



HELLO!

A warm welcome to the latest issue of Street Life.

Firstly, I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible generosity you've shown towards our recent Easter Appeal. Your support has provided vulnerable street children with essential items such as food, clothing and hygiene materials. These items really do make a huge difference to the children we work alongside. Your support at this time, as children around the world face more desperate and difficult situations than ever, means our partners have been able to prevent street children going hungry, provide something warm to protect them from the cold and treat their injuries and illnesses.

As you know, these essential items do so much more than just meet a child's immediate needs. For those who may have ended up on the streets after leaving violent or traumatic

home lives, receiving some of these essential items may be the first time in months, or even years, that they have felt any form of kindness or compassion.

For our frontline staff, giving out supplies in this way gives them an important first opportunity to build trust with a child or young person. Slowly, over time, as a bond of trust forms, the teams can find out about a child's personal circumstances and begin to work closely to support them in their journey away from the streets.

Sadly, we know that street children regularly face terrible discrimination for the way they look and dress, which can have a hugely detrimental impact on their self-esteem and mental health. It occurred to me that as humans we all have a deep-rooted desire to feel accepted and like we belong. Simple, yet essential everyday items, like the right shoes can really help to rebuild a child's sense of worth. I was really struck by a comment made by five-year-old Gabriel, who recently received a new pair of school shoes from our partner in Guatemala. He told us, "I feel like I look different with these shoes - they look new." It is thanks to support like yours, that Gabriel will now be able to go to school with shoes just like his classmates. He said, "Even though they're for school, they'll help me to run faster too! It felt good when I received my shoes - they feel so soft!"

Receiving essential items, like a new pair of shoes, really can be the first step on a street child's journey towards a brighter future. In Gabriel's case, they will allow him to play at ease - like every child should be able to. I now have a such joyful vision of Gabriel in my mind, speedily running across the playground, playing with his classmates at breaktime! Thank you for helping to make this a reality for him and for so many others.

Inside this edition we share some of the new work that is underway in our projects in India to address the issue of period poverty. Globally, millions of girls and women face significant challenges and barriers, simply because they menstruate. Here at Toybox we



believe that this is a huge injustice and we have witnessed first-hand the crippling impact that having a period can have on girls and young women living or working on the streets. Addressing period poverty is a new focus for Toybox and one which our partners in India and Sierra Leone had identified as causing a significant barrier for girls on the street being able to fully participate in project activities.

Inside, hear from Toybox's new Programme Manager Smita Khanijow, who we were thrilled to have join Team Toybox earlier this year! Smita lived in India for over 40 years, where discrimination against menstruating women and girls is widespread and periods have long been a taboo subject.

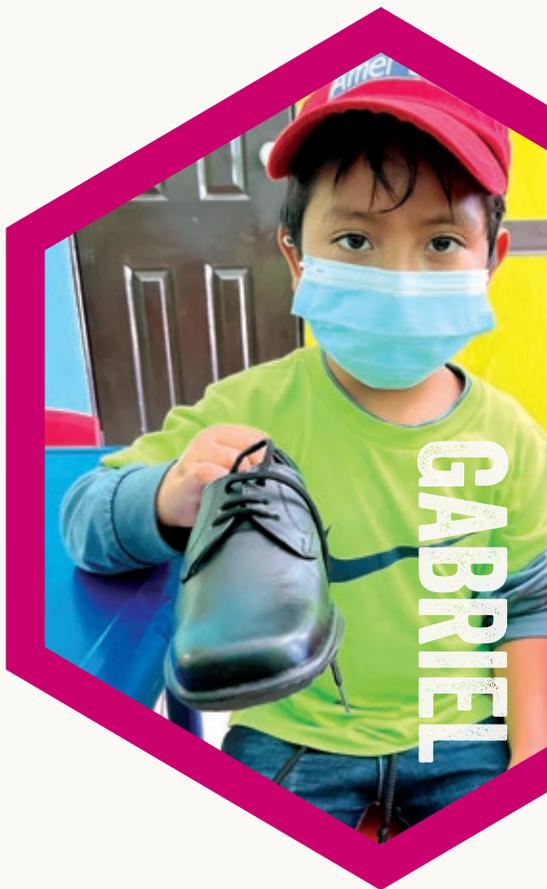
Finally, I am really pleased to report that most of our project activities are back on track again, after over two years of covid disruption. This is encouraging news and means that our partners will be able to reach out to even more street children in the coming months. We pray that things continue to move in the right direction and that the children we work alongside can begin to heal from the trauma, uncertainty and increased mental health challenges they faced during this time. Thank you for continuing to stand alongside us and the children we are here to help on this road to recovery.

I do hope you enjoy this issue of Street Life and once again thanks for everything you do to support street children around the world.

Yours,



Lynne Morris OBE
Toybox CEO



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www.toybox.org.uk



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PERIOD POVERTY IN INDIA

For young women and girls around the world, lack of access to sanitary supplies is more than just an inconvenience – it can be psychologically distressing and even dangerous to health. Sadly, it also has knock on effects to many other aspects of their daily lives, stopping them from reaching their full potential. Toybox's partner in India, CHETNA have reported that a lack of access to adequate sanitary supplies is a major barrier to girls' full participation in project activities, such as sports and life skills sessions and it affects their ability to concentrate on their studies. In a recent report, CHETNA explained how during the pandemic, when many families were left without any source of income, many of the girls they work alongside had no choice but to use whatever

they could get hold of to manage their periods – many relied on rags - putting them at serious risk of infection.

However, thanks to your ongoing support, CHETNA have been able to start addressing this serious healthcare concern by supplying sanitary kits, teaching the girls about managing their periods and running workshop sessions to dispel longstanding myths around menstruation. This support has been vital in ensuring that they are able to safely manage their periods free of shame. Distributing these kits has also helped to raise awareness about menstrual hygiene in communities, helping to break the stigma attached to the issue.

FIND OUT MORE

Tune into episode 5 of our podcast, Stories from the Street, where we take a deeper look at the challenges faced by women and girls living on the streets in Delhi in accessing sanitary protection and clean and safe toilet facilities. You can find this new episode on all your favourite podcast channels including Spotify, Amazon Music and Apple podcasts or visit our website:

www.toybox.org.uk/podcast

"In many of the communities we work within Delhi, there is a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding about periods as well as a real stigma associated with having one. Menstruation continues to be seen as a 'dirty' biological occurrence and one which isn't spoken about openly. As a result of the myths and superstitions surrounding the subject, many girls and women are not allowed to enter the kitchen and are forced to sleep on the floor during their periods. They are also not permitted to attend any religious functions, touch deities or handle any items of food at this time.

Due to these widely held beliefs and practices, it is unsurprising that so many girls in India miss school when they are menstruating. Girls living or working on the streets in India lack access to clean water and toilets, forcing many to drop out of the education system especially when they reach puberty. For those already living a hand to mouth existence, the cost of sanitary products is completely prohibitive. Most poor and marginalised families push their girls to use rags as menstrual pads, or even at times, the leaves of certain plants, which means that many girls end up developing infections. The male dominated focus of households prevents girls and women from talking openly or seeking advice and support on menstruation and as a result, they end up suffering in silence."

Smita Khanijow, Programme Manager for Africa and Asia

Teenagers Ritu, Aditi and Kanci attend a Toybox supported project in Delhi, which focuses on helping young people to develop life skills through sport and formal education. Since attending the project, the girls have received sanitary pads as well as other hygiene materials and stationery to support them with their studies. With the support of the project, they have also been able to teach their families about the importance of menstrual health.

"I feel extremely good about using sanitary napkins as I don't have to worry about staining or the cloths falling out in the middle of nowhere. Before I sometimes had to use wet clothes because I didn't have any others – my thighs used to get grazed and infected. Now I can easily walk and do my chores – I want to tell all the young girls that we should use sanitary pads to stay hygienic and have a carefree period. We should never use old wet clothes to avoid irritation and problems." Ritu, 16.

"I wish for people in my community to not treat girls like untouchables during their periods and to give them respect." Aditi, 16.

"The pandemic caused clouds of gloominess to hover above us. During my period, I had to use old clothes as we didn't have enough money to buy even food." Kanci

Read Ritu, Aditi and Kanci's stories in full: www.toybox.org.uk/stories



ADITI



RITU



KANGI

A LIFETIME OF LEGAL PROTECTION

When the pandemic hit Guatemala, restrictions meant that being outside after curfew was a punishable offence by law. Like many young people who depend on the streets, 21-year-old Alejandra had nowhere safe to go and as a consequence was arrested by the police and placed in prison. Alejandra had never been in trouble with the law before and was understandably terrified. To make matters worse, she was also pregnant with her daughter Ana.

Thankfully, she was able to contact her family and thanks to them being able to present her birth certificate, she was able to prove her identity, allowing her to get out of prison after just a few days. After she was released, Toybox's partner CONACMI supported her to access prenatal care as well as helping her partner, Lucas, to get his birth certificate. This meant that when their daughter was born, they were able to

easily register her as they both now had their own birth certificates.

"When I registered Ana, I felt so happy and relieved. I was so afraid to go out with her before because she could've been stolen and no-one would have known she was mine. The police could have stopped me and not believed I was her mother then she would've been taken away from me. Now I can prove she is my daughter."



The young family are currently renting a room in one of the notoriously dangerous areas in Guatemala City. CONACMI have been supporting them with essentials like food and nappies, whilst working with Alejandra to help her improve her opportunities for the future. "I want to find a better place to live so that my daughter can grow up in a better, safer and more stable environment. My dream is to have a job where I can do my own things and not depend on anyone else."

Read Alejandra's story in full: www.toybox.org.uk/stories

CALL TO PRAYER FOR THE VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA CITY

"In recent months we have been receiving regular updates from our partner CONACMI regarding the escalating violence in Guatemala City and the impact that is having on project activities. Organised crime groups have been present in the country for decades and corruption is endemic (Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Guatemala as 150 out of 180 countries).

In the city centre, some of the violence experienced by young people on the streets is at the hands of the National Civil Police who frequently move homeless people away from the places where they are sleeping, scattering or throwing their limited belongings away. The treatment by the police is increasingly repressive and CONACMI continues to speak out against these abuses.

However, the situation most worrying partner staff at the moment is the increased presence of organised crime groups in the city centre. This has dispersed the usual meeting places for young people on the streets and some have moved to other parts of the city for their own safety. Those that remain in their 'focos' (groups), are currently extremely vulnerable. Organised crime groups have a pattern of targeting minors to recruit them as the law is more lenient on those under 18 if they are caught. CONACMI have observed that some of these 'focos' have been taken over by organised crime groups which intimidate,

threaten and attack the street connected youth so that they do not buy drugs from other distributors. In the worst cases, children are coerced into illicit activities."

Roz Elliott, Programme Manager for Latin America



PLEASE JOIN US IN PRAYING FOR:

- The young people for whom violence is 'normalised' and part of their daily lives - that they may know a brighter future
- For the government and local authorities to fulfil their role as duty bearers and protect street children
- For CONACMI and their partners who courageously and continuously speak out in the face of these abuses, giving a voice to those who have none.

REFLECTION

Graeme Everist is Toybox's Director of Finance and Resources. Here he shares a personal reflection on the power of stories and how they can help us see the world through the eyes of others and reflect on the difference each of us can make.

During the summer between my second and third years at university, I found myself in A&E nursing a wrist injury. Sitting across from me was a young woman, a couple of years younger than me, with an arm in a sling and a very frightened look on her face. I smiled, going for a 'look at us, how silly we are for breaking our arms' kind of vibe. She tried to smile but couldn't. I nodded.

A few minutes later, she was talking to the receptionist. She didn't have any money for the payphone (remember those?) and needed to call someone. The receptionist couldn't help, so I offered her some loose change. She looked surprised, wary almost, of accepting

even a small amount from a stranger, but eventually she did.

Her parents wouldn't come to be with her. A nurse asked who had brought her in. 'My boyfriend... he couldn't stay'. How did it happen? 'I fell...' and silence. Eventually she admitted it was her boyfriend who had hurt her, but she insisted that the police weren't called.

I saw her as I was leaving. I tried to smile but couldn't. She nodded.

My wrist still hurts when it's cold, or when I bump it, or when I'm asked to do some DIY! Every time it does, I am reminded of the girl in the hospital and wonder what happened next. Was she reconciled with her family? Did she escape the violent relationship? What else could I have done? And so, I pray for her and hope her world has improved. It often feels like that is not enough, that there must be something more that can be done. Psalm 12 v7 says 'You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked', so I trust that He is in charge of her story, keeping her safe.

We hear stories every day of Toybox's partners work with children and young people who are separated from their families or subject to violence. We rejoice when we hear of families reunited, children protected from abuse and harm, birth certificates issued so that children can progress through school and access healthcare. And yet so many still slip through the net. How many stories don't have that happy ending? How many stories do we simply never hear?

I love the focus that Toybox places on helping children to tell their stories in their own words. As a father of two, I know that children can be incredibly hard to read. Bringing to life the true realities street children are facing in their daily lives is incredibly important and by sharing their stories we give them a voice and show that they matter and are noticed.



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