



HELLO!

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

Here at Toybox, we believe that every child has the right to experience a childhood away from the streets, safe from harm. Over the years, our experience has shown that the reasons a child ends up on the street are often complicated, with many ending up there due to difficulties they have experienced at home.

We know that the streets are no place for a child and that it puts them at further risk of abuse and exploitation. So, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, our partners work with children and their caregivers to support them through a process of reconciliation and reintegration with their families and the wider community.

As part of our work with families, Toybox works with children to teach them about their rights and with parents, caregivers and communities to help them to gain a better understanding of children's needs and how to protect them. Our aim is to support children to move away from the streets and into to a safe environment, where they can recover from their experiences.

The process of returning a child home after a period on the streets takes significant time

and resources and is rarely straightforward. But each time it works, it is a huge victory for us as an organisation. Family is the single most important influence on a child's life and our home and family are where we should feel the most comfortable and the most safe. Not only do these experiences in childhood determine how life decisions are made; they also shape children's attitudes, sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

In the last financial year, 148 children and young people went back to their families, which is cause for huge celebration. While the reintegration process may take time and is often complex, the impact of bringing

a child back to their family is truly life-changing. Every single one of these success stories is testament not only to the hard work and determination of our partners, but also to the children and families involved. Inside this issue of your magazine, you can read more about our work in Bolivia and how we are supporting

street children and their families to reconnect and rebuild their lives together.

You can also hear about how our partner is working to support entire street families to leave the streets behind for good.



The ongoing impact of coronavirus

16 months on from when the World Health Organisation first declared coronavirus a global pandemic, it sadly continues to cause significant pain and disruption around the world and in many of the countries where we work. Over the past few months our partners particularly in India and Nepal have been dealing with a fall out of a huge second wave of cases.

Cases in India spiked significantly in April as a result of the Delta variant which quickly spread to neighbouring Nepal. Both countries battled with lack of sufficient oxygen supplies and hospital beds. Lockdown restrictions once again meant that street connected children were unable to access food for survival as labour opportunities were not available, except for those involved in the work of preparing graves and bodies for cremation. Toybox has supported our partners in both Nepal and India to access food, hygiene supplies, medical and mental health support and to continue with their education while schools are closed.

Changes to our new project in Kenya

You may have seen the announcement earlier this year that the UK foreign aid budget was cut by around £4bn. This news comes as a significant blow for many of the world's most marginalised people – many of whom are already struggling to survive on a daily basis. The impact of these cuts has sadly already been felt – and we are not exempt. We recently received the disappointing news that we would not be getting the £1 million grant that we had been awarded by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office last year to undertake a new three-year project with street children



in Kenya. Despite this hugely disappointing news we will continue to do all we can to support our partner in Kenya as they continue the essential work which is helping street children in Nairobi.

Thank you so much for continuing to stand alongside us in our mission to change the world for street children. I really hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine.

Yours,

Lynne Morris, CEO



To see all our latest news and for regular updates, please visit our website
www.toybox.org.uk



REUNITING FAMILIES IN BOLIVIA



MEET THE CALDERÓN FAMILY

Gabriela and her children rent a small dwelling on the outskirts of La Paz, Bolivia. Each day the family make the journey by public transport into the city centre to work. Gabriela is a roadside street vendor while her son, Carlos, who is 13, and his younger sister Beatriz, work alongside her, cleaning the windscreens of cars as they stop at the traffic lights.

Like many of the families Toybox supports, the family have a long standing and deep-rooted connection to the streets. Before having children, Gabriela spent much of her own childhood and adolescence living on the streets.

When she fell pregnant with Carlos, Gabriela made the decision that she wanted to leave her life on the streets for good. Yet, as is often the case, she struggled with a series of personal challenges and setbacks and Carlos and Beatriz were born and spent their early years on the streets. It was around this time that our partner, ALALAY first came into contact with the Calderón family and began providing support and guidance to Gabriela and found a safe place for the family to live.

Here, the family lived together for a number of years. However, growing up Carlos and Beatriz experienced periods of instability and conflict at home, resulting in them making the decision to

escape to the streets. During this time, the pair would often be found sleeping under bridges.

ALALAY's street outreach team worked closely with Carlos and Beatriz while they were living on the streets, initially offering support in areas where it was needed most such as providing food and emergency medical treatment. As well as offering a constant and reliable presence in the children's lives at this time, crucially, the team were there to listen without judgement. This support was critical in Carlos and Beatriz's journey away from the streets. During this time, the siblings also took part in many of the recreational activities run by ALALAY, giving them the opportunity to learn, develop, and play in a safe place where they were cared for and able to build friendships.

The team then also worked closely with Gabriela, Carlos and Beatriz to support them to address the underlying challenges they faced through family counselling sessions. Together, over time, they worked on a plan to enable the children to return home to Gabriela and for the family to reunite. Since then, they continue to be involved in many of the project activities which focus on strengthening family relations, through follow up visits and individual counselling sessions. Gabriela also attends parenting workshops where she is able learn positive parenting strategies and techniques

to support her in her ongoing relationship with her children, while Carlos and Beatriz regularly attend life skills workshops to support their personal development and growth. Shortly after reuniting as a family Beatriz said, "We still don't feel like we're a normal family or one of those that you see on the television or in adverts. We've still got a long way to go until we get there, but we're making progress and we've improved some things. The place where we live now feels safer and we don't fight as much at home. Carlos has learned a lot from everything ALALAY have done - I have seen that he and mum can talk normally without fighting."

Carlos also acknowledged the positive changes in his life. "Sometimes, I think about how much I want to be out on the streets with my friends, but then I remember the fights with my family and realise how far we've come. We still fight, but much less. Before, I used to escape and go to the streets when we fought but now, I just go and take a few minutes in my bedroom to calm down and I stay with my family."

Between March and August 2020, the Calderón family were unable to work because of the pandemic. For a family who already lived a hand-to-mouth existence, this proved devastating and resulted in them building-up a large debt of unpaid rent. They were also left without money to purchase essentials including food, masks and hygiene items. At this time, ALALAY were able to support the family with emergency supplies. In September 2020, the family were able to start work again and reached an agreement with their landlord to pay their rent in instalments.

HELPING FAMILIES LEAVE THE STREETS

Roz Elliott, Toybox's Programme Manager for Latin America unpacks another aspect of ALALAY's work with families, which focuses on supporting entire street connected families to leave the streets.

"Our partner ALALAY have developed a unique approach to support children and families to leave the street, building on their many years' expertise from working daily on the streets of La Paz and El Alto. As the Calderón's story illustrates, many families are living in such precarious situations that often whole families become dependent on the street. For many, they cannot see an alternative life for themselves and have little hope for the future. ALALAY's street team walk alongside them to build trust and foster that hope, supporting them to recover their sense of self-worth and to believe that a different life is possible for them. To start the journey away from the streets, it is essential that the families themselves want this and are motivated to change.

Through Toybox projects, families receive skills training, family psychosocial counselling sessions and support to create a concrete

plan to leave the street. The approach involves families every step of the way, ensuring they own the plan and have responsibility for implementing it. The plan includes finding a room to rent and working with the family to consider how they will earn an income. Once they find a room, ALALAY provide a package of financial support including one month's rent and seed funding, enabling families to start generating a regular income. They also offer material items to help them make that huge step off the streets.

An essential part of this work is to give families a hand up in earning an income. We recently supported 26 families to form a subgroup of street vendors to help them generate income more effectively. Economic empowerment is an area of work that ALALAY is keen to expand with street connected families. The economic impact of the pandemic is hitting vulnerable families the hardest, and the team shared with me how worried they are that more families will be pushed into street situations unable to make enough income to pay rent. Already they have seen families moving to different areas of the city in search of work or cheaper rooms to rent. With Toybox's support, ALALAY plan to build on their current approach to deepen the support to families in generating a sustainable income. In this tough context, ALALAY is there offering a helping hand where it is most needed."



SUPPORTING A CHILD ON THE STREETS TO MOVE INTO A PLACE OF SAFETY

Eduardo works as a Street Work Coordinator for ALALAY and is responsible for overseeing the organisation's approach and care for street children and their families, as well as leading on the coordination with external institutions and service providers supporting street children and young people.

During outreach sessions, ALALAY's street team initially identify children and young people who have left home and ended up on the streets. Over time as they establish a relationship of trust, the team begin to find out more about each child's background and family history. This helps them to assess whether it would be feasible and safe for the child to be reintegrated with their family. If it seems like

there is a chance of bringing a child home, the team will then approach the family to find out whether they are open to the possibility.

Eduardo told us; "After establishing contact with a child or young person and their families, they are invited to participate in group activities and individual follow-up sessions are also scheduled. We never pressure the families or the children - plans are always consensual and progress is made at the pace of each individual."

At this point, the team also work in close collaboration with external agencies including the Ombudsman for Children and Youth, the public authority with responsibility for the welfare of children and young people.



In cases where family reintegration is possible, ALALAY provide support to both the child and the family. This is delivered through counselling, family orientation sessions and, if necessary, a small grant which gives families the chance to purchase basic equipment to help with a child's homecoming including essentials such as a bed, mattress and blankets.

Eduardo acknowledged that this work is not straightforward and in some cases families are not receptive to the idea of their child returning home. "When they do accept the child, because the Ombudsman's Office intervenes, violence towards the child can increase, which normally results in the child leaving home again for the streets."

This reality is something that Eduardo and the team are always alert to and is why their focus on providing support to parents and caregivers alongside the child both before, during and after reintegration is so important. Throughout the process, the team work directly with caregivers to help them identify and address the root causes of their behaviour and to overcome issues such as abuse and violence within the home.



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Registered charity number 1084243

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