

But What About Us?

February 11, 2009

It's a question that haunts my dreams every time I hear it: But what about us? It's what the older street kids ask us every time our street outreach team spends time with them in the market district of Tegucigalpa. "Michael, when are you going to start a program to help us?" It's a hard question to get asked because for so many years, the Micah Project hasn't had an answer. In fact, in Honduras, there are few answers to this question for older street teens.

If you are a young Honduran child that needs a place to live, there are many wonderful organizations and orphanages that can take you in. If you are a young teen, between the ages of twelve and fourteen, the Micah Project can take you into our group home and help you begin a new life. But if you are an older teen who is still on the streets, your chances to get help dwindle to zero. What are your options if you are a seventeen or eighteen year old glue-addicted youth who has spent most of your life running the streets? Most often, your options are long stints in jail, a life sentence on the streets, or an early death.

Cesar is one such street boy. At eighteen, he spends most days hanging out with a group of street kids in the sprawling and raucous outdoor marketplace in Tegucigalpa. He has some contact with his mom, who lives in a run-down shack not far from the market, but conditions there are so bad that Cesar's



younger siblings were taken away from her and placed in an orphanage. Cesar was already too old by that time, though, and his only option to make it through the day-to-day struggle of survival was to hit the streets.

Like most street kids though, in addition to scavenging for daily scraps of food and making a few meager cents shining shoes, Cesar also learned how to forget about his plight through the fumes of addictive yellow glue.

Above: Cesar inhales yellow glue in the market district of Tegucigalpa during one of our street outreaches.

That's the situation in which we found Cesar when our street team met him in 2007. A nice kid, a kid with obvious natural intelligence and people skills—but a kid with absolutely no options. Since we have known Cesar, we have taken four of his fellow street kids into the Micah House: Wilmer, Marvincito, Axel and Hector. Each of them had the fortune of connecting with our street team at the age of twelve or thirteen. Besides taking Cesar on the occasional Saturday outing to a park with the Micah boys, though, there was little else that we could do for him.

Until now, that is.

In 2009, the Micah Project is planning to launch the next phase of our ministry, the Micah Project Technical School. This program will offer complete training in automotive mechanics and carpentry to kids like Cesar, good kids who are too old to receive services from other programs, but kids that deserve a shot at a new life. It is a chance for Cesar to learn skills that will help him leave the streets behind forever.

The Micah Project technical school has been a growing vision in the hearts of Brian and Natasha Wiggs for almost two years. The Wiggs are currently missionaries in Portland, Oregon with Bridgetown ministries, a frontline ministry focused on empowering churches to develop personal relationships with the homeless community. Additionally, Brian is a top-rated mechanic and master carpenter. But even more important than all the things that Brian has done, it is his personal testimony—a testimony of how God rescued him from a life of drugs and brokenness—that makes him a perfect person to speak into the lives of kids like Cesar.

Right: Cesar meets Brian Wiggs during the Micah Project high school graduation in November, 2008.

We first met Brian and Natasha in 2007, when they came to Honduras on a short trip. Their connection to the Micah boys was immediate and powerful. When they brought their two young sons back on a later trip, it was obvious that God



was calling the Wiggs to join the Micah Project as missionaries. Natasha quickly developed strong nurturing relationships with the Micah boys, and Brian has already had an impact on the street kids and on several ex-gang members in the Micah Project neighborhood. After a period of discernment with their church in Portland and with their sending agency Action International, the Wiggs have gotten the green light to join us in July as long-term missionaries.

The most exciting thing about the Wiggs' vision for reaching kids like Cesar is that it goes far beyond providing technical or job training. The mission of the vocational program is to "teach Biblically, train technically, and build relationally," a mission that Brian describes as "body-off discipleship." In the vocabulary of auto mechanics, "body-off" means stripping down a car to the bare bones, then meticulously replacing all the broken, damaged or worn parts with new ones. It is a complete transformation, and it turns an old jalopy into a new car! When Brian talks about body-off discipleship, though, he is not just talking about the cars that his students will work on in our technical school. He is talking about the students themselves!

When it comes to boys like Cesar, body-off discipleship means stripping away the drug addiction, the self-defeating habits of street life, and generations of poverty as he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. Even as Brian works with Cesar to strip down an old car and replace the broken parts with new ones, he will help him to replace the brokenness of street life with the new hope that only comes through a restored relationship with his heavenly Father. Brian's vision for the young men he will work with is perfectly summarized in I Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

I can't wait to run into Cesar again the next time we do our street outreach. For years, the only thing we have been able to offer him is friendship and empathy when he asks "but what about me?" Now, we can begin to help him dream of a new life. We can help him begin to see himself as a master carpenter, creating beautiful things out of wood, or a master mechanic, stripping down cars and making them new. And, even though he might not fully understand it now, we can begin to help him see himself as a new creature, a child of God with an important role to play in his heavenly Father's kingdom. I encourage you to take a look at Brian and Natasha's blog, www.wiggfamily.blogspot.com to learn more about their vision for the Micah Project technical school. Pray for them as they put their Portland home on the market and work to raise the funds necessary to move their family of four to Honduras in July. Continue to pray for us as well, as our vision of body-off discipleship—of helping street kids transform into the people that God has called them to be—takes exciting steps forward this year!

Gracias!

Su hermano en Cristo,
Michael Miller