



Mi Arca

Guatemala City Partner

Programme

December 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

StreetInvest is very proud of what our partners have achieved since we were founded in 2008. In the last year alone, we have worked with 32 partners in 13 countries on four continents. These partners are in regular contact with approximately 58,000 street-connected children and are accessible to as many as 350,000. There are estimated to be more than 1 million street-connected children and youth in 12 of the countries where we work. In the 13th, India, there are said to be 18 million.

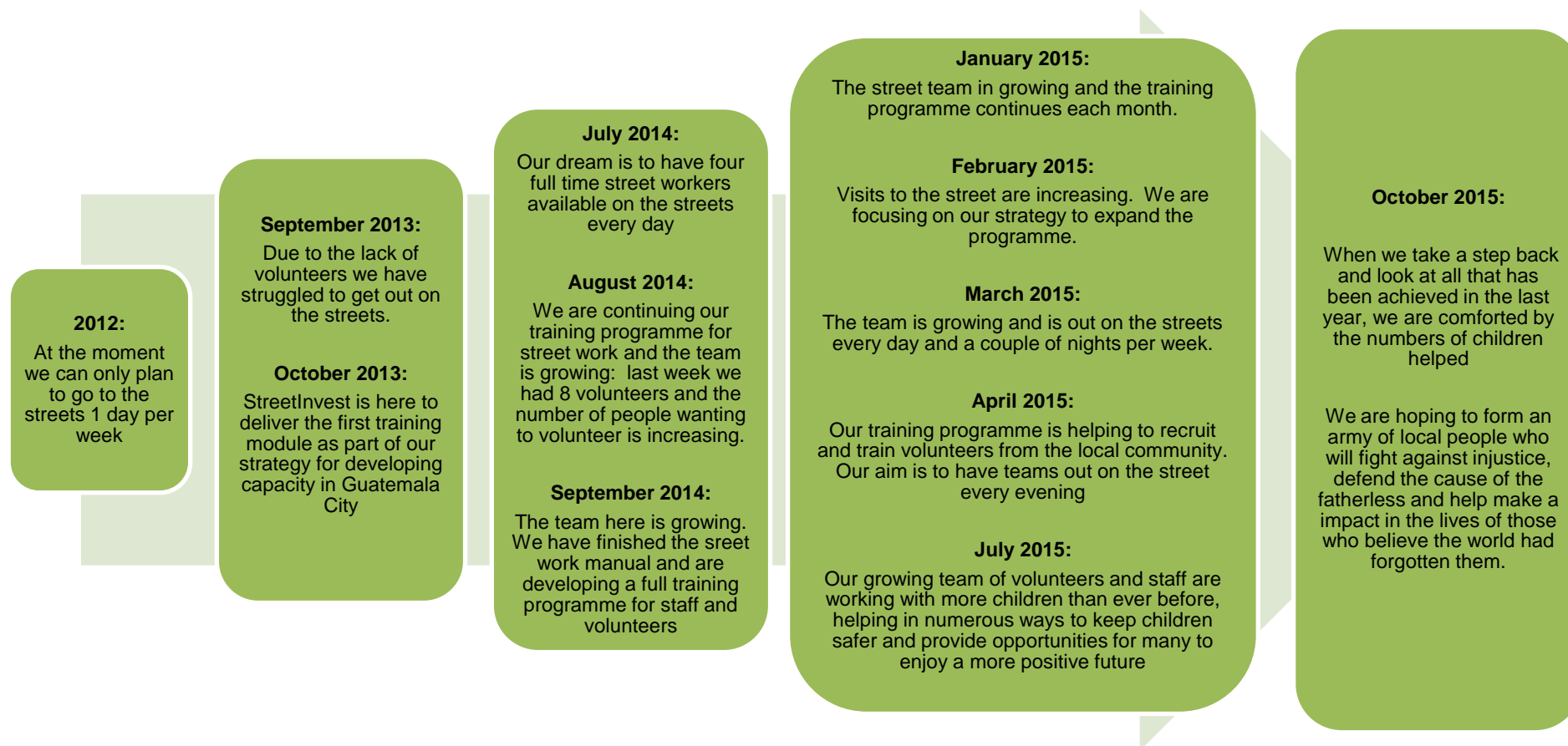
It is impossible to get everything we do into so few pages and do justice to what is achieved and to everyone who contributes. This report is about one partner in one country and should be read along with everything else we make available and be seen as just one more step on our journey which will inevitably be a long one.

What this report is intended to do is give you some idea and understanding of what StreetInvest and Mi Arca do, why we do it, what we have achieved and some of the challenges we face. Mostly it is to thank the wonderful people we work with and support us to make it possible and the street children who remain our inspiration.

First and foremost our thanks go to Mi Arca and their dedicated team of street workers. This report highlights the real impact they are having on the lives of street-connected children and youth in Guatemala City. The work we do in partnership with Mi Arca would not be possible without the support of others. In particular, Students Supporting Street Kids and the Trefoil Trust who have funded a significant part of the street work over the past 12 months.

SUMMARY

Mi Arca was established in Guatemala in 2010 to focus on working with street-connected children and young people, and high-risk children. It is the sister organisation of Street Kids Direct which has been working in Guatemala for 30 years. In 2013, Mi Arca invited StreetInvest to develop its street work programme. With the support of StreetInvest, Mi Arca has moved from an irregular and small street work team to a regular presence of 22 staff and volunteers who visit the streets 395 times and directly support over 800 children each month.



"Thank you to StreetInvest for your support of Mi Arca on behalf of all the children and young people who have benefitted from our work. With your support we have managed to help these young people see how much they are really worth, that they matter in this society, and can achieve their goals. We thank you from the heart for undertaking this journey together with us, for giving us this opportunity and for supporting this beautiful and challenging work: in real situations that are often overlooked but are so important. This work determines the future of many children." Mi Arca, October 2015

Since 2013, StreetInvest and Mi Arca have worked together to realise a shared vision of a trustworthy adult in the life of every street-connected child and young person:

"We are keen to work with StreetInvest because they offer the expertise and support we need as a small organisation. StreetInvest provide a framework on which we can develop as an organisation that keeps children at the heart and centre of its work. Having a defined plan and proven methodology continues to help us provide a supportive network for children. StreetInvest has helped us realise the importance of continued evaluation in order to improve the services we offer. There is no other organisation that gives us the breadth of information needed for this type of work."

Mi Arca

One vision:
A trustworthy adult
in the life of every
street-connected child

Two objectives:
1. Maximum reach
2. Maximum effectiveness

Three outcomes:
Increased protection Enhanced capabilities Strengthened ties

Four activities:

Informed:
Data collection and
research

Equipped:
Training and investments

Influential:
Local, national and international
advocacy

Strong:
Organisational development

MI ARCA PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES TO DATE:

Monitoring & Evaluation
Framework

Introduction to Street Work module
Resources including phones and
salaries
Street Work Manual
Mentoring

Representation at international
conferences
Membership of CSC
Support for national CPS meetings

Monthly street worker training
programme
Admin support and resources

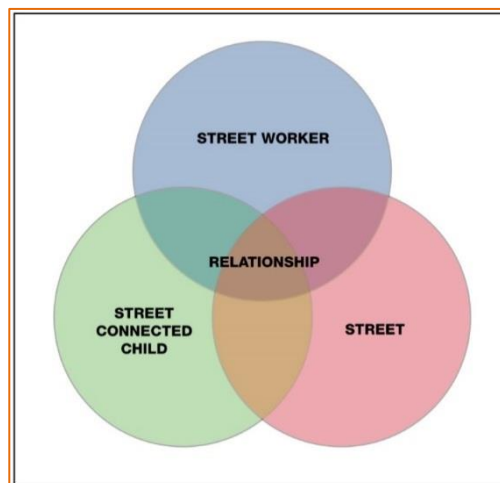


WHAT WE DO

Street work enables organisations supporting street-connected children to better understand and respond to their needs. Too often, policy priorities and service provision do not correspond to the lived experiences of street-connected children. The conventional approach to the 'problem' of street children ignores the significant proportion of children that never leave the street – the street being their home, society and source of income. Street work does not glamorise the street environment by ignoring the dangers and hardships associated with life for young people living and working on the street. Rather it celebrates the unique experience and choices of each individual and enables street workers to respond in a way which privileges the voice of these young people and their right to be part of decisions which affect their lives.

Through the sobbing and endless tissues Jorge started to tell me more about his story because he felt he could trust me. The more he talked the more I could see that just having someone listen to him, not give advice or tell him what to do, but just listen was what he needed.

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.



It is funny but also sad that Brandon, who turns 18 on Sunday, still calls me throughout the week, usually just before he sleeps on the streets to say hi, to tell me he cares for me and that he will call me another day. Funny that he calls me to tell me he will call me another day but sad that I think he does so just to know that someone out there is thinking about him and maybe his life has some sort of meaning.

Kevin came to talk to us and ask if we had been thinking about him. We first met him a year ago when he was a fresh-faced 13 year old full of life in his eyes. Now he was looking very much older and his life on the streets has taken its toll on him. All he wanted to know was that we had been thinking about him because, he told me, no one else does."

"The training and techniques offered by StreetInvest have helped our workers and volunteers to deliver great street interventions that focus on the most vulnerable children. This work impacts their lives and offers hope within a caring and supportive relationship. StreetInvest are there when you need them most." Mi Arca

REACH

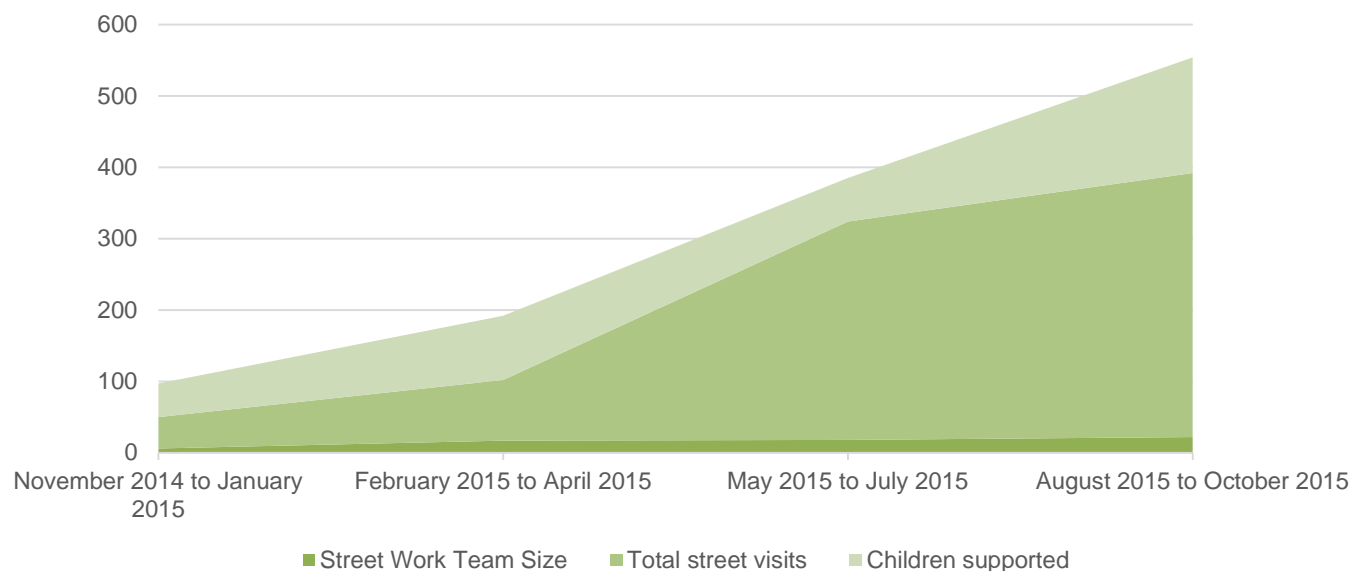
Reach is defined at different levels:

- **Support** includes children who are offered specific support such as healthcare, food, education, skills training, family reunification, etc.
- **Contact** includes children with whom the street workers have regular contact and which may or may not include specific interventions
- **Access** includes the children who are aware that there is a safe and trustworthy adult for them to turn to if they so wish.
- **Influence** for children whose lives may be improved by the influence of others – through research and advocacy at an international, national and local level

In the last 12 months Mi Arca has supported over 800 children and been in contact with approximately 3,000. The accessibility and influence of the street workers is a far greater number: for example, Mi Arca's street workers are the first point of contact for its mentoring programme which aims to reach 1.4 million children over the next ten years.



Street Work 2014-2015
Mi Arca



Partnership with StreetInvest



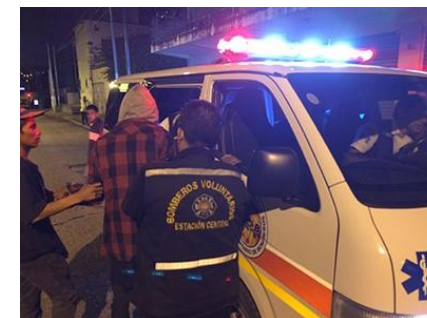
INCREASED PROTECTION

In the past 12 months:

- 6 children per month have received emergency health care
- 1 child per month has benefitted from legal assistance
- 109 children per month have been involved in early intervention/prevention work
- Mi Arca has continually challenged the persecution and abuse perpetrated against street-connected children by the police and security forces
- Mi Arca has been making strategic alliances with other institutions such as the International Justice Mission: through such alliances they are able to receive legal advice on specific cases.
- Mi Arca continues to work with a committee that has begun preparing methods of prevention and support surrounding statutory rape.

Guatemala is one of the world's most violent countries with an average of 101 murders each week, and the highest child murder rate in the world. While the national situation is not one street workers alone can change, they play an important role in supporting the young people at most risk: those exposed through life on the streets. Street workers play many different roles in their work: counsellors, advocates, mediators, doctors, teachers and many more.

For street children, the benefits of this may be felt in different ways. For example, educating children on safe sexual practices may reduce the risk of STIs, whilst understanding the harm of substance abuse may lead to a reduction in drug taking.



July 2015:

“As we walked up the 5th Avenue we came across a 17-year old girls lying on the pavement with serious signs of abuse and rape. Maribel had been raped by a group of men that day and left for dead. She had managed to crawl towards some of her friends who live on the streets but they didn't know what to do. We did our best to make her comfortable and called an ambulance. We went with her to the hospital where she had to wait several hours to be examined. We were asked to leave and so returned the following day but were informed she had signed herself out. Most of those we work with on the streets have very little confidence, if any, in the hospitals and are always living in fear that the police or someone else will find them there and that they will come to harm. So they leave and prefer to make it on their own on the streets.”

Of particular concern – and a focus for the street work team in Guatemala City – in the violence perpetrated against street-connected young people *by the police and security forces*: this includes destruction of their street homes, physical and verbal abuse, murder, and the failure of the police to protect them within the juvenile justice system. Mi Arca's street work team responds to both the immediate and longer term impact of the police's negative behaviours and attitudes.



The team could see the children had been badly beaten and had guns pointed at them as part of the police's attempt at 'social cleansing'. One officer threatened a 17 year old, who had lost his right eye some years before after being shot, saying, "I will come back and remove your other eye."



December 2014:

Most common concern reported by street-connected children is abuse by police and security forces

April 2015:

Mi Arca street team receive a call from the young people living in an area called La Terminal. The police are there to 'clear them away'. Many children have been badly beaten

The street team is able to dispel the police and treat the children's injuries. They take photographs of the officers concerned who deny any wrongdoing

May 2015 to present:

Mi Arca launches a campaign highlighting police violence in Guatemala. Formal declarations have been made to the Human Rights Office and Public Ministry Office

October 2015:

Mi Arca continues to pursue a case against the police officers involved and are currently waiting to be called to give evidence in the trial.

"El Hoyo, the hole, is an alleyway where I first started working with street children in 1992. It is the place I met 13-year old Reuben, a street boy who taught me so much about street life. One night he told me there was no point helping him as he would end up dead like all the other kids. His prophetic utterance shocked me but it was that night he was killed by a security guard as he slept on the streets."

ENHANCED CAPABILITIES

- Over 3,000 one-to-one counselling sessions in the past 12 months
- Over 1,600 children benefitting from informal educational activities
- Nearly 1,700 children developing skills and talents through group work activities

“The role of street workers in one-to-one sessions is to talk to individuals and learn about their ambitions. We can then support them as they identify options and make decisions. Each time we meet we discuss their progress in achieving their goals, celebrate their successes and try to help them overcome the challenges.”

Mi Arca street worker, Jan 2015



Wilman, 12 years old, August 2015

“I sit down with Wilman and ask him about how happy he feels with his life. The question takes him by surprise: I don’t think he has ever had the opportunity to consider how he actually feels about his life, and what he would like to achieve for himself. Everything has relevance to the needs of his little brothers and to provide food for the family.

I can see he is going in his mind to a place he seldom ventures but one it seems he would like to explore.

I draw out a small road map and we talk about where he sees his life at the moment. I ask Wilman to think of what his biggest dream is. He struggles to find an answer and just replies to help provide for his family. I give him some examples of the things I wanted to do when I was a child and my dreams of a happier future where I

promised myself never to be hungry again. My life reflections help Wilman explore some ideas before finally saying he would like to have a house far from the slum where his mum and brothers can live without fear and without being hungry all the time. Our life road map takes on a new dimension as we draw out where he would like his life to go. He is determined that working in charcoal everyday will not help him reach his goal. As we talk, he speaks about his dream of having an education: perhaps if he could return to school and study he could get a job that pays significantly more, is much healthier for him and one that he actually enjoys.”

Since this conversation, Mi Arca has been able to introduce Wilman to a school in the city which it works closely with to support high-risk and street-connected children. He has been offered a place. Mi Arca continues to explore options to support his family to cope with the lost income and bus fare for Wilman to attend.

“We met a little girl today, she is 8 years old. She smiled when she saw us even though we had never met before. The two little girls, aged about 3 and 5, were obviously her sisters and sat behind her holding her shoulders and stroking the baby Maribel had tied to her back in the traditional Guatemalan shawl. Bella, an 11-year-old girl ran over to greet me and asked us to help. She explained that a taxi driver, who was just starting up his engine and driving off, had given Maribel a bottle of drink and a packet of biscuits. Bella explained how the taxi driver had bought Maribel the drink and biscuits but had wanted sex in return! It was one of those moments when you had to check that what I heard was in fact what I heard and so Bella not only re-told me the story she also mimicked the actions the taxi driver used to explain what sex was. I was glad he had driven away but I know the area well and know that this is sadly a daily occurrence.

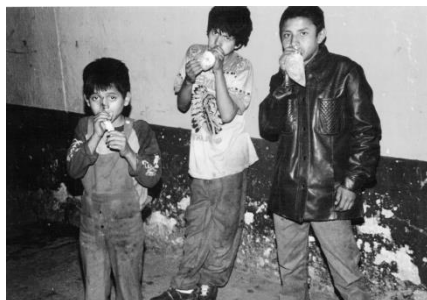
Playing with Maribel and her siblings helped break the ice and they enjoyed one of our new story telling tools that included all of them in the stories. In between stories I taught Maribel and her little sisters how important it was to say no thank you when offered things by strangers and then to move away from them as quickly as possible. By the end of our time Maribel obviously had got the message and Walter and I hoped she would be safer now. “[July 2014]

STRENGTHENED TIES

- 135 children per month benefitting from educational activities, in some cases reintegration with formal schooling
- 1 child per month reunified with family
- Group work activities involving 1,700 children over the past 12 months: building self-esteem and confidence to create positive relationships with peers and others

Relationships between street children and others in the community are often strained. Street workers not only build the self-esteem and confidence of the children which has been lost because of this stigmatisation but also challenge these negative attitudes which can result in tangible changes to the behaviours of those around them, allowing a possibility for reintegration into society.

Relationship of Trust: 25 years and counting



In April 2015 one of our oldest street boys, Manuel, took the decision to leave behind 25 years on the street and enter a rehabilitation centre. He is one of the few who has managed to survive for so long on the streets. He first came when he was six years old. The two friends in the photograph with him are now dead.

He asked for support to leave the street and we were able to find a room at the centre for him. He was thrilled but we made a deal: he had to make his way there independently and then we would come and visit. Manuel was obviously excited and promised us he would make his way there and then get the centre to call me to confirm. A couple of days passed and then we heard that Manuel had arrived

at the centre and was settling into his new bed. We went to see him and were amazed that in just a few days he had changed so much. He was walking better, talking more lucidly and was able to concentrate on our conversation for more than an hour, something not possible in the streets. We continue to support him as he takes this step. Often decisions like this are short lived. We will continue to support him and help him remain focused on changing, learning and coming to terms with a life away from the streets. As always, it is easier to take someone out of the streets than take the streets out of the person.



I was overwhelmed with pride this week as I spent time with the 3 boys who are still studying at the AMG International School in Guatemala City. I don't feel pride about my part in this process as, to be honest, I have not spent much time with the boys. I felt pride in their personal success. Sergio, Josué and Jony have stuck at their studies despite their own personal challenges, temptations and their far-from-perfect living conditions. All 3 boys have come from a tough background and were helped to take the decision last year to study in school rather than hang out on the streets day and night. The lure of the streets for these boys is powerful and knowing their particular situation I can see why they would rather spend their lives on the streets than at home, and I use the word "home" in a very loose sense. I thought about where the boys used to hang out on the streets (La Terminal) and see so many more like them readily taking their place and so the challenge continues. Seeing them in school this week made me feel very proud of their personal victory over their circumstances and commitment to exploring and working towards a more positive future. [July 2014]



“Jorge came to speak to me today as he needed, in his words, to 'offload' on someone. Through the sobbing and endless tissues he started to tell me more about his story because he felt he could **trust** me. The more he talked the more I could see that just having someone **listen** to him, **not give advice or tell him what to do**, but just **listen** was what he needed.

Jorge grew up in an area of great conflict in Guatemala City and the daily violence on the streets and at home marked his childhood in a way that has completely traumatised him and led him down a track he now rejects but he is finding moving on in his life extremely difficult.

At the tender age of 8 Jorge heard his mum go to the door of their little house and as she opened the door he heard shots in the street. As he ran to the door he saw his mum lying in the road with blood pouring out of her body and two young men running away. She had been assassinated and he said that he was paralysed with fear and could not deal with what he was looking at.

His father, from memory, was always drunk and when he came home later that evening to find his wife had been shot dead he took it out on Jorge, as though it was his fault. His dad told him he could not go back to school and had to work now. The next day Jorge dressed for school and his father tore into him telling him that he now needed to go and find work to earn money for the family. Jorge protested as having an education in Guatemala is much sought after. This resulted in Jorge's dad tying his wrists up with rope and hanging the rope over a beam in the roof so that Jorge could not sit. His dad lifted up his shirt and beat him with bare wires until his back was a bloody mess.

The beatings got worse and this led Jorge to spend more time on the streets where the local gang took him under their wing. Being in a gang meant that Jorge's dad could no longer lay a finger on him and the newfound power led Jorge to prove himself in the gang. Within a few weeks Jorge was given a gun and told to kill someone, which he said he did in order to feel accepted. The killings continued and the young boy earned his gang name of “killer”. Jorge killed many people as a child and he told me that he sees the faces of every person he has killed and how when he shot a man one-day two young children came out of the house and were caught in the spray of bullets. The event made him leave the area and take to living on the streets and abusing drugs with the hope that this would end his life: “When I think about those people who I have killed and all the families I have affected it makes me think I should be dead”.

We explore some of the great things about his life right now. We also explore some of the things he would like to achieve with his life and what we could do to help him. Sitting back his smile returns and he thanks me for listening and says that he is so pleased to have me in his life. He is only 21 years old, has been the father of a little girl who was then killed by a rival gang and then his girlfriend tried to kill him twice and as he lifts up his new t-shirt he shows me the stab wounds.

Trusting people is not easy for Jorge but he has begun a new journey and tells me that he never wants to go back to his old life. A rather long hug tells me he has appreciated our time together” [November 2015]

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To many, the concept of building relationships of trust with young people as a means to improving their lives may seem easy. StreetInvest has worked with thousands of street workers around the world and recognise not only the impact of this work, but also the real challenges it brings. This work is not easy and our thanks and admiration go to those who dedicate their lives to it. After one visit to an area called La Terminal, one street worker wrote the following message to his colleague: it sums up the highs, the lows, and their necessary commitment and dedication.

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“How?

How could you sleep at night?

I ask you this question after visiting the little girls in the box.

The visit was all normal, you know, "normal", rubbish everywhere, kids hitting each other, adults screaming to the kids and the indifference of those who just come to buy vegetables or to throw more rubbish in the dump.



It was all like that until I was introduced to the wooden box I have seen before but hadn't met its residents. Two little girls, Genesis and Sarah. I just can't get the images of the two little girls playing with maza (maize flour) out of my mind. I didn't see anything for them to drink or anything to eat. The girls 'mum was not around and from what we learned she leaves them under the care and mercy of whoever watches them for a little while until she returns at night.

I left with a headache trying to figure out how powerless I felt leaving the two girls behind and the picture of Genesis shaking her head to say "don't leave" as we were saying good bye for now. I ask you, how can you sleep at night? But I know that you don't always sleep well and now I don't think I will so easily.

You know the story about the sea shells and the boy who picked them and threw them back into the sea until someone said it was useless to do that with so many thousands of shells on the beach. The boy responded saying that “even if it is that one that makes it back and survives I have done my part”. Here we have a great opportunity. I, myself, was given a chance to have a different future to what I, by human destiny, was meant to grow to be - a thief, drug addict and die with no legacy.

I am sure that Genesis and Sarah could also break that fatalistic future and grow to achieve so much more. I just hope their mum realises that they can have a life outside the box and that we can do our part and don't stop until that box is finally AN EMPTY BOX.”

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“Often people ask me how I cope with all the things I see and hear, and I have not yet found a way to answer the question in a way that satisfies the way I often feel. Sometimes to be human is to enter the pain of another but not so deeply the pain overwhelms you so you become useless and unable to help. So I live with a bad night's sleep instead.” Duncan Dyason, May 2013

“Everyone on the streets is there for a reason, and each one has a painful story to tell.”

Danilo and his brother live and work on the local rubbish dump. Their mum works incredibly hard on the dump to find them food and earn enough to support the family. There is no dad present in their lives and so both boys have started to wander more in the streets in recent months.

November 2015

Doña Alicia offers shelter to a number of children around La Terminal. The reasons they are there include one's father being shot dead; sexual abuse from their father; being abandoned on the dump.

July 2015

Don Diego came to the streets in the city with his dad to escape the civil war when he was 11 years old.

He was so sad to leave his home and his mum but learned quickly how to shine shoes and that if he worked 12-14 hours a day he could eat.

February 2015

Daniel is 7 years old and starting to sleep on the streets. He is very small and underweight. His carer tied him up with wire last week to stop him running away but he managed to escape.

August 2015

WHAT NEXT?

Thousands of street-connected children and young people have benefitted from the dedication and continued presence of Mi Arca's street team. We celebrate the successes – however great or small – and the commitment to those who continue to struggle (no matter how long this journey will be).

There is so much more StreetInvest and Mi Arca can do to ensure no child is left alone. It is clear, no matter what their reason for coming to the streets, the trust these young people have in so many around them has been broken and abused. Street workers serve as trustworthy adults in their lives. In the words of Mi Arca's founder as we celebrate the progress made to date:

When one takes a step back to look at all that has been achieved over a year one can be very comforted by the numbers of children helped. However, there seem so many more children around these days and new ones coming on the streets. I just wish I had more long-term volunteers here to work on the street.

The phrase 'a level playing field' is said to mean 'a situation that is fair to all; a situation where everyone has the same opportunity'. This world is the opposite end of the level playing field, probably the scrub-land that no one cares about and where few venture. When you spend time listening to the children and young people on the streets it is very obvious that they have not had the best start in life. The odds seem stacked against them from day one and so it comes as no surprise when they end up making really bad choices or suffering a whole series of reinforcing deprivations.

"What chance do they all have?" I ask myself, and I think about the level playing field once again. So arriving home exhausted and somewhat scarred by the experiences of the day I wonder where this will all lead as we certainly can't leave these children alone. We need help. We need more people. We need funds. We need resources.
