



HELLO!

A warm welcome to the latest issue of Street Life.

In this edition we take a deeper look at some of our current work in Nepal and uncover the devastating impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having in relation to child labour in the country. You can read a heartbreaking update from Biso, the CEO of our partner, SathSath, who are working tirelessly to assist a group of young people who have been working at a COVID-19 crematorium site during the pandemic.

When I think about these young boys working in such horrific conditions, I think of my own teenage son. Like most of us who are parents, I have done my best to protect my two children over the last 18 months from the pandemic and some of the harsher realities of the virus. There is already so much they have had to take in and adapt to, it seems unfair to burden their young minds with even more. But for many young people, including these boys working face-to-face with death, there is no such luxury. Every day they are working in dangerous conditions, undertaking work that most adults could not do. They have seen things that no child should ever see, and continued exposure to such pain and sorrow may cause scars that last a lifetime.

When I hear from our partners about situations like this, I feel angry and, if I'm being honest, at times a little bit hopeless. However,

I know that thanks to the support of people like you, our partners can and will be there for these boys, doing their utmost to ensure that they are protected, have someone to talk to about their experiences and are supported to find safer alternatives in the future. We really felt this story was important to share with you however I do recognise it makes for an uncomfortable read.

In more positive news, during the past year, I am pleased to share that thanks to your generous support we were able to start a new project in Kathmandu. Working alongside our partner CWIN, the SAFE project is focused on building the resilience of street children to the impact of the pandemic. Along with addressing children's immediate needs for food, clothing and first aid, the project is also focusing on children's long-term well-being and opportunities for safe and stable futures by equipping them with essential life skills. At a time when life for these children feels less certain than ever, never has this support been more needed.

I was encouraged to hear that the project has recently appointed two peer educators to work in the local community. On the back page of this issue, you can read more about the benefits of this and hear from 25-year-old



Ankita, a peer educator who herself was born and grew up on the streets of Kathmandu. It is clear that Ankita has a good understanding of the challenges facing street children in her community and can empathise with the difficulties they face. Ankita is certainly well placed in her new role and has the drive and passion to really make a lasting difference in the lives of street children. It is thanks to the unfaltering determination of our partners on the ground and our incredible supporters like you that work like this is possible. Thank you for your continued support at this time and take care of yourselves.

Yours,

Lynne Morris, CEO



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THE HIDDEN CHILD LABOUR CRISIS IN NEPAL

A recent report published by the UN in June 2021 highlighted that for the first time in twenty years, progress to end child labour has stalled. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased pressure on children to enter the work force and over the past 18 months many families have lost their jobs and seen their incomes plummet. At the same time, schools have been closed for prolonged periods intensifying expectations that children contribute financially, while making them even more vulnerable to the worst forms of exploitation.

In response to the unprecedented economic impact of the pandemic, many countries implemented emergency measures such as cash assistance for vulnerable families. However, in some places this support has been inadequate and in many, it has fallen well short of need. In Nepal, many street children were unable to receive the limited government distributed food rations during the latest lockdown because they could not prove their legal identity as they were not registered. Without official help, it is unsurprising that many more desperate children were forced to search for whatever work they could find.

Even before the pandemic, more than a third of 10-14-year-olds were working in Nepal, but since March 2020, many more children have gone out to work for the first time to help support their families. The UN estimates that globally an additional 9 million children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 because of the pandemic.

Other children have been forced to work longer hours or enter even more exploitative situations, putting themselves at significant risk of harm. Once at work, many of these children will never return to school, with all the evidence showing that the longer children are out of school the less likely they are to return. UNICEF estimates that across the world 24 million children that have missed out on schooling during the pandemic will drop out for good.

These findings have undoubtedly been reflected in the day-to-day experiences of many of the street children we work with and many of our partners have expressed growing concern about the type of work children and young people are engaging with.

Searching for hope amongst the ashes

Earlier this year, Biso Bajracharya, CEO of our partner SathSath's reported, "Today, we spent six hours outside the COVID-19 cremation site. We were not allowed to go onto the site but could observe from the side of the river and communicate from there with the young people working there. We noticed that all the cremators were street connected young people, along with some adults from the slum area. All together we saw 14 people working at the site - seven of the boys are currently connected with our projects.

While we were there, we asked the boys about the work and why they were doing it. They said as lockdown was imposed, they were out of

work and for survival they came to work at the cremation site. They said they were paid Nrs.1000 per body (approx. £6) which they share among the group at the end of the week. They boys were given somewhere to sleep and food, but they are not allowed to go outside the cremation site.

The boys also then collect all the ashes from the funeral pyre in sacks and take it to another side of the river where they pour ashes in the flowing water to search for precious metals such as gold and silver.

The area where they are working was specially created to cremate those who have died from COVID-19. The boys are given the required gloves, PPE, shoes and masks but we observed that they are not taking enough precautionary measures. These young people see it as opportunity - they only see the monetary benefits rather than the risk from contracting the virus. They are taking very high-risk jobs for the sake of money."

It is clear that the pandemic has impacted so many aspects of daily life and with fewer employment options available, young people are taking whatever work they can find. At this difficult time, SathSath's frontline workers have been in constant contact with the boys, focusing on both their mental and physical well-being. They have done this through face-to-face meetings (when this has been permitted) and by phone. The team have also advocated on the boys' behalf with the cremation management committee. This support has been vital as it ensured that they were paid for the work they had undertaken and that they were provided with the necessary protective clothes and equipment to carry out their jobs. In addition, counselling support will also be made available by SathSath for the boys undertaking this work.



TEJ

15-year-old Tej regularly attends the Toybox-funded project The Bridge and has first-hand experience of the overwhelming pressures associated with unexpectedly becoming his family's sole earner.

When SathSath's frontline workers first met Tej he was working on the city streets of Kathmandu. Over time, as Tej began to trust and open up to them, he told them about his background and his reasons for ending up on the street. He explained that after the sudden and unexpected death of his father, his mother's mental health had suffered which resulted in her being unable to work and provide an income for the family. In the absence of his father and as the eldest child, Tej felt a strong sense of responsibility towards his mother and younger sister and took on the role of primary breadwinner. For around seven months, Tej spent much of his time away from home, living and working on the streets collecting scrap metal.

When the pandemic hit, Tej was unable to work at all. With no source of income, he was left in a situation where he was unable to buy any food to feed himself or his family. During this time, SathSath were able to offer additional support to his family,

supplying them with emergency food packages and hygiene kits as well as counselling to support their mental health and help them through their bereavement.

Thanks to the ongoing care and guidance he received from SathSath during this challenging time, Tej decided to become involved in The Bridge project where he has been receiving support with his studies as well as basic school supplies such as stationery and school uniform. Thanks to this invaluable support, he has also enrolled back into school. When he's not studying, Tej spends his time helping his mother around the house as well as working alongside her with local landowners who grow and harvest crops.

Tej has been enjoying his return to school and is now determined to complete his studies to enable him to fulfil his plans to join the army in the future and support his family.

"My life has changed a lot since attending the project. I thought I would never be able to continue my education and that I would have to be on the street my entire life to earn a living. Now I am free from my life on the streets and can live my life again by enrolling back at school. The sorrow we went through after the death of my father brought many changes in our lives and the counselling for me and my mother has helped a lot. Now, hope for doing something positive has built up inside me. I am happy that I am able to study and have a better future."



ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

Toybox's Director of International Programmes Naomi Hall Opiyo discusses some of the recent ways Toybox supported projects have been addressing the impact of the pandemic and subsequent rise in cases of child labour in Nepal.

"In Kathmandu, vulnerable families have been left without income due to the pandemic so we have also been providing temporary assistance with rent repayments as they risked eviction. This support has been crucial - not only has it ensured that families have a safe place to stay, it is helping to lower the risk of children ending up in dangerous work environments in a bid to help ensure their family is not left homeless.

During this time, SathSath have been continuing to work with unregistered children and families, working to secure them their birth certificates as well as advocating with the government that unregistered families should not be excluded from future ration distributions. We know that being registered opens up so many more possibilities for the young people we

work with, both in terms of the immediate support that is available to them in times of crisis and also the ability to get an education and subsequent qualifications for better employment prospects in future. This is another key initiative which over time will have a positive impact on the rising child labour rates in Nepal.

Through the Bridge education project, awareness sessions have been run with parents to highlight the importance of education, and mobile schools have been set

up, providing an important function for children unable to attend online and formal classes that have been disrupted by COVID-19. Given the nationwide school closures, the project is enabling those who would otherwise not have been able to join online classes to

do so to continue their education. This is a fantastic intervention, which is preventing street children from dropping out of school entirely and entering into full time work. Over a three-month period, 117 children were supported through the Mobile School. The initiative has certainly been a strong success - with 82% of the children returning to formal school."



Bijay, a frontline worker for SathSath outside the COVID-19 cremation site.



PEER TO PEER SUPPORT IN ACTION IN NEPAL

The SAFE project in Nepal recently employed two peer educators from the street community. These young women act as a bridge between the community and Toybox's partner, CWIN. This successful model is used in many of the projects Toybox supports including the long-standing Ambassador programmes in Guatemala City and San Salvador.

Peer educators are able to closely relate to the children they work alongside and truly understand the challenges they face. At the SAFE project, the newly appointed peer educators are responsible for making regular visits to children on the streets, as well as sharing leads and details of emergency cases and vulnerable children they encounter to the project team.

Ankita has been working as a peer educator for just over six months; "I was motivated to become a peer educator for CWIN as I was interested in doing social work in my community. I had been unable to support my community by myself because I didn't have much capacity. The biggest challenge I face at work is writing the field reports as I

left school after class 4, when I was 11. In my role I really enjoy collecting the names and details of needy people and interacting with them and the community that they live in. I like supporting them with education support as well as being involved in distributing the emergency food and hygiene kits. I have felt a real sense of achievement that I can help provide food and gas refill support to street connected families during the latest lockdown. Because of this, everybody in my community is respecting me. I feel so happy because all the families are happy with this support."

