.toybox.org/stories)

# REFLECTION

**As we enter a new year, Team Toybox share some reflections on what they were thankful for in 2022 and their hopes for this year...**

**Lynne:** I have been thankful for how our partners engage with us and that the children allow us to tell their stories. I'm also grateful for the loyalty of our supporters and the kindness they show me with their notes and letters. My prayer for 2023 is for a stable government and stable economy, that the impact on Toybox of declining foreign exchange rates is reduced and



that our supporters feel they can continue to support street children.



**Jenny:** I'm really thankful for all that we heard from our partners about the lives that are being changed. My prayer for this year

is that children may have the opportunity and the courage to speak out about their rights.

**Roz:** I'm thankful for the opportunity I had to meet project participants and partner staff face-to-face and see first-hand the difference our projects are making. My prayer for this year is for the health and safety of partner staff as they work tirelessly to promote the rights of children and families in street situations.



**Carol:** I am so thankful for the easing of covid restrictions in the UK and across the world that has allowed us to get back to working together in the office and travelling to visit our partners abroad again. My hope for this year is that we continue to receive great support from donors to allow us to further the work with street children and improve the situations of many more children.



**Naomi:** I am so thankful for the kindness and generous spirits of our supporters. My hope for this year is that we have the opportunity to continue to change the world for children in street situations.

As a team we are all so grateful for the kindness, encouragement, prayers and donations we receive from supporters like you. Thank you!

Watch a short message of thanks from some of the children at our projects as well as Team Toybox at [www.toybox.org.uk/thanks](http://www.toybox.org.uk/thanks)