



## Toybox Update

Summer 2017





Thank you for  
your support



## STREET OUTREACH IN EL SALVADOR

### COUNTRY PROFILE

**Capital city:** San Salvador

**Population:** 6.1 million

**Local partner:** Viva



### EL SALVADOR

The smallest country in Central America, El Salvador, has a history deeply rooted in violence and one of the highest crime rates in Latin America. News over the last year reports how gang-related violence and murder has spiked to alarming levels since the ending of a gang truce two years ago.

According to a recent UNICEF report, El Salvador is now the most deadly peacetime country in the world, with more children murdered per capita than anywhere else. From 2014 to 2015 alone, murder rates increased by 70% - the highest of any country in the past 20 years.

As always, in situations like this, it is children, especially those without the proper care and protection of a home or family, who suffer the most.

### A STORY FROM THE STREETS

Pamela is 6 and Cesar is 8 (pictured right) and they are looked after by their 13 year old sister Mariela\*. This little family has had to survive so much in their short lives. Their mother died of a brain tumour in 2015 and their father abandoned them soon after.

None of the extended family would take the children in so they ended up living in a shack constructed of three metal sheets on the streets of San Salvador, in an area controlled by the dangerous MS13 gang. Here, the children didn't have a bed, toilet, or any way of cooking for themselves. They were unable to protect themselves from the dangers of living on the street and survived by begging and living hand to mouth each day.

*(Continued on page 3)*



### LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

Toybox have been working on the streets of El Salvador for over ten years, where sadly, stories from children like Pamela, Cesar, and Mariela are all too common. However, as long as there are kind and generous people, like you, who are willing to care about these children when others may not, we have always had hope.



## A STORY FROM THE STREETS

*Continued.*

Sofia, a Street Outreach worker in San Salvador, met Pamela, Cesar and Mariela during one of the night outreach sessions last year. They were all severely malnourished. Mariela had been trying to care for them but all she knew how to cook was rice. Sofia noticed the children were incredibly shy and apprehensive to talk to other children or to her.

However Sofia met them again the next night, and the night after, and slowly began to gain their trust. The children allowed the Outreach team to help them in some basic, practical ways; providing food, clean clothes and medical care. They all soon began to look brighter and healthier.

### THE FIRST STEP

Sofia encouraged the children to attend the daytime outreach activities where they could benefit from workshop sessions on how to care for themselves and how to protect themselves from abuse. The activities also provided the children with a safe place to play and an opportunity to truly be children.

In September 2016, thanks to the support of Sofia and the team, Pamela, Cesar, and Mariela made the decision to leave the streets for good. The team quickly began searching for permanent accommodation for them.

The legal process to get a child into a residential home in El Salvador is incredibly long and complicated, involving a huge amount of bureaucracy. Whilst this process was underway, the children's aunt suggested the three children could stay with her.

### AN URGENT SITUATION

Whilst this seemed like a safer option for the children than sleeping in their shack on the side of the road, at their aunt's house they were made to sleep in the attic which was open to the elements and had just one bed.

Not only was their father around most of the time, the extended family also resented them being there and wanted them gone and as a result, the children were abused and neglected.

Sofia continued to visit the children regularly to support and encourage them. She soon realised the urgency of the situation so began to put more pressure on the Courts to ensure the children's case would be presented to a judge as soon as possible.

*Continued on page 4.*





## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Earlier this year, Abbey Stewart, Toybox's Individual Giving Executive, visited El Salvador where she met Pamela, Cesar and Mariela. She had met the children for the first time in 2015 and had not forgotten them or their story.

*Abbey said, "It was so good to see the children again. Although they've been through so many tough situations - that no child should ever have to experience since I last saw them - it was amazing to see how they'd grown and hear how they are looking forward to their future. The relationship and trust that they share with Sofia gives me so much hope as I know that they are so close to finally being safe and loved in a secure home. It will be a day of true celebration when they are off the streets for good."*

LEFT: Abbey with Pamela (left), Cesar (middle) and Mariela (right).

## CHANGING LIVES

Shortly after Abbey's return from El Salvador in March, the children's case was finally granted an audience with the court judge and approved. The fantastic news is that the siblings were all able to move to a residential home together.

They are all now living in a home in San Salvador where Sofia visits them regularly to check on their progress. She will be a consistent support in their lives, for as long as they need her.

*Sofia says, "I have seen a huge change in the children since I first met them. They all attend school regularly and take part in the activities like painting, games, playing, and homework help. Their general well-being is so much better and their self-esteem is higher. Another difference we've seen in them is that they are participating a lot more with other children and making more friends. They are noticeably happier and more hopeful for what the future has to bring."*

\*Please note that to protect the identities of the children in this update, all names have been changed

## THANK YOU

Thank you so much for your commitment to Toybox's work and for helping to change the lives of the children and families we work with. We are so thankful that Pamela, Cesar, and Mariela have had the support of Sofia and the Street Outreach team in El Salvador over the past year and have begun their journey towards a brighter future. Their story is one that demonstrates the incredible difference your support really does make. Your generous support enables Toybox to help children like Pamela, Cesar, and Mariela, and over 800 other children in El Salvador.

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 story mentioned, please do get in touch with Abbey Stewart on 01908 360080 or by emailing her at [supporters@toybox.org](mailto:supporters@toybox.org)

## Toybox

G4 Challenge House  
Sherwood Drive  
Bletchley  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire  
MK3 6DP

 **TOYBOX**  
Changing the world  
for street children  
[www.toybox.org.uk](http://www.toybox.org.uk)