

LAS MEJORES, NOTICIAS ESTÁN EN LA CALLE*

Written by project participants in Bolivia

Being part of the magazine helped us say things we hadn't been able to say before. Some of us wrote about things we had never told anyone, things that hurt us, like bullying or the violence we've experienced. Others felt that writing was like letting off steam, getting things off our chests and showing what we go through every day.

We also want you to know that we often keep our feelings to ourselves. We find it difficult to say when something hurts or worries us. Some of us want you to know important parts of our story, like when we had to work or the effort we make to continue studying.

Even though we are on the streets, we have feelings, responsibilities and dreams.

The message we want to share is: please don't forget about us.

Sometimes we feel invisible. We do not always need money or clothes; often what we need most is for someone to listen to us and see us as people.

We want you to learn to look beyond what you see on the outside. It is possible to get off the streets if you do your part and if someone gives you a chance.



Image: Maria, 16, with her son
*The best news is out on the street

DEFOGGING DREAMS

Hi, I'm Maria. I'm 16 years old and I was born in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. My grandmother sold newspapers at traffic lights. From a very young age, she would take me to the traffic lights to help her sell.

At the roundabout where we used to hang out, there were several young people who cleaned windcreens and used inhalants (glue). I never knew my father; I only remember that he died in a street fight.

I got pregnant at 13 and became a mother at 14. To support my baby, I started selling lollipops, but I didn't earn much. Sometimes we ate, sometimes we didn't. My friends who were homeless taught me how to clean windcreens, where I could earn a little more money.

I found the Alalay Foundation, and they helped me get a birth certificate and ID card for my baby. They also encouraged me to resume my studies at a Centre for Alternative Education.

Now I've been given the opportunity to fulfil my biggest dream: to be a football player. I'm training hard so I can be part of the Alalay Foundation's women's team and make my dream come true.

At times I wanted to give up and disappear, but then I look at my son and say, I have someone to keep fighting for and a dream to fulfil.



DIEGO'S STORY

I'm 13 and this is my story... I used to live with my mum, my four sisters, and my brother in a house in La Paz. My mum beat us a lot, and all the money we earned selling things went to her. She didn't give us anything to eat. My siblings and I got tired of that, so we left home and went to live on the streets. That's how it all started.

I worked selling sweets almost all day: from eleven to three, then again from seven to ten, and even in restaurants in the afternoon. I often went to internet cafés, first to use the computers and later to sleep there.

We called those "all-nighters". You pay money to stay overnight. Sometimes I'd go sell things in the centre or bars to save up money for the all-nighters, which cost fifteen bolivianos to use the computers all night. During the all-nighters, there were rapes, abuses, people drinking, and many other things, like smoking marijuana and snorting cocaine.

In the mornings, some of us slept on the balcony until one day the police caught us sleeping at the internet café and took us to the Special Force for the Fight Against Crime, and from there to the child protection agency. My cousin came to pick me up, and since then I haven't gone to those places.

I met Alalay after we were kicked out of the all-nighters. They came to meet us at the internet café and invited us to eat and talk about our lives.

I want to change my life. Now I've started studying. I was in sixth grade, and this year I moved up to seventh grade, and I don't go to the all-nighters anymore.

I started going to my aunt's house, and I don't drink alcohol anymore. The people from the Alalay Foundation enrolled me into a football school.

I'm still selling things, but now I go home, and I don't think I'm doing bad things anymore. We participate in activities with the Alalay Foundation, like scouting, and we also go to the project centre where they give us food and breakfast. They also help us with our homework.

In my free time, I like to play football with my friends. I also like going to the internet café, but not for all-nighters, just for two hours. Then I go to sell things and go home. I play Roblox.

In the future, I want to leave the streets completely and become a professional football player, and that's why the people from Alalay enrolled me in the sports school. If I don't become a footballer, I would like to be a doctor.

THE STORY OF 'L'

A creative story written by 'L'

Once upon a time, there was a young girl who didn't feel loved by her family and because of that, she made some unwise decisions, such as leaving home. Her problems consumed her completely, and life on the streets offered little help. However, she found support among other people living in the same situation. She said that they were her real family and adapted to this new way of living. In time, she gave birth to a son, but the young woman felt unable to care for him and temporarily left, leaving her child with her mother.

This boy, whom we will call 'L', grew up with his grandmother. From a young age, he spent a lot of time alone.

His grandmother worked long hours, and his aunt was studying so he was often by himself, feeling the absence of both parents. Little by little he learned to cope with being alone and tried not to dwell on it. His mother would return from time to time and visit him.

With his mother's visits, he began to feel a mother-son bond. But one day she suddenly stopped visiting him, and 'L' experienced sadness and abandonment. At night, little 'L' felt lonely despite having his grandmother and aunt. 'L' soon got used to it and although his mother later resumed visiting him, he no longer felt the same bond – though he still agreed to see her.

As the years passed, his feelings of loneliness grew, and he was no longer as dependent on his mother.

At school, he was not enthusiastic, struggled to express himself with others, and focused on his phone because he did not feel unique or like a good person. He used his phone as a form of escape.

Time passed. He still felt lonely and found it difficult to feel useful or capable like before. He tried to recover, but never fully did. As a teenager, he began to make more friends and started listening to them and supporting them. His friends cared about him. Even though he made mistakes, he tried to move forward with his unique personality, which made him who he was. He always relied on his schoolmates or friends, sharing his problems with his closest friends.

He learned that crying, smiling, and getting angry were what made life beautiful, even if he kept many problems to himself.

He reminded himself that he would move forward and improve no matter what happened. He always believed it was better to smile in the face of problems, that it's okay to cry, but that smiling meant you were still standing, still strong and capable of overcoming anything.

