

## No. 1

Returning from a day on the streets leaves you both high and low. Despite the excitement of seeing the kids and street adults again there is always a deep sadness at having to leave them knowing that you might never see them again.



During the last week I have been able to get out on the streets more and see how the situation is changing for the street population and how they are responding to the changing times.

It was great to be able to take a small group of street youths to a local park the other day to play football. When we arrived Matt, Becky, Herbert and I organised a match between us (England) and the young people (Guatemala). The game reached an impressive 4 – 4 before a group of school children arrived and asked to play with us. So we formed one team and took on the kids from the school who gave us all a run for our money!



What was good about the game was that the young people we brought with us from the streets were able to mix and play with kids from a local school and their behaviour was exemplary. In fact the only one who caused problems was me! I missed judged the ball (as always) and kicked a boy in the shin instead. A good trip out for the young people and a good talk afterwards by Herbert.

This particular group of young people includes a young family we have been trying to help over the last couple of years. The teenage mum and dad, Jessica and Jorge, have a young baby called David who is soon to celebrate his first birthday. I think this boy is a miracle because despite his bad health, diet and living conditions he is still alive.

Herbert has been trying to find an alternative place for them to live but despite his tireless efforts with them it seems that they are not keen to change just yet. We took Jorge, Jessica and David out for lunch and it was funny and sad watch them eat with speed and bag up as much of the food as they could to take with them to share with others. When a couple in an adjacent table finished eating it took Jorge no more than 5 seconds to return to our table with a bottle of drink that had been left by the couple.

## No. 2



So I have grabbed a few minutes to report back from my trip to Honduras last week.

Mark and Rosalie Balfour, from St.Peter's Church in Maidenhead, met me in Honduras and we spent the next 10 days together.

Two days were spent with the AFE project working with the kids and families on the city rubbish dump. The AFE project is such an inspiration and it was great to see the progress since my last visit.

A group of students have now graduated from the AFE school including a boy called Rene who was one of the first kids to be rescued from the dump nearly 10 years ago. He and another 8 students are now studying hard in college or in university.

I was keen to look at the business potential of the AFE site and what could be developed there in order to help sustain the project in the long term.

Mark and Rosalie (photo above) visited the dump and helped hand out food and water to those working there. We were able to inform the children that next week a school will start for them on the dump. The dump school is the first step for the children in gaining entrance to the AFE School across the road from the dump.



Wethen spent 6 days with the children at the Manuelito children's home in Talanga.

Thanks to Lindfield Nursery, Amersham we were able to give out Christmas presents to all the children. I know it is quite late in the year but I had to bring them with me on the plane and the kids were thrilled to have Christmas in February.

Mark and Rosalie were able to organise some craft activities for the children in the afternoons and Mark and I led a PE session for the older children, which went down really well.

The home is blessed with a large amount of land and a small farm project has started but continues to struggle for lack of someone to run it. I was keen to see how the Exagris company in Guatemala could explore options with Manuelito to better use the land and produce a regular harvest for the sustainability of the home.

I am concerned by the number of work teams now coming each year and the number of buildings being built by them with little support of the ongoing running costs. For example money is given towards the construction of a new building but was little money for food. This meant that some days the children have very little food and that was very hard to deal with.



Our day with the boys in the Manuelito Transitional Home in the capital was such fun. We took the boys out for a wander around the city centre and treated them to a McDonald's ice cream. Then we searched around for a football pitch we could hire for an hour and found a brilliant all-weather pitch which hosted a England vs Honduras match. England won of course!

On our return to the home Santo and Vlademer (photo) made us friendship bands and we played more football before having to say goodbye.

We were then invited to speak in a church in the North of Honduras on the Sunday but Rosalie became unwell and was taken into hospital. I then had to speak in the church and was given 1 hour to speak! People responded well to my testimony and they took up an offering for the Manuelito home. Thanks to Pastor Luis for the invite and for the lady who owns a petrol station in town who offered me free petrol whenever I was passing!

I left the next day for Guatemala but popped in to the hospital to visit Rosalie who was much better. On leaving the hospital I got stuck in a lift with Pastor Pinto, his wife and one amazing guy called Carlos. It was a new experience and fun climbing out of a lift stuck between floors.

Looking forward to going back next week with Matt Levett and Rebekah Green, my last visit before the team from Amersham come out in July.

### **No. 3**



It was great to see familiar faces in zone 4 yesterday. One of the younger boys who had been missing for a while has come back into the zone 4 group. His nickname is 'the clown' and looks about 13 years of age (photo). He is able to bend his legs around his body and has a smile that he seems to never be without despite his street existence.

Two of the older girls seemed to be rather down and one of them confided in me that she was sad because her brother had been arrested and sent to prison. She asked me if she could use my phone to call her mum. When we eventually got through to her mum her sister joined her in crying down the phone to their mum. When I spoke to the mum she told me they were both welcome back with "open arms". Both girls cried a lot down the phone saying things like "mummy I am sorry" and "please can I come home". Both left to catch a bus to Jocotales and I said I would call by their home next week to see how they are doing and maybe we could visit their brother in prison together.

Matt, Becky and I then joined a Guatemalan volunteer called Francis and headed to 'El Hoyo' which is probably the place I enjoy visiting the most. El Hoyo means 'The Hole' and is situated between the city bus terminal and main market and an area that is renowned for its bars and prostitution.

The crumbling streets and pavements are littered with excrement, bags of open rubbish which are a great source of food for the many stray dogs, and many drunk men sleeping off the alcohol. In the midst of this are the many kids we are working with. Some of whom are kids who live on the streets and many who are 'at risk' of becoming street kids or have a strong sense of connection with the streets.



Last week Moises (photo), a young man who has grown up on the streets but was now renting a room in the market, came and asked me for some medical help for himself and his little son. We went to see where he was living and in order to find his room we had to make our way down a labyrinth of narrow passageways in total darkness. The room was eventually lit by a candle and revealed a wooden bunk bed and a pile of clothes. Five people were living in the room and no wonder that the children only sleep there and then spend the rest of their time on the streets or in the market doing odd jobs. Moises was so happy we had visited and we were able to give him a small wind-up torch for his house which I hope will be treasured and used rather than sold.

Moving on into the market area itself we already had a small posse of children following alongside of us and some fighting for the chance to hold our hands. Most of the stalls had now closed up for the night and so the empty passage ways and piles of crates made for a make-shift area for us to gather the children together and play a game of LOTTO. Some of the children I had met the week before and so knew that they needed some treatment on their feet.



The foot washing was certainly needed as many of the young children had no socks and very black feet with sores and infections. After the cleaning came the bit the children seemed to relish – the application of cream and foot massage. Finally some foot powder and for three young children some socks. It was amazing to see the smiles afterwards and one little boy was so proud of his clean feet and new socks he couldn't help but show everyone.

Matt, Becky and Francis were great at playing with the children and providing them with crayons and colouring sheets, so thanks guys for coming and helping.

## No. 4



A few days ago Matt, Becky, Herbert and I had the amazing privilege of taking a donation of peppers, beans and tomatoes from our farm in Guatemala to an inspirational project about an hour's drive from Guatemala City. The project is a school founded and funded by Education for the Children in the UK.

The school offers free education to children who would not normally be able to benefit from going to school. They select the poorest and most neediest children they can and provide not only an exceptional education but also provide support to the children at home and to the wider family.

Street Kids Direct has known of this charity for the last 3 years and since that time has seen the progress the school has made as well as the impact in the local community.



This is Amy, who is a long term worker from the UK, with one of the children. Amy's commitment to the school is incredible and we want to wish her and her team well in all they do.

For me it is important to work alongside others as much as possible and see how together we can help the most neediest children in Guatemala.

## **No. 5**



Today at the Manuelito Children's Home it was photo day! I took photos of all the children for the sponsors in the UK who give each month to keep them in the home. Thanks to Global Care we are able to help keep the regular support coming through and yet many of the children do not yet have sponsors. Please will you consider sponsoring a child in the home for just £18 per month by following the link on the right. One of these kids could be better off if you do. THANKS

## No. 6



Matt, Becky, and I decided to give in to pressure from the girls at the Manuelito Children's Home and download some Justin Bieber videos and have a 'JUSTIN' night!

It was interesting that the boys also wanted to watch the videos and it made me laugh as they had said how much they hated Justin Bieber but happily sang along to 'Baby, baby, baby'!

Matt and I dressed up for the girls and joined in their 'Justin' party and I am sure they will remember it for a long time.



We left this morning and headed for AFE, the project working with the kids from the city rubbish dump, and so had to say our farewells which is never easy.

## No. 7



A great day with the boys from the Manuelito Transitional Home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras yesterday.

We managed to go and buy them an ironing board and iron as well as a large box of chocolates and two boxes of donuts. As you can imagine this went down really well with the boys but the thing they seemed most excited about was that we had come not just to visit them but to spend the whole day with them.

The boys had made a welcome display on the wall of the dining room and posed for a photo before we sat and watched them perform their new dance routines.



It was encouraging to see how the street dance workshops had really motivated them to work together and enjoy doing something new. Their dance teacher has invited them to perform in a few weeks time at a cancer charity concert so they were keen to spend every spare moment practicing their routines.

Matt, Becky and I then invited the boys and staff to a football match. A small caged pitch was rented for an hour but the match lasted an hour and half with no break and with my team losing 21-18. It was a very tiring session but I kept going till the end and then we headed into the city centre where we treated them all to an ice cream.



On our return to the home we sat and watched two episodes of Mr Bean and a couple of videos of Diversity.

A long but very rewarding day.

## No. 8



Back out on the streets today with David and Julie Voncannon from Street Invest and Jose from Youth Challenge who wanted to see what it was like to visit the streets first thing in the morning.

We headed out to zone 4 and came across a group of about 15 adults and 2 kids, some of whom were still sleeping but quickly woke up when they heard our voices.

It is encouraging to know that some of the adults I have known since they were kids a fact they remind me of each time I visit. Maybe they have known very few people in their lives that long but the longevity of the relationship they have with me means a certain level of trust and respect is evident.



I spoke with 12-year-old Gerson (photo left) who has lived with this group for the last year. He was born in El Salvador and when he is not high on solvents he is a pleasure to chat with. It is still early days for me to discuss some deeper issues with him and so for the moment we play games and laugh about the little incidents that take place while we are with them.

It took me 10 washes before I eventually got the smell of rotting feet from my hands but the pleasure of washing feet and rubbing in cream is instant for those we can help on the streets. So many suffer from really badly infected feet and so any care you can give is greatly appreciated.

## No. 9



It's amazing how much you can fit into one day! One minute I am sitting among the Guatemalan elite singing happy birthday to the city mayor and the next moment I have changed in the car and am working out on the streets.

It was great to receive an invitation by the city Mayor and his wife to celebrate the re-opening of their primary school for children whose parents work on the city rubbish dump. The kids put on a great show for us by dressing up as city workers and singing "you are the city".



I remember visiting the dump 20 years ago and seeing hundreds of adults and children trying to make a living off the stuff we so easily discard. Many children have died in the dump over the years and then the Mayor's wife decided to do something and constructed an official entrance for the dump and made sure no children were allowed to enter. It took a few years to change the habits of a lifetime but little by little the community responded and saw the benefit of seeing their children grow up with an education.

The refurbished school hosts over 500 children each day and other schools have been established by the Mayor's

wife Patricia de Arzu. I am meeting her again next week to discuss a city-wide strategy for street children and hopeful that the change that is sweeping the city will eventually reach those on the streets.

Talking of those on the streets I thought I would add a few photos that were taken on our most recent visit to a couple of groups in the city.



On arrival we found 11-year-old Gerson asleep (yellow top). When he woke about an hour later he found that someone had stolen his cap during the night. Jose, a Guatemalan volunteer from Youth Challenge, had given Gerson the cap only last week and he had really treasured it. We talked with him about how the way of life on the streets means that you can lose all you have when you fall asleep. The fragility of life on the streets made him think but not for long as he was excited to receive a trendy scarf

from Jose and he promised to hide it inside his clothes at night. Last night someone had also tried to steal his shoes, but he woke up in time to punch out and scare off the thief.

I had made some worksheets with mazes on and so sat down with Gerson. The first maze was easy and the second one much harder. Unlike the way others had attempted the maze Gerson studied it first and then mapped out the way through the maze with a pen and handed the pen back to me with a smile. It gave me



a chance to talk a bit about how life is like the maze and how we sometimes make wrong turns but can decide to go back to the point you made the wrong turn and try again rather than keep going down the wrong path.

David and Juli Voncannon came out again with me and it is such a blessing to know these guys and to David enjoyed taking some photos (like the one of me, Tanya and Gerson) while Juli had brought some coloured wool with her and began to teach the guys on the streets how to make pulseras. Not everyone had the patience for it but those who persevered began to make some amazing friendship

bands. David and Juli have come out with Jose, from Youth Challenge, more and more over the last couple



of weeks and I am sure they will continue the work after I have returned to the UK - something I don't want to think about just yet! Work with them. David is from the US and Juli is from Guatemala, they have two young boys and live in Guatemala City. David and Juli have worked for many years with YWAM, a Christian youth organisation, and are now considering setting up their own organisation to help street youth.

## **No 10.**

I am sure we don't all remember everything we say or even the advice we hand out to people and even less do we hear how that advice or what we have said made a person think about the direction of their life.



Well yesterday on the streets I was made to think about the words Yesenia spoke to Juli Voncannon. Juli and her husband David joined me and Jose (local volunteers) as we wandered around the city and met up with groups of street youth and adults.

When we found Yesenia she was so pleased to see us and the last time I saw her was about 3-4 years ago. Then she was a few stone heavier and living on the streets with her two girls. Actually, I took a photo of both girls as I was deeply saddened that at such a young age they were living on the streets. The photo of the girls was then put on a large board and placed in a business in Amersham. It is still there today next to Carol's in Hill Avenue!

The transformation of Yesenia's life from 3-4 years ago to yesterday was incredible and Juli asked her more about what had happened and I only caught the first part of the conversation as we were walking around the market area in order to find a shop that sold a book her youngest daughter

needed for school.

Apparently, the night I took the photo of her girls I had sat down and talked with her about life on the streets. I can say with all honesty I cannot remember having said anything profound but what I had said made Yesenia think about her life. The following day she went to a church and began to laugh at the way the Christians were worshipping God and saying that Jesus was with them. Then she heard a voice speak to her and realised it was Jesus. She broke down and asked Jesus into her life and from that day her life was transformed.

Yesenia allowed a local organisation to take care of her older daughter whilst she tried to care for her younger daughter. She began begging at the traffic lights to earn money to rent a room rather than live on the streets and little by little she managed to gather enough to find a place for her and her younger daughter. Yesenia was fortunate enough to find work and continues working today. Her youngest daughter is in great health and studying at school.

When I asked Yesenia what had happened to her all she could say was 'Jesus'. Her life is so different after 17 years on the streets and I will try and get hold of the book her daughter needs for school next week and see how they are doing. The schoolbook costs about £10 so if anyone fancies dropping £10 into Alexis Curson I will make sure it is used well.