



Toybox Update Autumn 2020

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Thank you so much for your commitment to vulnerable children living and working on the streets. With your generous support during the past year, we have been able to work alongside children like Kevin in Bolivia and Hana in El Salvador, whose stories of hope we share below.

KEVIN'S STORY

Kevin* is five and lives on the outskirts of La Paz, in a remote area prone to landslides. His home, which was built by his parents and is shared by Kevin and his four older siblings, is very basic and has no sewage system or access to running water. Instead, the family rely on collecting water in buckets from a public pool.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Kevin had just been registered, received his birth certificate and been able to start Kindergarten – which he was really excited about! Previously because he did not have his identity documents, he was unable to enrol and would spend his days working alongside his older sisters making and selling handicrafts on the streets.



Since the coronavirus outbreak in Bolivia and the national lockdown which ensued, Kevin has not been able to go to Kindergarten however his new birth certificate has still played an important part in protecting his rights. Because he is now registered and has a legal identity, his family were able to receive emergency food vouchers from the government. Similarly, should Kevin get sick and need to visit the hospital, his birth certificate will ensure he is able to access the medical care he needs.

Kevin tells us that his day to day activities have changed a lot since the country went into lockdown. Whilst he is able to take part in some school activities online using his sister's mobile phone, internet access is limited and expensive in the remote area they live; and naturally the family are prioritising the small amount of income they are able to earn selling items on the streets to buy food and healthcare supplies.

He says that he misses going to Kindergarten, playing with his friends, and attending the recreational activities offered by our partner and that he would like for this whole pandemic to pass quickly and for everything to go back to normal soon.

Currently, Kevin and his family are also beneficiaries of the emergency family baskets that are being provided to vulnerable and high-risk children and families by our partner as part of their emergency response work. These baskets include food and hygiene materials including masks, soap and sanitiser and have been a vital lifeline for many vulnerable families.

PROVIDING SAFETY AND SECURITY DURING EMERGENCIES

In almost all emergency situations, children become increasingly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. When children are unregistered, these risks become even greater as there is no legal evidence of their existence. Unregistered children are at higher risk of becoming involved in hazardous work, sexual exploitation, trafficking, recruitment into armed groups and being treated as adults in the criminal justice system. It can also be harder for unregistered children to receive aid. Birth registration represents a key tool of protection for children in times of emergency.

Registering a birth is the first legal acknowledgement of a child's existence; without proof of identity a child is invisible to the authorities. Registration entitles children to their rights and helps build a protective environment against abuse, exploitation and violence, especially during and after emergencies - when state, community and social structures breakdown. A legal identity remains of crucial importance during public health emergencies as individuals need to be able to prove who they are to access services such as health care, financial aid and other vital social services.

HANA

Hana* is 15 and lives in a high-risk zone of San Salvador, where gang activity and crime are a daily occurrence. Violence and poverty at home meant that Hana's self-esteem was very low for a long time. She says, *"I've always wished that I was older so that I could go out and sell on the streets like my parents to earn some money. That way it might stop them fighting."*

Hana's family is very important to her and she has always wanted to help support them financially – a factor that could have pushed her towards working on the streets or becoming involved in the gangs that inhabit them. However, thankfully her father saw her academic potential and told her that she should continue at school so that she can *"become a professional and avoid having the life that I have had."* When he said this to Hana, she said that she felt the tears well up in her eyes and a new spark of motivation lit inside her.

Our partner has been working with Hana to help her plan for her future. During life-skills workshops she has learned about her rights – information she says she loves sharing with younger children in the hope that they can grow up with this knowledge rather than learning about it when they are older like her.

Hana says, *"Now, I feel more secure in who I am and what I can achieve. I am so motivated to help other children so that they can know their rights and achieve all their dreams. I know that I can help people, my family and God by studying at university. My mother has always been there for my sister and me – one day I want to give back to her in the way she's given to us."*



KEEPING CHILDREN IN EL SALVADOR SAFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Once named the most-deadly peacetime country in the world, over the last year El Salvador had been seeing a decline in the number of daily murders. However, recent reports stating that the country's violent gangs have been taking advantage of the coronavirus pandemic in a bid to regain control by enforcing social distancing through violent methods have sadly been confirmed following the murders of over 60 people in one weekend in April alone. Street children, already some of the most vulnerable to this violence, remain not only at significant risk of the virus itself - but the many other deadly implications it may bring.

During the pandemic, our partner has been working alongside the National Street Children Network and local authorities to find children places in shelters where they can receive emergency food and healthcare – as well as a safe place to stay. The team are also providing 35 of the most vulnerable families in the communities where we work with emergency food baskets and vouchers for healthcare.

At the beginning of June El Salvador was hit by a devastating tropical storm. Across the country, 20 people died and over 11,000 people left their homes for temporary accommodation. In the communities where we work, 24 families were also sadly affected.

Our partner has responded to the needs of these families by providing basic food items and essentials such as toilet paper, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap and mattresses. They have also provided emergency grants to help families get back on their feet. Clothes have been donated and the team are currently in the process of creating a local TV advert to help raise vital funds.

This emergency support will continue whilst planned project activities remain on hold for the foreseeable future. In addition, our partner is currently developing virtual resources to support children with their studies and running online and telephone meetings in order to continue supporting children and families.



THANK YOU!

Your support has truly helped change the lives of hundreds of vulnerable children and families who now more than ever, need urgent care and support. Thanks to your generous gift, children like Kevin and Hana are not only protected today but can also look forward to a much brighter future – away from the dangers of life on the streets. Quite simply - we really cannot thank you enough!

We really hope you found this update interesting. If you have any questions or would like any more information about any of our activities or the stories mentioned, please do get in touch with Jenny on 01908 360080 or by emailing her at supporters@toybox.org

Toybox wants to see a world with no street children and we won't stop until we do. We know that we can only do this with help from people like you.

Thank you so much for your amazing support.

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