

# can you hear their voices?

It's easy to walk through Tegucigalpa's frenetic, noisy downtown and outdoor market without ever seeing or hearing them. Distracted by the façade of colorful produce stands, traffic-saturated streets, and even the fear of getting robbed in the midst of all the chaos, it's easy to walk right past them. But if you strain just a little harder, you will hear these voiceless ones begin to speak. Behind the chaos, behind this bustling world of commerce and activity, there lies a sobering reality—a world marked by stories of abandonment and brokenness, shattered hearts and rejection, abuse and indescribable pain. A world in which many children and youth have had to embrace the harsh life of the streets as their own.

*Edgar and Freddy know this ugly reality all too well.*

While other kids were being loved and cared for by their parents, going to school, and playing soccer with their neighborhood friends, Edgar and Freddy were working the streets to earn a few *lempiras* here and there, sniffing yellow glue to mask the hunger and pain they felt, un-nurtured and unloved. Now they are 14 and 17 years old, respectively. There is no time machine that can take them back and change that reality; they have been robbed of their childhoods. It is at this heart-breaking point that our paths have crossed, and that God has brought these two guys into my life.

Since joining the Micah Project last September and becoming increasingly involved in street outreach, I have met many others whose stories are similar. So as Edgar and Freddy invite you to take a peek into their stories, let their voices speak for the many others whose voices are drowned out by the harsh, unforgiving world of the streets.



*I want to see Edgar off the streets.* That's the salient thought in my mind every time I get the privilege of spending time with this little guy. From a young age, Edgar experienced abandonment and rejection by his parents. Rather than be nurtured in a loving home environment, his childhood years were spent being moved around from one center for street kids to another. At 12 years of age, he ran away to the streets. You could call Edgar a runaway, but when he begins to talk to you about his home life, you'll realize that he is not a runaway child—he is a *throwaway* child.

And yet society blames Edgar for his plight. I will never forget the day that I headed to one of the downtown street corners where he and his friends often spend the afternoons begging for money; I was looking forward to visiting with them, and was in such a cheerful mood after having prayed with another street guy to receive Christ just a few hours earlier. But as I walked up to the street corner, I witnessed the policemen there beating and insulting the street youth, calling them *perros* and *basura*—dogs and trash. One of the policemen struck Edgar forcefully on the arm with the weapon he was carrying, sending him running off with tears of pain, anger, and sadness. When he finally came back to the street corner where I was after the officers had left, I just sat down at his side and put my arm around him, telling him that he shouldn't allow the policemen's words and actions sink into his heart. I reminded him that he was loved and valued in the eyes of his Heavenly Father, and that no man could erase that or separate him from the love of God. As tears streamed down Edgar's face and his body continued to tremble, I couldn't help but feel a rising anger in my heart towards the injustice at hand. The officers blame, demean, and beat Edgar for begging and inhaling glue, while turning a blind eye to the root issues of familial brokenness, fatherlessness, childhood abuse, poverty, and emotional and spiritual wounds that mark his story.



*Stephen smiles with Edgar*

Over and over again, my heart breaks for little Edgar. This is not what God wants for his life.



I first met Freddy one day as I was walking through the market district. He was sitting on the roadside, completely high from inhaling yellow glue. I stopped for a moment to invite him to come to our street soccer ministry the following day, though, since he was so high as to be incoherent, I didn't really expect him to show up.

I was pleasantly surprised to see Freddy arrive at the soccer court the next day—glue bottle in one hand, and a sack of empty plastic bottles he had collected in the other. As I started talking to him a little bit more, I couldn't help but notice that his body

was covered with scars. Not the kind that kids get from tripping and scraping their knees in a soccer game; these were the battle wounds from years of abuse and violence on the streets. My heart broke for Freddy as he began sharing with me how both of his parents were dead, how he has suffered a harsh life on the streets and wrestled with multiple drug addictions, how he thinks his life has no worth and he has no future, and how he has tried to commit suicide in the past. The astonishing physical scars that cover his body tell the story of the deeper emotional and spiritual scars that mark his battered heart.

If you look beyond the glue-induced haze that covers Freddy's eyes, if you strain to hear his voice beyond the slur of yellow glue, you will see and hear a deep *tristeza*. This profound sadness pleads with you to see him for who he really is, to hear his story. It drives us to put ourselves in his shoes and ask, "Is there any hope for me?"



*Stephen and Freddy in the Market*

◆◆◆ **Hope** That simple word, I believe, is why the Micah Project exists. The stories of Edgar and Freddy remind me daily of why we are here, doing what we are doing in Tegucigalpa: *we are called to be hope-dealers in the midst of a world of brokenness, darkness, and injustice.*

Hope is sharing the Father's love with the fatherless of this city. Hope is the incredible transformation we have witnessed in the lives of the young men who are currently living in the Micah House and the Timothy House. And it can even be seen in the way the street kids' faces light up whenever they see us approach. Hope is the start of the school year at Micah, and the worship-filled hearts of the boys at our Sunday evening worship meetings. It is Freddy's decision to hand over his glue bottle to me last week, and Edgar's tear-stained face as he is one step closer to seeking the inner healing that only God can bring about. It is every small step of growth, every decision to trust, every moment of healing.

We are called to be a platform for God's love, healing, and transformation...and hope. I often have asked myself what makes Micah so different from the many other centers for street children in Tegucigalpa. As I've gotten to know more and more street children and youth, I can't express how common it is to hear them tell me that they have been at two, three, four, or even five different centers for street children—and yet today they are back living on the streets again! Why is it, then, that when Micah has such a high success rate with the boys we take in?

It all comes back to hope. A hope that God has placed in our hearts to press forward even when we can't yet see the light at the end of the tunnel, and when it seems that a child is only taking one step forward for every two or three steps backwards. A hope that calls us to love radically and unconditionally, following in the footsteps of He who left the 99 sheep to go after the lost one. At Micah we take seriously the Lord's words in Isaiah 58:6: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" We are not simply here to provide a group of boys with a meal in their stomachs and a roof over their heads, although those are important needs as well; we are here to *act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before our God.*

No, it's not easy. There are many uphill battles, many late nights and early mornings, many questions left unresolved, and many tears shed. But we have hope that there is something beautiful waiting on the other side of all this. We have witnessed it over and over again, and know the Lord will continue to transform lives for His glory. Indeed, there is something about that "already but not yet" that makes our hearts yearn for the coming of the Heavenly City. It motivates us to continue striving even amidst situations that appear hopeless. Daily we long for that *shalom* here at Micah. The voices of Edgar and Freddy cry out for that as well. Can you hear their voices?



As I close out this letter, I just want to take a brief moment to thank you for all your dedication to the Micah family. Without your day-to-day faithfulness in praying for us, encouraging us, and financially supporting what we do, none of this would be possible. The Lord has truly blessed us by making you an integral part of the Micah family. We look forward to walking alongside you in these next few months as the plans for building Micah 2.0 move forward, creating yet another horizon of hope for the boys that God has brought into our lives.

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guide and keep your hearts in Christ Jesus.  
Love in Christ,  
Stephen Kusmer, for the Micah Project

