



◆ STREET LIFE | ISSUE 6

**Child Ambassadors** – the children changing their communities  
**Christmas Appeal update** – see how your support is helping  
**Coping?** Toybox report from the streets of Nairobi





# WELCOME

# NEWS

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## Hello and a warm welcome to the latest issue of Street Life, your Toybox magazine.

Here at Toybox, our supporters are so important to us - without your generosity, time, prayers and action, the amazing news and stories you're about to read simply would not be possible.

With your help, street children in El Salvador are receiving the training they need to prepare and keep them safe in future earthquakes (p.3). Our birth registration work is reaching out and helping children like Romina (p.6) and very excitingly we have also just been able to expand our Child Ambassador Programme into Kenya (p.12). I hope this issue gives you an insight into the lives of the children you are helping and what it's been possible to achieve with your support.

With the issue of data protection continuing as a hot topic in the media, I also just wanted to take this opportunity to assure you that Toybox will continue to adhere to all related legislation and have not, nor will not ever share or sell your personal data. You can read more about our commitment to you and supporter promise on our website

[www.toybox.org.uk/supporter-promise](http://www.toybox.org.uk/supporter-promise)

Thank you so much for your interest and support of our work - whether you are new to Toybox, or have been with us for decades, you really are helping us change the world for street children - and for this we are truly grateful. I hope you enjoy the magazine, Yours,

Lynne Morris CEO



## EARTHQUAKE SAFETY TRAINING FOR STREET CHILDREN IN SAN SALVADOR

60 children attending Toybox supported projects in El Salvador's capital, San Salvador recently received training to help them prepare and stay safe in case of an earthquake.

Speaking after the events, Sophia from our partner Viva El Salvador, who facilitated the session commented: "The idea of this training was to familiarise and

prepare children with what they should do if there is an earthquake. The activities were undertaken in school and taught children about the different types of natural disasters, what to do in each situation, how to act and who to go to. The most important thing that we taught the children is that they need to stay calm. The children were all very engaged and came up with a number of steps that they would follow in the case of an earthquake. As these are quite common in El Salvador, we hope that the children will be able to remember these skills when the time comes so that they can be safe. The children were also keen to repeat the workshops for other children who were not in the class, this is a great sign they enjoyed it!"



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

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## TOYBOX'S STAFF MEET WITH BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN GUATEMALA

During a recent trip to Guatemala City, staff from Toybox had the opportunity to meet with Carolyn Davidson, the British Ambassador to Guatemala and the member of her team who focuses on Human Rights and Justice.

Speaking after the meeting Al Richardson, Toybox's International Programmes Director said: "The Embassy staff had previously met with our partner CONACMI and were interested in talking more with Toybox and CONACMI together. The UK Government has announced that it will be prioritising tackling modern slavery and the British Embassy in Guatemala is also focussing on this challenge, in particular trafficking and child labour and other issues surrounding vulnerable children. During the meeting we were able to share some of the exciting stories of our work, and how children we've helped receive their birth certificates can now attend school and undertake vocational training so they are well positioned

to access employment in the future. The meeting was a great opportunity to hear more about each other's work. I am looking forward to continuing to build on this relationship to help improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable children in Guatemala."

## TOYBOX AND PARTNERS PRESENT AT THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT IN BRAZIL

In late November 2017, Toybox and three of our partners travelled to Sao Paulo, Brazil to deliver sessions at the International Summit on the Legal Rights of Street Connected Children. The conference saw over 100 leaders, experts and practitioners working with street children across the



world come together to focus on the global need to ensure the legal rights and human rights for children and youth who spend time living on the streets. The summit also looked at developing strategies to implement the UN's General Comment on Children in Street Situations and to draft principles that would support both governments and communities in understanding how best to implement the UN Comment to ensure that street-connected children have access to the same rights as all children. Toybox and the three partner organisations from Bolivia, India and Kenya all led sessions at the summit. Toybox's Programme Manager for Africa and Asia, Emily Malcolm commented: "The summit provided an amazing opportunity for our partners from different continents to meet one another and learn and share about each other's work."



## Team Toybox is thrilled to be heading back to the Wychwood Festival again this June for another weekend of fun, music and food!

Once again, we have been asked to be the partner of conscience for the event and are already planning some of the fun that we are hoping to add to the event.

Wychwood is the UK's Premier Family Music Festival and returns to Cheltenham Racecourse for its' 14th year from 1st-3rd June. Over the weekend, there will be more than 100 acts covering a range of music genres from indie and folk to world and rock across three fantastic stages. There are also activities for the whole family including a Children's Literature Festival, comedy sets and crafty workshops which are sure to add to the weekend's entertainment. Top that off with delicious food from all around the world, a great selection of Wychwood ales and the legendary Wychwood Festival Headphone Disco and that's the first weekend of your summer sorted!

This year, we will be teaming up with Wychwood Festival to organise various activities around the site to tell festival-goers about our work with street children and in particular to tell some of the stories of our Child Ambassadors. This incredible group of children really do have inspiring stories and we are excited to be sharing these with even more people.

We have also negotiated a special discount price for our supporters which will give you a 30% saving on your Wychwood tickets. This early-bird offer will end on the 9th March so snap yours up today! Go to: [event.bookitbee.com/12497/14th-annual-wychwood-festival-2018](http://event.bookitbee.com/12497/14th-annual-wychwood-festival-2018) and use the code **2018TOYBOX**

**To read more about the Wychwood Festival and to see some of the incredible acts who will be performing, visit [www.wychwoodfestival.com](http://www.wychwoodfestival.com)**



## CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2017:

# UPDATE



**At the time of going to print our Christmas Appeal had raised over £155,000. We have again been overwhelmed by the generosity of you, our supporters - so thank you.**

Our 2017 appeal focussed on the story of the Invisible Girl, the girl who is everywhere, but nowhere. The girl who is invisible to society, but all too visible to those who look to abuse and exploit her.

A birth certificate can make the Invisible Girl seen and heard. With a birth certificate she'll have a legal identity and will no longer be powerless and vulnerable.

This vital birth registration work was established in Guatemala in 2013 and we have now expanded into Bolivia and El Salvador to ensure street children will have the same opportunities in these countries as well. The lowest birth registration level across Latin America is found in Bolivia\*. This highlights the need to educate communities on the importance and value of registration at birth as well as retrospectively registering those street children that have not had this opportunity. Families like Romina's are benefiting from a lifetime of opportunities thanks to the generous donations we've received.

Romina was only nine when she fled to the streets to escape her alcoholic father. She slept in cemeteries and parks and became immersed in street life. She took drugs to deal with the harrowing reality she was living in and by the age of thirteen she was

pregnant. Over time she had seven children and sadly recently lost her youngest child due to malnutrition at two months. Romina survived by selling sweets, cigars and other small items on the streets and lived in fear for the future of her surviving children. She is now living with her children in a small, rented room. Thanks to support like yours, Toybox were able to work with Romina to take her and her children through the registration process. The children are now being enrolled in school and Romina said she feels so much safer now she has the documents. She is no longer invisible.

Our Street Outreach worker, Gabriela, said "The right to an identity which comes through the possession of a birth certificate and identity card brings with it an incredible sense of emotion for people because they feel as though they exist. They have their own place in society and feel that they will be listened to and that they are legally part of the state. They can access their rights to education and healthcare as well as so many other things, which all make the right to identity fundamental. Now, we can take them all to the doctor - the mum and the children".

\*2016 Unicef report: Closing the gaps



**ROMINA WAS ONLY 9 WHEN SHE FLED TO THE STREETS TO ESCAPE HER ALCOHOLIC FATHER...**



**In Guatemala our registration work has gone from strength to strength.**

In conjunction with this, on 1 January, our partner gave out baby baskets to the first babies born in 40 of the largest national hospitals around the country. These baskets contained some new-born essentials like nappies, creams, blankets and babygro's to help new parents and babies settle into life as a family. This country-wide promotion will highlight the importance of registration at birth and ensure that fewer babies grow up to become the Invisible Girl.

**THANKS TO SUPPORT LIKE YOURS, ROMINA AND HER CHILDREN ARE NO LONGER INVISIBLE**

# MAKE AN INVISIBLE CHILD VISIBLE

**Registration of a child is a one-off event but the impact it has is life-long. If you would like to make a donation to provide a street child with a birth certificate, please call 01908 360080 or give online at [www.toybox.org.uk/TheInvisibleGirl](http://www.toybox.org.uk/TheInvisibleGirl)**





# COPING?

**An estimated 3,000 boys and girls spend their nights sleeping on the streets of Kenya's capital and as many as 60,000 further children live and work on Nairobi's streets during the day.\*** In this article

Toybox's Child Rights Adviser, **Hannah Doornbos** shares some of the findings from our recent report, Ways of coping: Children growing up on the streets of Nairobi. The report uncovers the experiences of children



like Freddie and Eric and the many others who are forced to adapt to life on the streets through ways of coping that are innovative and brave, but often destructive.

## THE SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING

During the writing of this report, I was amazed and saddened to learn that street children in Kenya are still considered to be illegal. In Kenya 'vagrancy' is illegal, so by living or sleeping on the streets, children are effectively breaking the law and seen as criminals. They are discriminated against

in their attempts to access services such as healthcare and treated with violence and contempt by the state authorities and members of the public.

The children we spoke to during our research told us their stories, not just of living and working on the streets as a means of escaping abuse at home, but of the activities they are forced to engage in to survive street living. To me, when children steal or sell sex in order to buy food, it is clear the system of child protection is not working.

## CHILDREN ARE LEFT TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES

One of the children we met during the development of this report was a 10 year old boy called Freddie. Freddie was forced to seek protection on the streets after his mother became a drug addict. He could not endure the harsh environment at home when his mother became very violent and abusive. He was beaten and neglected, deprived of food and water and verbally abused. He had no way of providing food and clothing for himself. Freddie realised that his mum had lost control, and that his life was in danger. He knew that he could not survive at home so he decided to run away and joined other boys living on the streets.

15 year old Eric is another of the boys we spoke with. He lives with a group of street children in an informal settlement in Nairobi. Eric told us that he is most afraid of the nights and is anxious and scared of the authorities – particularly the city inspectors who work on the streets at night. He has good reason to fear them - he and his friends have had many ambushes at night and he has seen the way that they handle other children. He told us how some of his friends have been taken and he has not seen them since. Eric and Freddie are just two of the children we met; but their stories highlight a more widespread reality - of how, in the absence of protective families and support systems, children are left to

fend for themselves. These children are also forced to find ways of protecting themselves and each other. One boy told us; **"The older street kids protect the younger ones. We keep each other on high alert to avoid arrest by the city police."** Another young girl, who was no older than 10, told us; **"We sleep in a safe open place where no one can be harmed...."**

## WAYS OF COPING

From our research it was clear to see that children living and working on the streets of Nairobi have an incredible capacity for resilience, and their ability to find effective means of survival is remarkable. Our research also uncovered how street children use a variety of ways of coping with the ever present challenges of hunger, sickness, physical and sexual violence - but sadly these are often deployed at the expense of their wellbeing.

## ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

With your generous support, Toybox is currently working with local partner, PKL in Nairobi to begin to address some of these challenges through prevention based projects. Our 'Safe from the street' project empowers children in the slum areas of Nairobi to learn about their rights and responsibilities through Child Rights Clubs in schools. The project is also working with communities on building their knowledge and capacity on child rights and protection so that local

**"THESE CHILDREN ARE ALSO FORCED TO FIND WAYS OF PROTECTING THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER."**

authorities, teachers and parents are able to raise awareness on these areas and make an informed response to any forms of child abuse. In addition, our 'Financing Futures' project is providing access to financial and livelihood support for vulnerable families. Parents are supported to start small businesses, thereby reducing the need to send their children out onto the streets to work and enabling them to provide basic needs to their children.

Through this report we identified several critical changes required at both a national and international level to ensure that street children in Nairobi are able to experience the protection that they desperately need – and rightly deserve.

To read our recommendations and the report in full, go to: [toybox.org.uk/waysofcoping](http://toybox.org.uk/waysofcoping)

\*Kenya National Bureau of Statistics



# A DAY IN THE LIFE...

Our Street to School project in India is focused on helping street and working children in communities in Delhi to access and stay in education.

**Rekha** works as a Street Educator for the project and is responsible for supporting around 60 of the children who attend one of the Education Clubs.

## How long have you been a street educator and how did you get into this type of work?

I have worked for CHETNA Toybox's partner in Delhi for over 11 years but became a Street Educator two years ago. I have a diploma in teaching training and had previously worked as a teacher.

## Tell us about your job. What types of things do you do on a typical day?

The school runs in two shifts; morning for the girls and afternoon for the boys. My day begins at 9am with a visit to the community. I make sure the girls have left for school and encourage the boys to come to the Education Club. *The education clubs focus on bringing street children up to the attainment level they should be at and also supporting and preparing those who have not been in school to get to the right level for their age.*

Once the boys arrive, I ask them whether they went to school the previous day and what they learned. After this initial interaction, the actual teaching work begins! The last half an hour is allocated for games and sports. By 12.15pm the boys leave for home to prepare for school.

In the afternoon, I walk around the community again to see whether the boys have left for school and to mobilise the girls. The girls are supposed to arrive at 2pm, but they normally arrive at 1pm and eat their lunch together. In the last half hour, when the girls are busy playing, I start the report writing and other paperwork.

Besides the daily teaching and community visits, I also organise and run monthly support groups and life skills workshops for the children every six months. I also run parents meetings every three months and parents training once a year. *The activities with parents are focused on helping improve understanding on the importance of education and sending their children to school.*

## What motivates and inspires you?

The thing that inspires me the most is that I am working for one of the most marginalised groups of children. I am supporting those who do not have the support of anyone else with their formal education. Parents in this community find themselves unable to support

their children due to their financial situation. *This means that many children are not going to school as they have to work to earn the family income.* Also, I like children a lot - I like working with them!

## What are the biggest challenges you face?

The biggest challenge is that I work with children in the open. *Rekha runs the Education Club in a corner of a small park in the community.* While working with them I have to bear all the harshness of the weather - heat, cold and rain. When it's raining I have to seek refuge for us all under a tree or the side of a house, which barely protects us from getting wet. Sometimes parents will say "Today there is too much work to handle at home, my child is busy, he will not go to school." At other times, the parents take their children away from the Education Club if they need them to help at home.

## Is there a particular child who has inspired you in your work?

11 year old Anjali has inspired me a lot; seeing her perseverance and desire to go to school. Her day begins at 4am when she goes to sell second hand clothes at the local market before returning at 7am to get ready for school. After school she comes to study at the Education Club before leaving at 4pm because she is required to accompany her mother to sell neem twig (used as a toothbrush) near a temple to support the family financially.

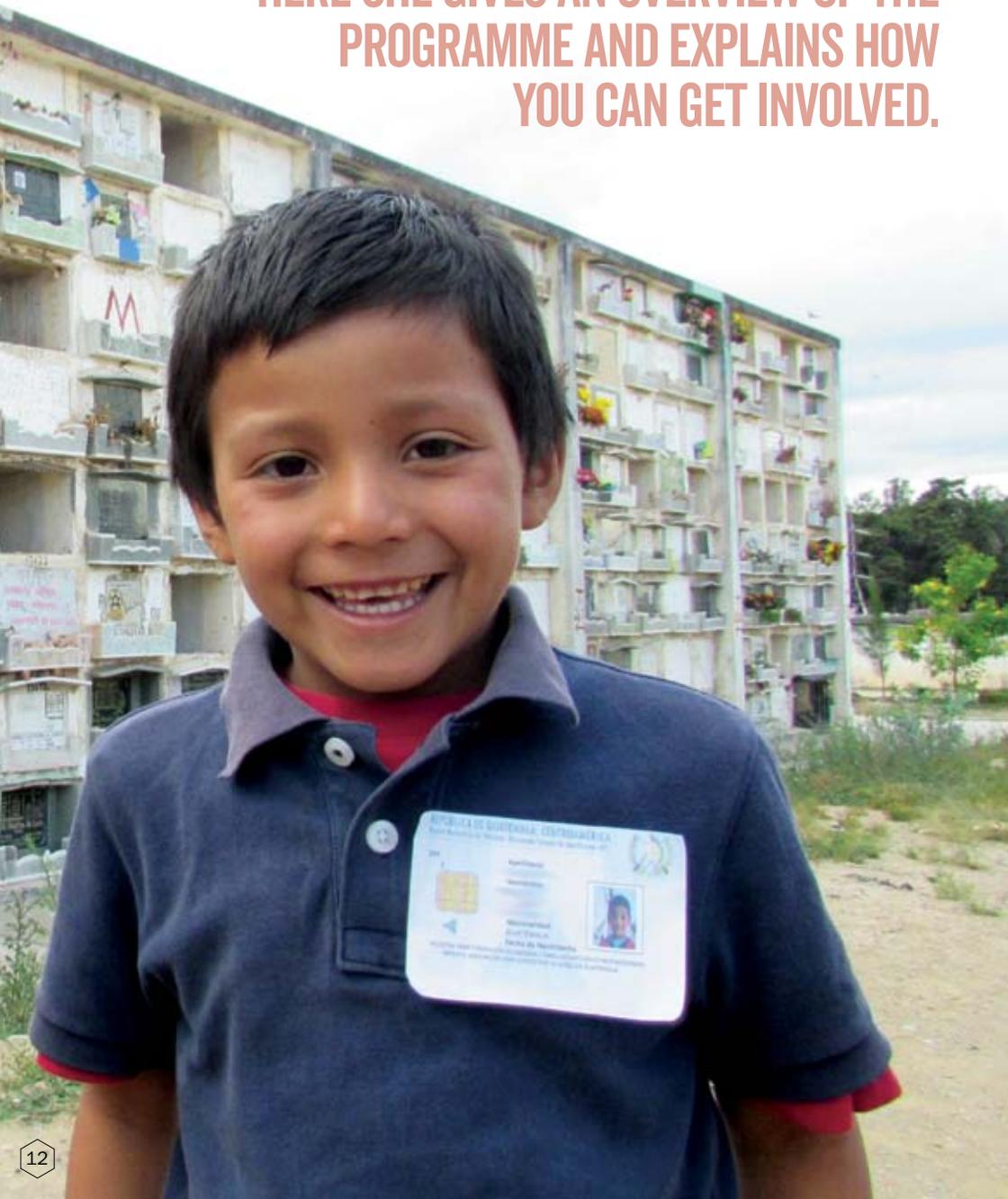
## What has been your greatest achievement whilst you have been a Street Educator?

This district is a tough area to work in. There was no culture of sending girls to school; parents were not happy to allow their girls to go out alone, for work or to study. Now things have changed a lot, the girls come to our education clubs and they have started going to school.

As a Street Educator I have become empowered with knowledge and understanding about these children that both care and education are needed in their early years to help them achieve optimum development and the future they deserve.



# ABBHEY STEWART MANAGES TOYBOX'S CHILD AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME. HERE SHE GIVES AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME AND EXPLAINS HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED.



## CHILDREN CHANGING THEIR COMMUNITIES

I've worked at Toybox for over three and a half years and I am still blown-away by the incredible passion and determination of our supporters to help street children. This commitment supports the amazing work that our partners are able to carry out every single day in five countries across the world. From street outreach and sports therapy, to birth registration and education clubs, our projects have a lasting and positive effect on the children we work with. However, the one area of our work that constantly impresses me is the Child Ambassador programme. I am fortunate enough to coordinate this incredible piece of work, which means I have the privilege of hearing all the latest news from the inspiring children who are changing their communities by becoming an Ambassador in their projects.

On three occasions now, I've visited some of our Ambassador projects and have seen the impact this work has not only on the Ambassadors themselves, but also on their friends, families and communities is outstanding. I've seen children start out as Ambassadors, shyly stepping onto a stage to give their campaign speeches, right through to the end of their time as an Ambassador, with their confidence, self-esteem and courage vastly increased.

## LIFE SKILLS TO HELP THEM STAY OFF THE STREETS

For those of you who may not have heard about our Child Ambassador programme before, it really is fantastic! Every couple of years, each of the projects involved in the scheme organises an election where the children can put themselves forward to become an Ambassador. Each potential candidate starts their campaign with a manifesto setting out the targets they want to achieve if they are elected and they use powerful speeches to persuade the other children in their project to vote for them. On election day, each child in the project is given an ID card with their name and a voting card. There is always a huge sense of occasion; each child stamps their thumb print to prove attendance and secret voting booths are used to make the activity even more exciting

and realistic. The votes are then counted and the new Ambassador is inaugurated at a celebration ceremony.

But the fun doesn't stop there! Throughout the two year period of office, the Ambassadors attend workshops and training days which teach them vital life skills to help them stay off the streets and away from the violence and crime that is often present in the communities where they grow up. They learn about topics such as responsibility, leadership, self-esteem, confidence and equality through fun activities which many would rarely have access to otherwise. As they learn new skills, they share their new found knowledge back at their projects with their peers. This means the programme has significant reach and can impact even more children. It's amazing to see the Ambassadors' excitement and to know that more children are being supported through their personal development.



## DETERMINED TO CHANGE THINGS

But why is the Child Ambassador programme so important to children today? I recently returned from a trip to meet some of our current Ambassadors in El Salvador and Guatemala – two countries where gang violence and homicide rates continue to rise and the possibility of being forcibly recruited into a gang is an ever-present threat.

Take Ángel for example. He is one of our current Child Ambassadors in a notorious red zone of Guatemala City and the community he lives in is controlled by the Barrio 18 gang. Before he joined his project, he spent his days working in a cemetery, cleaning out old tombs and preparing them for new coffins. He is just six years old and was sometimes used as a look-out for the gang. However, through our work he has enrolled in school and regularly attends Child Ambassador training sessions where he learns about his rights, the importance of education, self-esteem, leadership and responsibility. He says, "I never thought I'd get to learn so many things! My older brothers still work in the cemetery, but I am trying to change that for them." Despite the numerous stories I heard during my trip of children being recruited into violent gangs, as I spoke to Ángel, I felt really hopeful. The Ambassadors themselves are determined to change things, so that future generations of children don't feel the need or the pressure to join that way of life. The Ambassadors spoke of their communities as places of hope and the arrival of gang members' children at the project shows that perhaps they too are realising that gang life isn't the way they want their children to grow up. It is thanks to our Child Ambassador supporters that this work is possible. Their regular support is helping these children to bring hope into their communities and to change the tide of

violence that is sweeping across their nations. It is also thanks to the loyalty of our Child Ambassador supporters that we have recently been able to expand the programme into Kenya and hope to expand it into some of our projects in India too.

### JOIN US

And this is why we would love you to join us as a Child Ambassador supporter today. A monthly donation of £21 will support children like Ángel, through their time as Ambassadors. You will be linked to one child and their project and through annual updates, you'll be able to hear about everything they are learning, what their project is like and the changes that are happening in their wider community. You will help our partners to reach children before they are living at the streets and at their most vulnerable – preventing children from ever having to experience horrors that we can barely imagine. What better way to make a difference!

**You can join our Child Ambassador programme today. Simply sign and return the form enclosed with your magazine and letter. Alternatively, feel free to give me, Abbey, a call on 01908 360080 to learn more. Together we can change the world for street children.**

# ANNUAL REVIEW ROUND UP

## Toybox's CEO Lynne Morris shares her highlights from the last financial year.

Working for Toybox is amazing; each day I know with your support, something good has been achieved. And as I go to bed and think and pray for the street children who are just starting their day or walking through the night to keep warm, unaware of what challenges will be set them, I know that Team Toybox is walking alongside them bringing light, hope and choice to thousands of young children. And that is what we have done, every day and every night over the last year.

All too often we only view success in financial terms and if that is how Toybox is to be judged this year – well, we have done well then. Despite a challenging environment in which the US\$ plummeted (we send our money to most of our partners in US\$) and Brexit made a lot of us very nervous, the organisation grew its overall income by 3% so we have done a good job managing Toybox here Milton Keynes.

More exciting is what the donations, from you, have been able to achieve. This year we have supported over 17,000 children – playing with the maths that is 47 children a day. That thought keeps me very cheery at my desk!

Figures and ratios are all grand and good, but I'm sure you are also keen to hear how children's lives have changed for the better. For the full and detailed picture about what we achieved and what we didn't, and to read Angela, Flor and Cesar's stories of how their lives have changed, please take a look at our Annual Report and Accounts on our website: [www.toybox.org.uk/about/](http://www.toybox.org.uk/about/)

Together, we are spreading hope, joy and opportunity to the most marginalised children in our world. I am really proud of Team Toybox, the year we have had, all we stand for and all that we do – I hope you are too.

SUPPORTED OVER

**17,000**  
CHILDREN



# EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

## Toybox's Director of International Programmes, Al Richardson, shares her experiences from a recent trip to Guatemala City.

Sitting on the plane coming back home I was unable to sleep; my head was full of all that I had heard and seen during the past week. I had been in Guatemala City visiting some of our projects and partners, meeting some of the children and young people we are working alongside.

### EASY TO LOSE HOPE

As I sat and listened to children from the Santa Faz community, I was struck by how easy it would be for them to lose hope. This is an economically deprived area of the city, which is categorised by the Guatemalan Government as a red zone; one of the most dangerous areas in the country. There is limited employment and high levels of crime and violence. The children spoke of how parents were not providing good care for their children and that increasingly the children and teenagers were spending more and more time on the streets. Although the children enjoyed being with their friends on the streets, it is a really dangerous place; drugs are readily available and there is a high risk of violence. I met one very young mother who had been caught in cross-fire and had been shot in the leg. There is also the constant threat from gangs as they recruit children from the community to join them.

### VISION

Despite this backdrop, I could see a sense of hope and vision is really growing in this community. During my trip I had the opportunity to attend one of the Toybox supported life skills workshops. I heard

young people from the community discuss how they could change the direction of their lives. I met one young man called Eddy who told me how his brother was in a gang and how he, himself, had also been on the verge of being recruited. Fortunately Eddy had met one of the project staff and was encouraged to join a youth group that met in the local community centre. Through the life skills training sessions, Eddy began to see that he had a choice – that he could choose a different path. As his confidence grew, he decided to improve his success of gaining formal work and started an English language course. Eddy explained how he and a few of his friends wanted to continue with their studies and also support others in the community to do the same. They began asking around in the community and approached various organisations for books to support this venture and excitingly, they have recently set up a library in their community centre. I was so encouraged to hear Eddy speak so passionately about supporting both his peers and the wider community and also to learn of this incredibly useful community resource that he and his friends had the vision to create.

### INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In Santa Faz, there are few employment opportunities. Most of the population come from socially excluded and marginalised families, with low levels of formal education, scarce income generating opportunities and a lack of access to basic services. Only 20% of the adult population are employed in the formal economy, the majority are unemployed or work as street vendors. Toybox's partner Conacmi is working in this part of the city to help increase employment opportunities for young



people who at risk of ending up on the streets. The vocational training project, which includes classes on cookery, computing and motor mechanics, along with support in employment skills, is helping to improve these young people's success of gaining formal work. Excitingly, 250 vulnerable young people have already taken part in this training and can now look for employment. In the coming months, the project will also be focussing on engaging employers, to give more young people work-placements with the potential of permanent jobs on completion of the placement.

However this project is certainly not without its challenges. During conversations with Conacmi staff and young people in the community, I learned that if someone was ever able to get a job at a company in a different part of the city, they were often stigmatised by employers as a result of where they lived. I also heard of the challenges that these young people are facing in actually getting to work. Many of them are struggling to even cover their transportation costs to and from their work placements. The rising costs of using public transport are a direct result of the gangs who terrorise the community, extorting the bus drivers to pay them a 'protection' fee.

### BIRTH REGISTRATION WORK

After spending some time meeting young people from the Santa Faz community, I had the opportunity to see some of our birth registration work, which focuses on reducing the number of unregistered street children. I was quickly reminded of the implications of not having a birth certificate, that simple, yet vital piece of paper. A grandmother told me how she had taken her sick grandson to the hospital but that he was denied treatment because he had not been registered and therefore did not officially exist. As many of you are aware, through supporting our Christmas appeal, access to a number of basic services in Guatemala is prevented without a birth certificate. And if a child is not registered soon after they are born, it becomes harder to gather the supporting documents to apply for birth registration at a later date. Toybox is working with local partner



Viva to change this situation. Viva are working in partnership with RENAP, the government department for registration in Guatemala, and have now registered over 4,000 children. Whilst visiting this project, I had the opportunity to speak to Anderson and his mother. Anderson had started school but as he was not registered, he had not been able to fully participate or progress to the next school year. His family were unable to find the relevant documentation related to his birth so Viva, helped to organise a DNA test which proved that he and his mother were related. Working with a Judge, they were then able to obtain the legal paperwork stating that Anderson should be given registration and he has now received his birth certificate. Anderson told me that he is enjoying school and he has now been able to move up to the next year. He has six other siblings and they all have, or are in the process of getting, their births' registered so they too can attend school.

I came to Toybox in early 2017 and have had visited several of the projects that Toybox supports. Having the opportunity to meet so many amazing people and hear their stories has been really inspiring. At Toybox we see the children not as recipients but as agents of change; looking to change their own opportunities as well as together working to improve the support by their families and communities. I am very proud to be working in partnership with these children and youth so that together we will be able to continue to help some of the most vulnerable children, to address injustice and nurture hope.

## REFLECTION:

# STAND TALL AND STEP FORWARD

**This edition, our reflection is from Ian Gray, our new Chair of the Toybox Board of Trustees.**

Have you ever had one of those days when you think to yourself – I should just go back to bed! Your alarm does not go off, you can't find the car keys and then you meet the really aggressive man in the car park, shouting and swearing at you for, well, who knows what for. Or the really challenging days when you are told you have a serious illness, your depression is debilitating or you just can't face the prospect of years of solitude in retirement.

Tough days – tough moments; and as humanity we share these days, these moments. Regardless of our age, gender, or where we live – we all face these moments. When facing days like these Nelson Mandela's quote that "The greatest glory in living is not in falling, but in rising every time we fall" is a good one to remind ourselves of.

As a Christian I believe that not only do I need to keep rising, but that I am called to help others who have fallen, supporting them in their journey to stand tall and step forward once again. However, sometimes when I am too embroiled in my own challenges, fears or just glued to my mobile phone it is easy to forget that living is glorious and each rising is an opportunity to strengthen my faith.

When I take time to reflect on the people, and support, that God has provided to help me with the challenges I face, I am reminded of

when a colleague once sent me Psalm 121 vs1 to describe how it must feel for those who are not as blessed in having support around them to face their challenges; "I lift my eyes to the mountains; does my help come from mountains? No, my strength comes from God." When I pray for the children Toybox works with and reflect upon this verse; I see the work of Toybox as one of the ways that God shows his strength and compassion for those children who do not have the support that many of us enjoy.

All of us involved in Toybox; staff, partners and supporters are part of that earthly manifestation of God's strength to support children, even in their hour of darkest need. During the days where the challenges for these young children are simply too much – moments of abuse, days of violence; moments of despair and days of fear. But because, I and many like me believe that, daily, we should care for the orphan and widow, I know that we will - and do- have moments of joys, days of choice, and moments of compassion and days of hope.

The children who we work with are resilient, but their strength is not inexhaustible. Our God's is. To be part of displaying God's strength and compassion to them; what a privilege!





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