



# HELLO!

## **Hello and a warm welcome to Street Life, your Toybox magazine.**

Here at Toybox, our mission is simple - to positively impact the lives of street children who are some of the most vulnerable and at risk across the world. We have seen firsthand how registering a street child is one of the single most effective positive changes you can make to their life. It is also one of the vital first steps in supporting a child in their journey to leave the streets.

Birth registration is without doubt one of the most exciting and joyful things we do as an organisation. It may seem simple, one-off activity, yet it is a solution which has the potential to open so many doors for the children we work alongside. You see, with no legal identity children are invisible to the societies they live in and that sadly makes them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They are afforded no protection from the state and are not recognised in national statistics that inform government decisions.

Current UNICEF research shows that around the world one in four children under the age of five have never had their birth formally registered. This is a global issue; however, it is one that disproportionately affects children

from marginalised families. Without a birth certificate, we know that millions of children face daily discrimination; they don't officially exist and as a result are denied access to education, healthcare and many other basic human rights.

### **Invisible to society, visible to abuse**

It is a sad irony that whilst an unregistered street child is invisible to their government, they are extremely visible to those wishing to abuse and cause them harm. Whether that's through sexual exploitation, coercion into gangs, child labour, child marriage or human trafficking. For unregistered street children in these situations, their disappearance from everyday life goes largely unnoticed.

Without an official identity, we know that the odds are hugely stacked against children from the very start of their lives. A birth certificate is a prerequisite for access to vaccinations and healthcare, schooling, social services and other community support. And when a child's birth goes unregistered, the impact will be felt in

almost every aspect of their adult life too - severely limiting their employment opportunities, and ability to get married or vote. These are things every child should be able to look forward to.

I still vividly remember meeting a woman in her 80s during a visit to Guatemala City to see some of our birth registration work. Her words left a lasting impression on me. She had never been registered and this was clearly something that deeply concerned her. She asked me, "When I die, do you think God will know who I am?" Tragically in Guatemala, if you have not been registered, you are buried in a mass, unofficial grave, marked simply with XXX. This is sadly also the case in many of the





countries where Toybox works, where those without a birth certificate face this final, heart-breaking indignity.

### **Tackling injustice**

For children and adults to be denied the opportunities and basic dignities of life because of the lack of a birth certificate is a huge injustice. And this is precisely why Toybox started its birth registration programmes for street children. By helping children secure a seemingly simple piece of paper, we can support them challenge and tackle the injustices they already face as a consequence of living on the streets. We stand by them to ensure they can access the opportunities and services they desperately need and rightly deserve.

We initially started this work in Guatemala City in 2013, with an initial target of just 100 children. Since then, we have expanded the programme into Nepal, Bolivia and El Salvador and have registered thousands of children during this time. Our partners work hard to identify unregistered street children, and then support them through the stages of getting their identity documents. This is not just an 'administration process' though - it also does wonders for a child's self-esteem. When you register a child, they can go from feeling utterly worthless to suddenly having a birthday they

too can celebrate, like others around them. The simple fact of having an official identity can give a child the confidence to believe in themselves for the rest of their lives. And gaining these documents can truly be the turning point in helping them to see what a life beyond the streets could look like.

Our birth registration work does not stop here though - we also continue to support children and families once they have been registered to access the services and the support they may need. We work with local communities to raise awareness of the benefits of registration and, on a national level, we work with governments and civil society to improve registration services through training and the appropriate use of technology. It's a truly collaborative process and one that makes such a difference to the lives of children now, and for generations to come.

Your support means so much to me and all of Team Toybox. It's such an incredible feeling to be able to make such a huge and truly impactful difference to the lives of these children, helping them on their journey from invisibility to a life full of opportunity and promise. Thank you so much for joining us on this mission and helping to make this a reality for many more street children in the future.

Yours,

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

Lynne Morris, CEO



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



@TOYBOXCHARITY

# BIRTH REGISTRATION UNCOVERED

## GLOBAL RECOGNITION

In 2015 all United Nations Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an urgent call for action by all countries to address global challenges such as poverty, inequality and climate change. This was a key moment for Toybox as it put the challenge and injustice of unregistered children firmly on the global agenda as birth registration became formally recognised as a key development issue. The SDG target 16.9 states: By 2030 provide a legal identity for all, including birth registration.

 NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED BIRTHS

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING REGISTERED WHEN EMERGENCIES HIT

Registration entitles children to their rights and helps to build a protective environment against abuse, exploitation and violence, especially during and after disasters or conflicts - when state, community and social structures breakdown. During these times it is crucial for individuals to be able to prove who they are in order to access public services such as health care, emergency financial aid and other social services. In almost all emergency situations such as armed conflicts, disasters caused by natural hazards, health crises or mass population displacements, we know that street children become increasingly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. And if these children are also unregistered, the risks become even greater as there is no legal evidence of their existence.

## KEVIN IN BOLIVIA

Kevin is five and lives on the outskirts of La Paz, in a remote area prone to landslides. His house, built by his parents, is home to Kevin and his four older siblings. It 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 and was 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 instead spend his days working alongside his older sisters making and selling handicrafts on the streets.

When the coronavirus outbreak hit Bolivia and the national lockdown ensued, Kevin was not able to go to Kindergarten. However, his new birth certificate has 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 distributed to families of school-age children. 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.



## WHY ARE SOME CHILDREN NOT REGISTERED AT BIRTH?

There are a number of factors that can keep children from being registered including:

- Lack of access to registration facilities - those born in rural areas are 30% less likely to be registered than those in urban areas and wealth in urban areas will also increase the likelihood of registration.
- Lack of knowledge or understanding of the benefits and process of registration by families and wider society.
- Cost - unaffordable for families already living a hand to mouth existence.
- Unequal rights - in many parts of the world women do not have the same rights or ability to register their child's birth as men do. In addition, women may be unable to register their children if the father is unknown or refuses to acknowledge paternity.
- Traditional customs and practices in some communities (such as new mothers staying indoors for a period after the birth) may act as a deterrent.
- Fear - for parents who are not registered themselves, there can be an element of fear they will not be able to prove they are their child's parent without their own birth certificate.
- Parental choice - some parents actively choose not to register their children, often because they are then able to keep the child at home and use them to support the day to day upkeep of the home and family income.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE STATISTICS

The information and data gathered from birth registration records is used to help governments determine how and where to allocate resources and funding such as educational provision. Without knowing precise population figures and the locations of where the most marginalised children are, it becomes impossible to adequately budget and plan. For the many unregistered street children across the world, this means that they are entirely overlooked in vital decision-making processes.

## KALA IN NEPAL

After her mother left Nepal in search of work, 13-year-old Kala was left in the care of a relative however this was not a safe place for her stay as she was physically abused by the very person who was meant to be caring for her. Fleeing this violence, Kala was eventually found and taken in by a neighbour who discovered her sleeping in an abandoned car. Whilst living with her neighbour, Kala was supported by Toybox's partner, SathSath, to go back to school. However, shortly after overcoming this initial challenge, Kala faced another huge obstacle. She had never been registered so faced the very real problem that she would be unable to progress to secondary school without her birth certificate.

SathSath worked tirelessly alongside the local government to try and locate Kala's mother so she could provide the necessary paperwork for Kala to be registered. This proved to be a long and difficult process, as in Nepal a child can only be registered in the town where they were born.

Fortunately, the team persevered and were eventually able to locate Kala's mother, who was living outside of the country but was able to return to Nepal to support her daughter through the registration process. Now, not only is Kala officially registered, she is also living with her mother again. SathSath are continuing to support her through counselling sessions and providing essential school supplies to enable her to continue with her studies.

Despite everything that has happened to her, Kala is determined and excited to have the opportunity to progress in her education and has big dreams for the future. She says, "I am so happy my mother is back with me and that we can be together. I love school and want to be a teacher one day!"



## FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR BIRTH REGISTRATION PROGRAMMES

Visit: [www.toybox.org.uk/birthregistration](http://www.toybox.org.uk/birthregistration) and tune into episode 3 of our podcast, Stories from The Street which you can find on your favourite podcast channel including Spotify, Amazon Music and Apple Podcasts.

# HOW WE WORK

Here at Toybox, we are passionate about partnering with local organisations, most of whom have been working in their cities and communities with street children for many years. We believe these organisations are best placed to help find the most appropriate ways to prevent, support and help children escape from life on the streets. Not only do our partners have a greater understanding of their national context and specific country processes, they are also best placed to recognise and respond to local community needs. Adopting this locally-led approach enables our project activities and interactions with street children to be as impactful as possible. Our work with street children is divided into three broad categories:

## **1. Prevention: Preventing children from working or living on the streets.**

It is easier to help a child before they become deeply connected to the street and means our chances of keeping children off the streets long-term are much higher. Our birth registration projects form a key part of this work as, without this vital document and access to their rights, we know that children are denied access to education, healthcare and many other rights and will often end up spending more time on the streets and engaging with all of its associated dangers as a result of this.



## **2. Intervention: Intervening to support children who are living on the street.**

In a crisis, children and young people on the streets need direct help and they need it quickly. We support children who are living and working on the streets with practical and urgent care, as well as support to build their confidence to leave the streets. Supporting a child through the birth registration process is a vital first step towards enabling them to leave the streets.

## **3. Reintegration: Supporting children and families, if the child can return home.**

For lasting change, Toybox supports the reintegration of children and young people, if appropriate, by reuniting them with their families and their communities. This strand of our work also includes projects that focus on helping children to enroll or re-enter into school and access vocational training. Additionally, we also focus on working with parents and caregivers, supporting them with positive parenting strategies and techniques as well as championing the development of community-led savings groups and income generating activities so they do not require their children to work to supplement the family income.



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