

**“I DIDN’T
UNDERSTAND
WHY I DIDN’T
HAVE MY BIRTH
CERTIFICATE.”**



STREET LIFE | ISSUE 19

See the difference you are making to street children across the world



TOYBOX

Changing the world
for street children

HELLO!

A very warm welcome to your latest issue of Street Life.

Celebrating 10,000 lives positively changed

I wanted to start this new year edition of Street Life by sharing the wonderful story of nine-year-old Anaya from Bolivia – the 10,000th birth registration your support of Toybox has made possible.

Little did I know before we embarked on our first birth registration project in Guatemala City back in 2013 that this small piece of paper – a simple birth certificate – could be quite so transformative in the lives of the children we work alongside.

Meet Anaya

Born on the streets of Bolivia, Anaya's mother abandoned her when she was only one month old. Anaya and her maternal grandmother sold sweets on the streets and recycled containers to make a living. Before she was registered, Anaya faced an impossible challenge to get an education, "I couldn't be enrolled in school like the other children. I could only go to school and listen, but I couldn't pass to the next grade and they did not give me the school breakfast."

Once our local partner Alalay, identified that Anaya needed support, it took almost three years to obtain the necessary documentation for registration. Their tireless efforts paid off though and in late 2023, Anaya became the 10,000th child to receive their birth registration as a result of your support.



Anaya shared, "I didn't understand why I didn't have my birth certificate and it was difficult for many years without my identity documents. Now I am happy because I can be enrolled in school! I want to study to be a lawyer, because I want to help all children to have identity documents like me."

This significant milestone is one that we know has only been possible through the loyalty and kindness of our wonderful supporters like you. Thank you for your belief in the transformative power of birth registration and for standing alongside Toybox and our partners during this journey. You are helping to ensure that street children everywhere get the start in life they deserve.

You are opening doors

Your deep-rooted compassion for the millions of street children still waiting for their birth certificates is felt deeply by me and the wider team at Toybox HQ in the lead-up to Christmas. Opening your beautiful and heartfelt messages of support was such a gift and I am truly thankful for all that you do.

I was particularly struck by a message of hope we received for a child who was about to get registered, which said, "Life as you would want it begins TODAY! Everything is possible. Be happy and loved by those around you."

As a supporter of Toybox, you are opening doors for the most marginalised. You help children to realise their human rights and make sure they are legally protected. At the time of going to print, our birth registration Christmas appeal had raised £170,320.

Thank you for bringing safety, dignity and opportunity to street children right across the world. I am so thankful for all your support.

Providing Emergency food relief in Guatemala City

In August, presidential elections in Guatemala resulted in a landslide victory for Bernardo Arevalo. Since then, the President elect and his Semila party have been subjected to a series of attacks, seemingly aimed at preventing them forming the next government. By October, the public was calling on senior government officials to resign. Protests escalated to widespread demonstrations and road blockages nearly brought the country to a halt.

Limitations on movement meant that food supplies were not arriving, and the families we work with were unable to purchase items to sell in the La Terminal market to earn an income. Our local partner, Puerta de Esperanza became extremely concerned for the health of the children they support because they knew that if families were not earning, they would not be eating.

When we shared this prayer request online with our supporters, many were moved to action. Your unexpected generosity enabled us to quickly respond to the crisis and send an emergency grant to Puerta de Esperanza to support a short-term project providing emergency hot meals to those who found themselves with nothing to eat.

The children and families were extremely grateful for the support. Puerta de Esperanza confirmed that parents and caregivers are now able to work again, though the prices of some basic food items have stayed at the elevated level caused by the continued instability.

Reuniting families

Inside this issue you can read more about our work supporting children to leave the streets and return home to their families.

We know that the streets are no place for a child and that it puts them at risk of abuse and exploitation. So, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, our partners work with children and their caregivers to carefully support them through a process of reconciliation and reintegration with their families and the wider community.



This is complex and is certainly not a straightforward process. However, there is always much celebration at Toybox and with our partners when a successful reintegration takes place. We know when this happens a child will be much safer from

violence, discrimination, hunger and cold. Inside, I am thrilled to be able to share Syan's story with you – a young boy from Nepal who through the support of our local partner SathSath, has recently returned home to his family.

Thank you so much for making achievements like this possible. Together we are changing the world for street children.

Yours,

Lynne Morris OBE
Toybox CEO



To see all our latest news and for regular updates, please visit our website www.toybox.org.uk

Syan (left), talks with project worker Sunil.

“NOW I UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF FAMILY.”

In Spring 2023, 14-year-old Syan ran away from home, following in the footsteps of friends who had left the rural Nepalese village they lived in, in search of a better life.

Arriving in Kathmandu, Syan spent his days roaming the city streets, collecting scrap and begging. Day-to-day he was only able to make a small amount of money, which often wasn't enough to buy food. Life on the streets was incredibly hard for Syan, he explains, "I felt so alone - I had no one to share my problems with." Sometimes other boys would steal the little money he had been able to make.

When Sunil, (a project worker for Toybox local partner SathSath), came across Syan, he saw that Syan had an injury on his arm, sustained when he had been trying to hide from the police*. Sunil cleaned Syan's wound and gave him something to eat. During their conversation, Syan explained that he had run away from home. He explained how he regretted this and wanted to return home but could not recall many details about where he was from or how to get back.

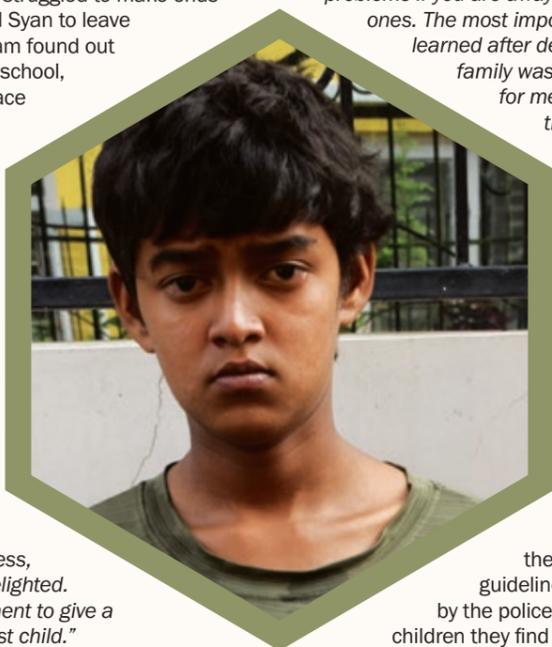
The outreach team made a commitment to meet Syan again the next day at the same time and place. However, when they returned the following day, he was no longer there. Fortunately, after continuous searching, the team came across Syan again a few days later in another area of the city. He had spent the whole night begging and was in a dire state

- hungry and exhausted, having lost all his money. The outreach team took him to their head office, where they gave him breakfast. There they had the opportunity to find out about Syan's background. Syan's mother had passed away and his family struggled to make ends meet, which had led Syan to leave home. When the team found out the name of Syan's school, they were able to trace its location. They coordinated with the head teacher and were then able to contact his family.

Sunil recalls, "The one moment that we cannot forget is when Syan's father saw his son. His eyes filled with tears. He was not able to speak a single word due to happiness, and his face was delighted. It is a real achievement to give a parent back their lost child."

Syan is now living safely back at home with his family and is back to studying in the village school. Syan's hope for the future is to join the

Nepali army and serve his country. "My role model is Jackie Chan - he's inspired me to become an army leader to protect my family and country." He continues, "If possible, never run away from home. You will have lots of problems if you are away from your loved ones. The most important lesson I learned after detaching from my family was their love and care for me. Now I understand the value of family."



*Street children in Nepal risk criminalisation simply for being on the streets. Since 2015, the Child Rights Board, in collaboration with the government, has urged the police to prevent any child from staying on the streets, issuing guidelines which are used by the police to round up any children they find on the streets.

REUNITING FAMILIES IN NEPAL

Smita Khanijow, Toybox's Programme Manager for Africa and Asia shares her insights on the reintegration work Toybox supports in Nepal.

The children we work alongside often run away from home for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, violence at home, ill-treatment by relatives and the temptation to explore the world independently. Sometimes they are even lured by traffickers for domestic work or begging, while others get lost while travelling with their families from one place to another.

In a country like Nepal, the terrain is mountainous and rugged, and villages are situated far away from each other. The geographical challenges and limited resources often make it impossible for families to track a missing child. Many give up hope when a child is lost, kidnapped, or has run away.

At times, it's even harder to know what has happened to the child. There is an Anti-Trafficking Unit in the police department, but it's poorly resourced so unless the family have their own means and are ready to continue their

efforts to trace a missing child, the common understanding is that the child has run away.

Most children are attracted towards big city life in Kathmandu, as they see or hear about it on the TV. They travel long distances on foot, take lifts in cars or trucks, or hide in buses to reach the city. Once there, they roam around, initially resorting to begging or stealing for food, until they are identified by a gang of older street families or they themselves are inducted into one. Once part of the street family network, they can learn the ways of street life.

Toybox local partner in Nepal, SathSath has a good rapport with street-connected families in Kathmandu, so whenever a new child arrives in the city, they meet the child and try to understand the reasons for them arriving there. In the project's Learning Centre, counselling support is offered to the child. At the same time, the team also engage with the authorities to explore reintegrating the child.

Sometimes, a child is willing to go back to their family. In these cases, the SathSath team help in the process of finding the family, counselling them, transporting the child to the family, and ensuring follow-ups to check the status of the case.

There are however times when the child is not willing to be immediately repatriated. In these instances, our partner will continue to work alongside the child, offering access to educational support and vocational skills, as well as helping unregistered children get their birth certificates.

THE COMPLEXITY OF REINTEGRATION

Naomi Hall Opiyo, Director of Impact and Programmes gives an overview of Toybox's approach to reintegration.

In situations where a child has been separated from their family, there's a general consensus among the international community that the best possible scenario for that child is to be returned to the care of their family. There are of course exceptions to this, particularly where a child has been abused.

It is often assumed that children on the streets have been orphaned or forced to leave their homes for various reasons. Although this is true for some, the majority do have nuclear and/or extended family networks - often in another part of the country.

In this aspect of our work, it is vital for our partners to understand each child's unique experience and what led them to leave their homes. This enables them to determine whether reintegration could be a possible outcome - and what would be required for it to be a successful one. Children and young people living on the streets develop considerable

resilience in terms of meeting their survival needs, developing social networks and living independently with peers. For many, the thought of returning home where they have less independence can often be a barrier to reintegration.

The process of reintegration may involve periods where a child stays with family members, then going back to the street or to an organisation known to them, before going back home again. This process may happen several times. Sometimes the child or young person reintegrates well into the family and community, while other times they may end up going back to the streets or to another place.

Reintegration must be carefully managed. It requires lots of planning and preparation, not only for the child, but also for the family and the wider community who must acknowledge and address the factors that led the child to leave. This role is undertaken by our local partners who are pivotal in the reintegration process. In some cases, the child may not know or remember where their family lives and sometimes the family is unsure whether their

child is even still alive and need preparation for the reconciliation and possible return.

Our experience in this area of work with street children has shown that reintegration is incredibly complex and requires significant time and resources. However, rewards can be enormous and each time it works is a huge victory. We know that where a child can return home, they will be much safer away from the dangers of the streets.

THANK YOU!

Reintegrating a child with their family and community takes time and resources - but together we are changing lives for the better.

With your support in the last financial year, 186 children and 51 young people were successfully reintegrated across Toybox projects.

REFLECTION

In September 2023, David Westwood was appointed as Toybox's Chair of Trustees. David has extensive experience in international development, humanitarian relief and advocacy. He has worked for World Vision in Angola, Switzerland and Costa Rica and is currently the Director of Policy and Programmes for World Vision UK. Here he reflects on how things have changed for street children during the past thirty years.

I grew up in Brazil where seeing children on the street was part of everyday life. I have memories of playing football in the road with whoever was around to play... no thought given to where they came from or whether they had a home to go back to. On one level, they were very much the same as me – the same fun and laughter chasing a ball up and down – and yet so different – what to eat, where to sleep, how to stay safe... all concerns I never had.

No child should be living on the streets. It's a bit of a no brainer really! And yet, at times it seems as far away as ever. As I read the statistics on the website – the UN estimated 100s of millions of street children – I am struck by the fact that not much seems to have changed since the day I started working in international development back in 1990. My professional career has led me through many a year working for the rights of the most vulnerable children; listening to their stories, advocating on their behalf, raising funds to help.

As I reflect a bit more, in fact a great deal has changed. We have a legal framework in place. The Convention for the Rights of the Child that came into force the year I started,

clearly laying out the rights that all children have to provision, prevention, protection and participation. It has now been ratified by all UN member states except the US. The rights of street children were further strengthened in 2017, when the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a General Comment on Children in Street Situations and provided guidance on developing comprehensive, long-term national strategies to support them.

We also have a far better idea about what works. About how important it is to ensure that children are legally registered, ensuring that they do indeed have access to the many rights laid out so clearly in the convention. We also know how important getting children back into education is and helping them to develop skills that open options for them in the future. And we know how important it is to work in close partnership with others, especially local groups, and with the children themselves to

ensure that what we do is the most contextually appropriate and likely to last well beyond our involvement.

There are also more people that care. People like you who have made the decision to engage with Toybox and its vision for a world without street children. We know we can and do make a difference – that there is hope and a future for many of the children we encounter.

Through the work of Toybox and its partners, 14,742 children, young people and their families living in street situations have been impacted over the course of the last year. I am privileged to have been able to have a career working to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children overseas. I also feel massively privileged to be involved with the work of Toybox.

