

## No. 11



Living on the outskirts of Guatemala City means that if you need to be in the city centre by 8am you have to leave at 6am to make sure you miss the worst of the traffic. Well today was one of those early starts but it was such a joy and I was very excited if not a little nervous.

Today I was joined by the amazing man who is David Voncannon. We were going to try and hold a live video link via Skype from a mobile phone in Guatemala City with a school in the UK. The school, Heatherton House School in Amersham, have been long-term supporters of Street Kids Direct and wanted to hold their very first assembly that

linked live with us in Guatemala City.

Unbeknown to the school I had been out and treated a group of street kids, youth and adults to a McDonald's breakfast - the deluxe version! After saying grace, which they were all keen to do, David and I helped distribute breakfast to all and then we received a call from the school.



What was amazing was to see the reaction of those on the streets when they found out there was a group of girls and staff in Amersham who were calling THEM live! Gerson, 11 years-of-age (photo - yellow top), was particularly taken by this and enjoyed playing up the camera on the phone which produced giggles in the assembly hall in Amersham.

It was a very special moment and a very special day and one I know the guys on the street will talk about for many years to come.

THANK YOU David and THANK YOU Heatherton House School.

## No. 12

Life has really got busy recently as my time in Guatemala comes to an end and I try and fit as much as possible in before Guatemala celebrates 'La Semana Santa' or Easter Week.

I will start with the funniest thing I have seen in ages and then try and backtrack on what I have been up to since my last blog.

Yesterday Herbert and I took a group from zone 4 to the beach. Only 12 were around (10 adults and 2 children) when I turned up and informed them that we were off to the beach. It took a while for some to wake up and for others to hide their solvent and find a safe place for the blankets and other meagre possessions that they had been given. The group followed me as I led them two blocks away to where the bus was waiting.

The sight of the 12 walking along the road accompanied by four dogs and the youngest member of the troop wrapped in a blanket as he was still cold and tired was quite a sight. Most people moved out of our path as we made our way past a bank and a hotel. On arriving at the bus, we gave them all a drink and a donut before running over some simple rules and then one of the group offered to pray for our journey.



The four dogs thought the day trip to the beach was for them and tried to get on the bus as well. When we were all on the bus and pulled out into the road the dogs followed alongside. It wasn't until we got on the main road and the bus picked up speed that the dogs, encouraged by 12-year-old Gerson out of the window, followed right behind the bus. When we had reached a good speed, I noticed that only one dog was following and managing to keep up a good speed as more of the group hung out of the windows and encouraged the dog to follow. Sadly, for the dog it was impossible to keep up after a few



minutes and so we all settled down for our journey to the beach. It was funny watching this pack of dogs follow behind the bus with those in the bus calling out to encourage them.

I sat at the back with the two boys who were already bored of the journey (just 5 minutes in!) and let them borrow my phone to play a game that kept them occupied for another hour. By then Gerson decided he would sleep at the back of the bus. The photo on the right shows Gerson wrapped in the blanket. At one point he woke up, sat up and said "thanks for the donuts" and fell back off to sleep again.



When we arrived at the beach everyone headed for the sea to wash themselves and their clothes. None had swim wear so it was just a case of wearing what they had on but at least they all got a good wash!

What I enjoyed about the day was just seeing some, who had not been to the beach for years, playing in the sand and having such a great time. I just hope that the good times like this will help the thinking process. Trying to get them to

consider leaving the streets seems much easier at moments like this as they experience something so different from their normal life. All we can do is try and keep trying.

My visits to the many and varied organisations continued this week as I have tried to fit in as many meetings as possible. The study I set out to complete seems only at the investigation stage with many more days of visits to go. Due to the fact everything now closes for Easter at the end of the week I think I will have to leave the rest of the visits till I return.

I have visited so many inspirational projects and many of them know little, if nothing, of what others are doing and how their work fits into a bigger picture of what God is doing here. The few links I have been able to make have proved beneficial and so I will need to work on those and keep encouraging people to talk to each other and share ideas, good practice and resources.



I found a great organisation that runs a hospital for children. It was inspiring seeing all they do by way of donations and their need for support, gifts of all sorts of medical supplies and short-term volunteers is great. If anyone works in the medical profession and fancies giving a week or two to help this hospital then please do let me know. The organisation (FPG) also runs a clinic and feeding centre next to the city rubbish dump and this little girl was one of the 60+ children who eat there and receive support each day. The hospital have offered me free medical and dental treatment for any child I take into the hospital!

Then there is this guy I met who hires 4 buses every Saturday and collects children from some of the most dangerous places in Guatemala City and takes them to a large football pitch where he has started to build a school. Half of the children play football and learn football skills while the other half have specialist support for their school work. At lunchtime they swap over and the day finishes with a worship service. Some of the children are not in school and so they are learning some of the basics. This project, like all those I have visited so far, are in need of donations, volunteers and lots of support.



I remain very concerned for little Daniel (photo) who is now starting to sleep on the streets. He is only 7 and very small, underweight and very neglected. The children who know him well told me that his carer tied him up with wire last weekend to stop him running away to be in the streets, but he managed to escape and it won't be long before he starts hanging out with the older street guys. I might try and pop by to see him today and spend some time with him and see if his carer will be open to

someone coming to visit him each week. Just need to find a volunteer to do this for me.

As I look back on the things I have done and all the organisations I have visited so far it is clear that there are many ways we could offer some very personalised support, maybe mentoring, to the children and help prevent many taking to the streets whilst helping those who are still on the streets.

On a recent trip to the streets we came across a group of adults sitting by a pile of rubbish. It was about 8pm and in a red-light area that buzzes with life when it gets dark but a side of life that most people will never see and probably shouldn't. As I was talking with the guys, as I have known some of them since they were kids, a new person came towards me and demanded some food. When he found out there was nothing on offer he then hit me on my arm. Nothing serious, and nothing like the knife-wielding attack of the previous week, but then he swore at me and moved off. This so annoyed the group that they set after him and made him realise that he should respect those who come to visit them. One of the guys, Caesar who is on crutches, was mad and told me how they would always look out for me and counted me as their family. A sad but at the same time quite comforting experience.

So now I just need to print out the photos from the beach trip and deliver them to the guys on the streets. A few more meetings and a couple more street visits will take me to Easter and then my return home to the UK. It has been one truly awesome opportunity and now I need to make decisions about where I feel God wants me to spend my time. Your prayers would be much appreciated. Thanks for sticking with me and for reading my blog. Hope to see many of you very soon. Dunc

## **No. 13**

Well, all the bites I have on me shows me that I enjoyed a good time on the streets!



Another visit to see a group of children living at high risk included having to investigate a reported case of sexual abuse of a young boy but Brenda, Herbert and I found it difficult to establish what had happened so will continue to monitor the situation and offer support as we can.

While we were with this group of children one of them came running to us and tripped over and cut open his head. Fortunately I has on-hand with a First Aid Kit and steri-strips to hold the wound together until he was taken off to hospital.

One of the girls told us that she would like help to read and write. She is 10 years of age and had difficulty reading the one word on my t-shirt! She is still in year 1 at school and her mum has told her that if she does not pass this year then she will get her brothers to beat her up! Some encouragement eh? Anyway, I will be on the look out for some books that will help her and then will need to find someone to visit her regularly in order to help her pass the year and, I hope, much more.

## **No. 14**

So my time in Central America is coming to an end, well for this trip anyway. It will be tough to take off next week and look down on Guatemala City and all those I will be leaving behind and wondering if they will be alive when I return in August.

My 3 months have been amazing. It has been an exciting time, a fun time, a challenging time and an emotional journey that has seared in me the call I feel God has on my life for this part of the world and for those who are neglected, lost, hurting, living without meaning and coping with things that most of us, thankfully, will never have to cope with.

Yesterday I went with my good friend Jose from Teen Challenge to visit a couple of groups of kids and street youth. Some are now in their early 20s and some a bit older but all in need of a hug, a smile, and keen to say their goodbyes to me.



On arrival in the early afternoon I found them all asleep as the city seemed eerily quiet. It is 'Holy Week' here and most people who live in the city have by now already left for the beach or the countryside to take advantage of the Easter holidays. Those who are left can enjoy empty roads and a much quieter city. So the kids and young people on the streets have no one to beg from, nowhere to go and therefore sleep is the default.

They soon woke up and took advantage of the first aid kit I always carry with me whilst Jose headed off to the nearest garage to buy some food and drink for them all. Two of the boys needed feet cleaning and I found that crepe bandages make very good belts for your trousers. Little Gerson needed something to hold up his three-sizes-too-big trousers as it seemed to me not worth even wearing them as they were around his knees most of the time. He loved his new white belt and the hug I got meant 'thanks'.



When Sergio arrived I greeted him and he thanked me again for organising the trip to the beach last week. I patted him on his stomach as he clearly had something the size of a small football stuffed under his t-shirt. He smiled and I wondered what he had hidden underneath. Sitting with him to talk about leaving the streets, as he had promised to do last week, was sad as he began to cry and plead for another chance. It was then, as I looked at his face, I noticed that he

seemed so much older from just a few weeks ago. I took a photo of Sergio just a few weeks ago (photo right) and I can't believe how much his health has deteriorated in such a short period of time.

I know that living on the streets changes you, as those in the UK who have ever taken part in the sleep-outs know. But Sergio seems to have aged considerably in just a few weeks. Then came the shock! Now, I am trying to remember that it was only last week we took them to the beach and less than a week ago when I saw Sergio sitting with the group and reading a New Testament. He seemed so happy then and was laughing about his time with us on the beach.

Then for some reason I asked what he had hidden under his t-shirt. When he lifted up his shirt to show me I was shocked to see a large growth protruding out of his stomach. It was some kind of hernia and, as I said, was the size of a small football and must have grown so quickly and now he was in great pain.

Jose and I decided to take him to the hospital to get him checked out and see if he could have an operation. Sergio was also keen to leave the streets and threw away his bottle of solvent and, with some help, climbed into the minibus.

On our way we decided to say goodbye to the kids who live in the terminal. Sergio seemed to enjoy the chance to be with us as we spent half an hour or so playing with the kids and talking to a lady who we have been trying to help over the last couple of months. Her husband spends all his time on the streets and comes and goes frequently. She carries the load in trying to bring up 4 children and seeing her husband, in his early 20s, come home drunk or under the influence of solvent each day. Her kids are showing the usual signs of neglect and I fear so much for them in their little wooden shack. Jose promised me he, David and Juli would keep visiting them.



Because of the Easter holidays arriving at the Roosevelt hospital only took a few minutes and there was hardly any cue so Sergio got seen quickly.

The photo of him outside the hospital (photo left) shows his hernia and demonstrates to me the change in him in such a short time. I realise that the photos don't really show the degree of deterioration I have seen in him over the last few weeks, especially the last week, but seeing him close-up makes me feel so sad as it felt like we were losing him.

He is safe now with Jose at Teen Challenge and will go back into hospital on Monday for his operation so maybe you can remember to pray for him.

All that is left for me to do now is prepare to pack everything up, write up a report from my visits to the many organisations, take one more donation of melons and tomatoes from our farm to a children's home and start planning for next term's youth and kids work in Amersham.

I know I will cry much and will have lots to consider on my return.

Thanks for journeying with me and for your prayers and messages of support.

Thanks to Herbert and for David, Juli and Jose who have journeyed with me and supported me on the streets. Thanks to all the unsung heroes who do some amazing things here for kids and young people.

Thanks to God for keeping me safe and keeping me going. Signing out, Dunc

## **No. 15**

To give you an idea of one of the days from this week I thought I would describe how it went and then you will get a feel of how things are here.

I realise that I can't do everything and be responsible for every child in need and so this has meant I am trying real hard to remain focussed on the plan for this year. This means, at the moment, I can only plan to go on the streets one day a week. The rest of the time is spent in writing policies, reports, meetings, planning and producing documents and programmes for the outreach work and our project partners.



The team (photo left, Herbert, Jose, Brian & Melanie) now comprises of Brian and Melanie Frye, an American missionary couple who have offered to work with me for 2 years as volunteers, Jose Flores, a Guatemalan who runs a Christian project for street adults, and myself. This week we are joined by 3 guys from the States who are visiting us for 3 weeks.

We decided to go on the streets on Tuesday this week. We met, as always, at my house which is also the office and base for the ministry. After some planning and prayer we headed to zone 4 of Guatemala City and to a group of young people at a place called La Casona.

On arrival we are greeted by smiles, handshakes and hugs. Then we are asked for medical help, advice and to sit and play some games. The group comprises of some 10 young adults aged from 16-25. The two younger boys that are normally with the group are not there and after some questioning we find out that one is currently seriously ill in hospital and another has been offered a place in a boys' refuge. I invite Melanie to come with me to visit a family that we have been working with for nearly a year now and leave the rest of the team to chat and play some board games.

On the same street corner where the young adults live there is a house that has been divided into small bedsits and in one of those bedsits lives Carmen and her family. I first met Carmen last year when she came out and asked me, at midnight, if I had seen her son Jonny. Jonny had been with us earlier that day colouring in some drawings and chatting with us about his life. Jonny is 10 and had started to spend more and more time on the streets and less time in the bedsit.

Melanie and I enter the house and work our way through a dark corridor and eventually find the courtyard at the rear where various families live. In one of the little rooms lives Carmen and her 5 children aged from 3-16 years. The bedsit is not a place to bring up children, it has one bed, a small camping stove in the corner, a thread-bare sofa covered with the family's clothes and then a small wooden unit on which is a battered TV that rarely seems to work. Carmen and the children invite us in and immediately the kids start to ask their mum for food. In the corner is a small bowl of food that seems to me like it has been there a few days. She can't warm the food up as she has run out of gas and since it costs £10 to refill then she will be without gas for a long time. The 20p she has left in her pocket is enough to buy 8 tortillas and 2 drinks in little plastic bags. The 2 youngest children share out the small amount of food and tortillas and eat like it was their first meal of the week.



Little Cristian (photo left) drops some on the dirty floor but is quick to pick it up again and hide it in the warm tortilla. We continue to talk with Carmen about her life and options for leaving this place. Carmen, with a cheerful smile on her face, begins to tell us that there are others worse off but that life has been hard the last few days. She tries to bring up the children as best she can and earns so little money when she works on the streets at night leaves the kids alone or with her ex-boyfriend who abuses the children.

She had been robbed the day before of her handbag with all her personal possessions in and makeup, the gas had run out, she was 2 weeks behind on the rent, her youngest child was hit by a car the week before, she had dropped her cheap phone in some water and now it wouldn't work, her 13-year-old was now spending more time on the streets and had kicked her really badly leaving a large bruise on her thigh and the only food she had left was a small packet of crackers. Saying "well I hope that things work out for you" or "may God bless you" is just so wrong whilst I am able to go home to a bed, food, a shower and clean clothes. Carmen wants to leave the work she does and make something of her life. She had dreams years ago but now she says she will never see any dream come true and as long as she can smile and keep the kids alive then that is all that matters. It was quite a depressing situation and one we knew we had to act. It was not like we had never acted before but this time a small gift of money would help until we could find a solution.

As we moved on to see the high-risk children at La Terminal we prayed for God to open doors and give us wisdom.

The children at the La Terminal were, as usual, on a high. We entered through the labyrinth of dimly-lit walkways with little wooden shacks on either side. In one of the shacks Melanie tried to speak to the mum of a little 2-year-old girl we met 2 weeks ago who was being sexually abused but the mum was not around. We moved into the open area and invited the now gathered throng of children to participate in some sports which drew quite a crowd and ended with a short talk by one of the visitors on the importance of exercise based on a passage from the Bible.



It is always good to see the kids but I am growing more concerned for the very disturbing behaviour I am seeing in the children. Their play is becoming more and more sexualised and it is showing us what some of them seem to be living with every day. We need to work faster on the mentoring programme and have it ready to work in a more focussed way with these children. When we do we know it will open up a whole

can of worms that will be very difficult to deal with but opened it must be.

Leaving them all behind is one of the hardest things to do, especially knowing that so many will go to sleep in tears this night. If you have read all this then you are getting a small glimpse into what life is like here and why I feel I should be here setting up new ways of working with these children and their families.

## No. 16

I returned to Guatemala from a 10-day trip to the UK at the end of April just in time to welcome the start of the rainy season.



Before I returned to the UK David Lilley and Geoff Houston came to visit Guatemala and then Geoff came with me down to Honduras. It was a special time with David and Geoff and both enjoyed their night out on the streets and seemed initially happy when I told the children that David and Geoff loved to give children swings around. After quite a while of swinging children around and around and around, encouraged no end my me asking the children to form a queue, both David and Geoff decided that it was time to calm things down and say goodbye to the children.

It is a amazing how the children are so welcoming and happy love the chance to just play and be children. Thank you David and Geoff for coming to visit.

Settling back into my routine in Guatemala took all of one hour and I was ready to get back to the exciting projects we are working on here. If you have not yet downloaded and read our document '[Making a Difference in 2013](#)' then just follow the link and you will see what I am focussing on this year. You might also be interested in my [personal news letter](#) and if you would like to be added to my personal mailing list please do [contact me](#).

I am now finishing my reading and research into mentoring programmes before moving forwards on the design of a mentoring programme and app for phones and tablets. The mentoring programme will be at the heart of our work with street and high risk kids and it has been great to have the input of some very special friends and organisations. Will keep you posted on this.



Our visit to the streets this week was rather sad. There is always signs of hope but sometimes the sadness of the situations we find the kids in does leave you feeling very powerless.

Having a camera ready is always helpful as everyone comes out and asks for their photos to be taken. I always promise to return with the photos and so will be doing just that

next week.

Working in places like La Terminal is rewarding, challenging and can be quite overpowering also. If we could only take these kids to a place where they can just enjoy being children, where we are in charge of the environment and where we can offer them something far more rewarding than just a an hour or so of our time. The mentoring programme will be key in reaching children from 10 years of age but I dream of somewhere they could all go to when they are in need.

## **No. 17**

I get a lot of pleasure from living here in Guatemala. It's not the weather, even though most days are a sunny 25-27 degrees C, it's the whole package and knowing that what you do each day really does make a difference to people's lives.

I was telling some visitors about my first week in Guatemala City at the end of January and how I spent that week moaning about what I did not have. Yes I had moved here with very little, yes I had a big house to live in, yes I had some money for food but was just trying to come to terms with all I had given up in the UK and then looking at an empty house with not even some basic implements for cooking or eating. So my moan did last a week and then, as always, I felt that God gave me perspective again. I had to take the little bag of rubbish out to the hold in the wall where I am supposed to leave my rubbish for collection. When I did so I found a family of 3, a dad, mum and a little boy of 7, waiting outside for my rubbish. They spared no time going through it to see if there was anything to eat or recycle. Once again, I am humbled.



Life can be simple; we just make it complicated. For so many families I work with life is just so simple and often less complicated than our busy lives. I was working on the streets this week and came across a family and a group of young people who are living in an area of Guatemala City that has a small triangle of grass. Sitting and playing with them for a couple of hours was great fun. The youth standing by the car sniffing solvent asked me to clean up a machete wound to his head.

The family sitting around the blanket were grateful that someone had come to spend time with them. The little girl was overjoyed by the game of Loteria we play over and over and over again. The simplicity and fun of the afternoon was juxtaposed by the busy office buildings around the triangle, the rush of traffic and the low-flying planes approaching the nearby runway.

I wish all my days were like this but sadly I have to focus on other elements of the work like continuing the production of the mentoring course, more meetings with other agencies to try and work closer together and the development of other areas of the growing work with those most affected by poverty.



The street visit usually ends up around La Terminal. It was a pleasant surprise to be asked to speak with Ana. Ana is usually very quiet and never fusses over anything and is always helping out others. Ana lives on the streets and has done for about 20 years now. She keeps all her most valuable possessions underneath her jacket. I have no idea how in this heat she manages to do this but she wanders around like a very heavily pregnant woman and smiles at everyone she sees. Her home is 5th street (photo) and together with about 20 other people call the streets their home. Across the road

from a small brothel where the local assassins hang out is where Ana lives and where, every evening, piles of rubbish is dumped from the local market. Often the rubbish includes secondhand clothes and shoes, all unfit for sale.

With a smile on her face Ana asks me to come over and talk with her. As I do so she looks around to make sure no one is looking and pulls me closer and hands me some money. The Q8 she pushes into my hand has a UK value of 65p. It is all she has. Ana tells me that she wants to give me a donation to help with my work. I could not refuse as that would be very impolite but taking her money seems so wrong and once again, I am humbled.

## **No. 18**

I sat and listened to Maria for over an hour as she told me her story and as she did I seemed paralysed with the pain of her life. 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 that satisfies the way I often feel. Sometimes to be human is to enter into the pain of another but not so deeply the pain overwhelms you and then you become useless and unable to help. So I just lived with a bad night's sleep instead and have not thought about much else today.



Maria lives with her boyfriend Cesar and they are very excited about the birth of their baby, expected in a couple of weeks. Both live between this tiny rented room (photo right) and the streets. When Cesar can't earn enough selling sweets on the buses they have to sleep on the streets and go without food. The decisions they have to make each day would make most of us drop into a spiral of depression, but they just get on with it.

Maria sat and told me how much she wanted to have a baby girl and Cesar said that if it was a boy they wanted to call it

Duncan. Not another one! Anyway, the birth of their baby will be a happy time for them but it will also be a massive challenge. Unless we help the chance of this baby living to its first birthday is bleak.

Hearing Maria's story made me very sad indeed. She grew up in a fairly normal family but was raped at the age of 13 and then felt so much shame she ran away. It was not long before she was living on the streets, alone, hungry and pregnant. Eventually she was offered a place to live but when her baby boy was born it was taken off her and given to an American couple. She is desperate for news or photos but these never come.

After a few years in the institution Maria ran back to the streets and started to sniff solvents. Street life comes at a cost and Maria's health deteriorated rapidly and before she met Cesar an older boy decided to beat her half to death one evening. As a result of this she now has a constant tremor and struggles to walk and cope with most basic tasks including talking. She is only 21!

Now Cesar is here to look after her but he struggles and was in tears as she told me her story because he said "it resonates with my story".

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

So neither Cesar or Maria are children, this was robbed from them a long time ago. Street Kids Direct is about helping children but we can't just turn our backs on them and now they are about to become parents.

Studies show that if we don't intervene in these early days then this little baby will have a short life expectancy or, if she/he does survive, the child will be classed as a child at very high risk and suffer all manner of deprivations.

Please do pray for them and for us to know how to help.

## No. 19



Matt Levett (*photo left - the one in the blue t-shirt!*) is one of the trustees of Street Kids Direct and is the youth worker at The Forge Community Church in Suffolk. Becky Green is Head of Mission at The Forge and she joined Matt, Ramsey and Naomi Selim (members of the church) in their exploratory visit to Guatemala and Honduras to see if the church would like to "forge" a link with Street Kids Direct and our work here in Central America. The next 2 weeks will be a full-on experience for the team.

I had to remind the team on arrival that we had one day in Guatemala City before driving down to Honduras to visit the Manuelito Children's Home and the AFE School. I also reminded them that they had a very full diary and there was no time to rest and why would they want to come all this way and then sit around!

After driving for 12 hours we arrived in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. We made it just before the major rush of home-time traffic and time enough to settle into the guest house and plan the next 2 days. Bright and early the next morning we headed for the children's home and are greeted by 40 children who live in the home and another 20 who attend the school built on the site of the home. It is a joyous time and 2 boys remind me not to forget their birthday and 2 others hang around with huge smiles on their faces looking intently at the car to see if I had remembered to bring them their BIG present to celebrate turning 18.



I had of course remembered, and they could not contain their excitement as I pulled out 2 iPod minis for them, a gift we have given to each child that turns 18 in the home. Jairon and Bairon (*photo right*) have been with us in the home since the age of 11 and it has not been an easy ride but they are still in the home, still off the streets and still dreaming of working for themselves one day.

The kids were all keen to see us and especially little Duncan who clings hold of me and shows me his little toy car. Sadly we are only there for one day but the kids are still pleased we

stopped by to spend the day with them. Not all the day is to be spent with the children as I need to give time to some of the staff to work through their planning process and explain to them the common reporting format we now use and the need to develop plans for growth. The sun is starting to head West and so we need to also head in that direction and meet up with Pastor Pinto, the founder of the home, to run through the finances.



Matt is mobbed again by boys keen to show their affection and try out their various holds on him, but Matt has been there too often and the boys enjoy the fact that Matt is the powerful opponent they can only dream of beating!

The next day we visit AFE, an amazing project that now helps nearly 200 children from the city dump. Jeony, the Director, is keen to show us the new bakery and talk to us about his plans for growth and all the things he has done since I last visited. How much can one man do I ask! Jeony smiles and tells us that he is not here to rest while so many are living in such awful conditions.

AFE needs some encouragement and this is just the right time to talk with Jeony and check if AFE received the \$20,000 donation from Street Kids Direct towards the running costs of the school. Jeony, of course, is thrilled and we are grateful to those who gave towards this need. I know I keep saying this, but YOUR donations REALLY do come here and make a MASSIVE difference.



More planning, plotting, and scheming and then we have to say our goodbyes and prepare for our 12-hour drive back to Guatemala the next morning. Rather than tell you about the horrors we faced on the road back I thought this photo would make you smile as I remembered the girls having their lunch out by the swings at AFE.

See you in August Honduras.

## No. 20

Well the team from the Forge in Suffolk are still with me and we are safely back in Guatemala, and I do know that is a relative term, but it is great to be back home. Becky, the Mission team leader, is a keen blogger and so you might like to check out the blogs from their trip on [The Forge Community Church Blogsite](#).



Another busy week ahead and the team quickly get stuck into helping me run activities for the Go Guatemala project in zone 18, Guatemala City. Go Guatemala is one of the new projects we are helping and during Radio Christmas we raised some money for this project but now it needs a lot more. We knew they were going to have 60 children today and they had nothing to give them for breakfast or lunch, so we stopped by a supermarket on-route and filled the trolley with enough food to feed a small army.

Guatemala City has many "red" zones where crime rates and gang activity are extremely high and where you would see dead bodies almost every day on the streets. Life in these zones is tough and growing up in the midst of all the violence, together with poverty, abuse, neglect and the multiple deprivations means that children do not come through it all unscarred. The club that Go Guatemala run each Saturday for the children is a lifeline and so we focus on giving them a great day with fun activities like Unihoc, parachute games and games of tag.



The famous phrase 'does my bum look big in this?' is a good caption for this photo!

I took the team to meet one of the families we are helping in La Terminal. They all live in a small shack in the market area and I still lose count every time they try and tell me how many people, cats, dogs, and chickens live there. They have a problem in that it's the rainy season now and their roof is filled with holes. When it rains in the day it is not too much trouble. When it rains at night then it's a pain as they all have to get out the tins to catch the water than drips onto the mattresses, they are placed on the dirt floor.



So we take a ladder, some materials that are recommended by Stuart East from [East's Building Supplies of Amersham](#) ("should have gone East" is the famous add on Radio Christmas) and carefully try and locate and seal up every hole we can find.

When we returned the following day it had rained in the night and the family were happily telling us this was their first night of good sleep in a long time AND a dry one. Thanks to Stuart and all at a cost of only £15 - bargain!

The last few days of the team's visit are spent on the streets, in meetings and then on the last day a relaxing visit to Antigua - a delightful colonial city that is both charming and has that 'back in time' feel to it.

Thanks to Becky, Matt, Naomi and Ramsey for their visit and if you are ever in Suffolk on a Sunday and wish to visit a great church then do pop in and say hi. I know you will receive a great welcome.