

the MISSING PIECE

A Story About
Two "Street Boys" and
the Love They Need

The Micah Project
FALL 2017 NEWS



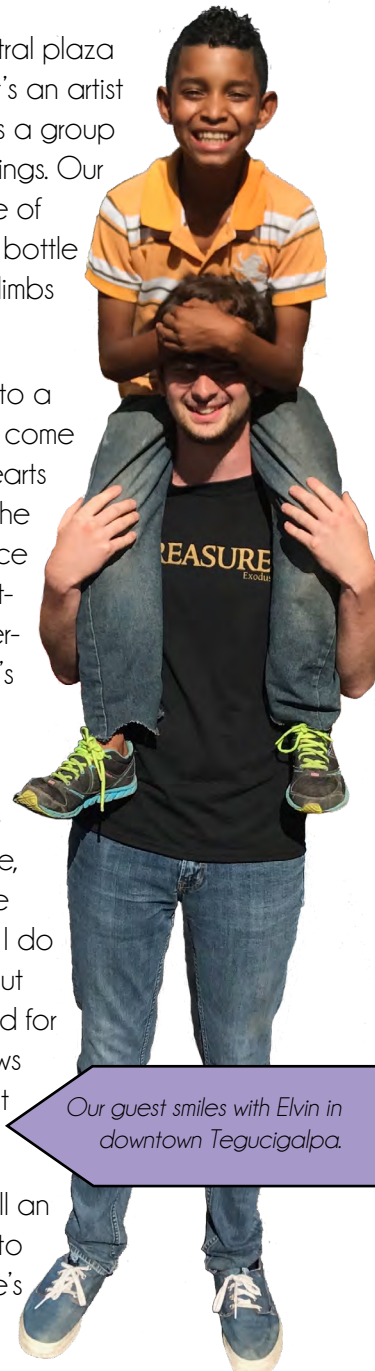
Elvin's got it all figured out. He has learned how to survive—even thrive—on the streets of Tegucigalpa at the tender age of 13. He has been living on the streets since the age of ten—more than enough time to learn all the tricks of the trade. If such titles were handed out, he would certainly be crowned The Prince of Downtown's Central Plaza, where he spends most of his time.

We run into Elvin on a Friday in mid-August. As usual, there's a crowd gathered in the bustling central plaza watching some street performers trying to earn a few lempiras. Some days it's clowns; other days it's an artist working on a chalk mural; some days it's street evangelists preaching fire and brimstone. Today, it's a group of half-decent musicians filling the plaza with lively Latin beats that echo off the surrounding buildings. Our street ministry team has brought a group visiting from the United States to the plaza to meet some of the street kids. We are taking a moment to enjoy the music when Elvin spots us. Clenching his glue bottle between his teeth, he takes a run at the tallest young man in the group, leaps into his arms and climbs up onto his shoulders before the poor guy knows what is happening.

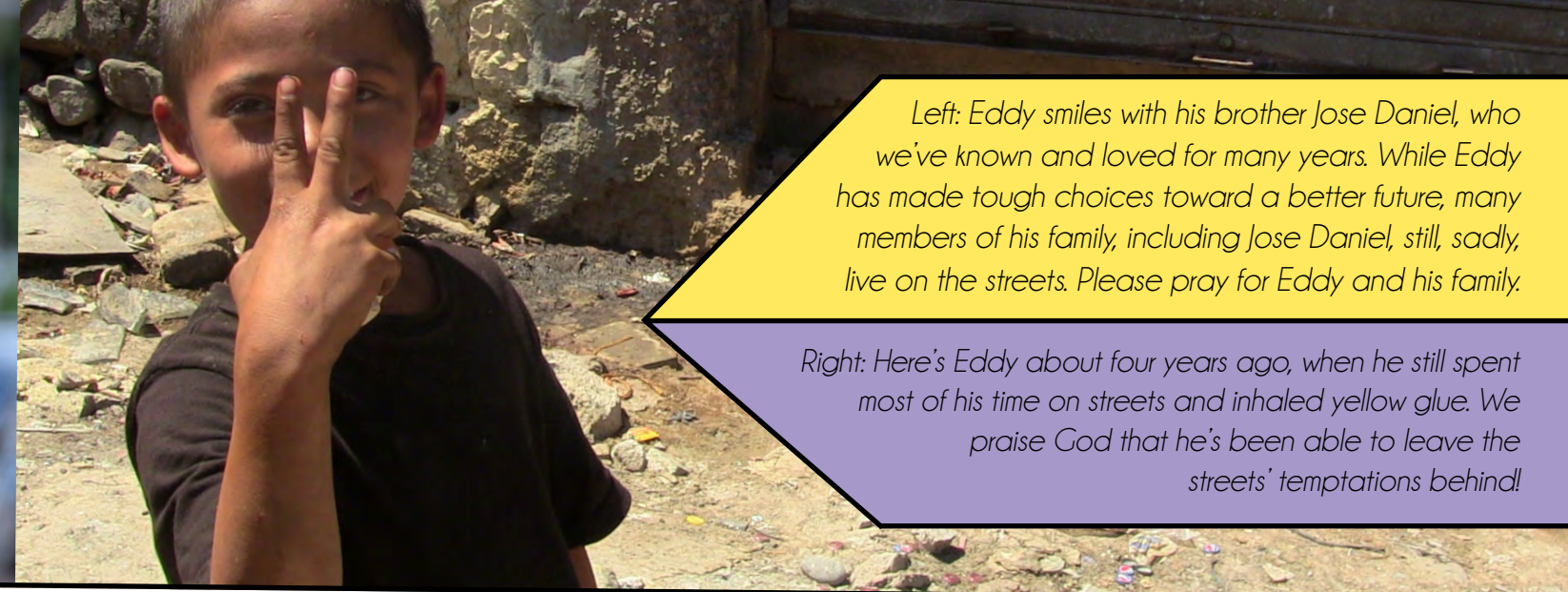
Elvin is skinny and small for his age; his mess of wild and uncontrolled curls matches his personality to a tee. His greatest tool is his heart-melting smile, which distracts from the slightly unfocused eyes that come from a morning of inhaling toxic yellow glue. He flashes that smile around at our group, and our hearts indeed melt. We are putty in his hands. He scrambles down off the shoulders, runs over to one of the teenage girls in our group, grabs her by the hand, pulls her through the crowd into the open space in front of the street musicians and begins to lead her in a lively salsa dance. The crowd is delighted by these incongruous dancing partners—the ragged street kid and the tall blonde North American. Elvin joyfully pulls in two more girls from our group to join the fun. He is the center of the world's attention and loving every minute of it.

After a while, we walk over to the colonial cathedral on one side of the plaza. It is a cavernous, sacred, silent space, and its doors are always open to people who want to go in, light a candle and pray. Elvin knows this, and as we walk through the cathedral admiring the colonial architecture, he whispers into my ear to give him five lempiras—about 20 US cents. Though we often tell people not to give money to street kids (a day's worth of yellow glue only costs twenty lempiras after all), I do anyway, knowing what comes next. He tiptoes silently to all of the offering boxes placed throughout the church, slipping a lempira into the slot cut into the top of each one. He may not know the God for whom this antique holy place was built, but he is an astute observer of men, and he thinks he knows what he needs to do to find favor with that God. And anyway, with his little-boy cuteness and that smile—that shining, world-conquering smile—he will beg ten times that amount within an hour.

Yep, Elvin's got it all figured out. . . at least he thinks he does. And I don't say that to mean this is all an act. In learning what it takes to survive, he has adapted his quirky, engaging personality in order to connect with the people who will give him what he requires to make it on the streets. Because he's learned how to make that work in his favor, he thinks he's got all he needs.



Our guest smiles with Elvin in downtown Tegucigalpa.



Left: Eddy smiles with his brother Jose Daniel, who we've known and loved for many years. While Eddy has made tough choices toward a better future, many members of his family, including Jose Daniel, still, sadly, live on the streets. Please pray for Eddy and his family.

Right: Here's Eddy about four years ago, when he still spent most of his time on streets and inhaled yellow glue. We praise God that he's been able to leave the streets' temptations behind!

Four years earlier: another man-sized personality in a little boy's body. Ten-year-old Eddy lived with a group of older street kids in a grimy alley just off the outdoor market place. He had found a grimy, too-big-for-his-head stocking cap with "I Heart Jesus" emblazoned on it; it slipped down over his eyes as I talked to him. Even his glue bottle looked extra big in his tiny hands. If cuteness is the key to success in living on the streets, then Eddy would be the all-time record-holder.

Unlike Elvin, who flashes a vaguely disinterested smile whenever we talk to him about joining Micah, Eddy found his way into the Micah House one day in 2013 and never left. Not once. Most of the kids who are addicted slip up a few times in the detox period, go back to the streets and have to start the process all over again. But tiny Eddy marched his way into Micah as if it had been a part of his strategic life-plan all along.

In fact, a few weeks into his new life at Micah, when he was still detoxing from the yellow glue and, thus, a flight risk, we took all of the boys to the airport to drop off a group returning to the United States. While Eddy was in the bathroom, we all went up to the second floor to help the group get into the security line. When Eddy came out and didn't see us, he panicked. He ran out to the (wrong) parking lot to look for Micah's van and didn't see it. He thought we had left him!

As fast as his little legs could carry him, Eddy started to run. Over highways and through the winding streets and barrios of Tegucigalpa, Eddy ran and ran. He ran through the market area where he had lived on the streets. He had every opportunity to go back to the streets and to the yellow glue that his body was still craving, but he kept running. Many miles later, he finally made it to the Timothy House, Micah's house for our college students and the closest house to the airport. He banged on the door until someone opened up for him. He had made it home.

A few days ago, we were chatting with now 14-year-old Eddy and were reminiscing about that day he ran the length of this million-person city. Our pastor John Bell asked him what he was thinking about as he ran. He puzzled over that for a minute and then said "At Micah, I had found a family that loved me and was going to help me prepare for my future, and I wasn't going to give that up no matter what!"

Eddy has found the missing piece, the one variable that is unattainable on the streets. He could have used his cuteness to survive on the streets for years: to get the food, clothes and drugs he needed to keep on going day-by-day. But you can't beg, borrow or steal love. And you can't truly thrive without it. The love of our Creator-God and Heavenly Father is the

spiritual oxygen on which our souls thrive; without it, there is only slow death. Jesus' disciple John joyously proclaims this in his first epistle: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!!!" The exclamation points are mine, but can't you just hear them in John's passionate description of our Father's love? If the disciple were saying this to you face-to-face, I think he would grab you by the shoulders and give you a little shake to underscore this perfect truth. At Micah, Eddy has found that missing piece, the love that will blossom outward and upward in his life in the years to come.

Elvin, on the other hand, thinks that his well-honed survival tactics are all he needs to live his life. Love is the lost piece that leaves his puzzle incomplete. But how can he find something that he doesn't even know he is looking for? I hate to think what will happen to Elvin if he remains on the streets long-term. We've known too many boys like that. Eventually, the harder edge of manhood will begin to replace the boyish cuteness. His antics, which were funny as a kid, will get him into trouble as an older teen. He will become a nuisance to those around him and will be beaten out of the central plaza by those whose job it is to guard it. Since he won't be cute enough to beg, he will resort to theft—mugging or breaking-and-entering—and will end up in prison, or worse.

Unless... unless he can find that love, which is the missing piece. Much of what Micah offers—food, companionship, fun activities, warm clothes—Elvin can figure out how to get on the streets. But love is the main thing we offer that he will not find anywhere else. Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, talks about the transformative power of building a community of tenderness among the gang members with whom he works, a place where they all decide to live in each other's hearts. And I am convinced that Micah's own community of tenderness is the only thing that will point Elvin to his Father's open arms—and convince him to leave the streets behind.

After 17 years of ministry in Honduras, Micah's community of tenderness is ever-expanding. Many of our grads are now married and have children of their own, and they are building the foundations of their own families on the love they received at Micah. Other grads are working in missions or with at-risk children in other organizations, helping broken-hearted people find their way to His love just as they themselves once did at Micah. Micah's long-serving missionaries Israel and Jenna Zaldaña are now in El Salvador and have founded Micah Life, an organization that will reach out in love to the street-connected kids of that country. Because God's love is at the center of all this, Micah's community of tenderness is being transformed into a movement of tenderness!



Elvin (right) laughs with his brother Eduar (left) who is now living in the Micah house!



One of our street ministry coordinators and Micah grads Olvin smiles with Elvin at our "street kid soccer outreach."

Whether you have been part of the Micah Project for just a little while or since the very beginning, you have a vital role in this movement. Your love, prayers and financial investment in the boys make a direct impact on their lives. Often during our prayer time at the Micah House before dinner, the boys pray for YOU and express their gratitude to the Lord that you are a part of their lives. That is a powerful symbol of how they have learned to trust in the love of their Heavenly Father. And with this great movement of people praying and expressing God's love, we are hopeful that Elvin, too, just like Eddy, will one day find that missing piece that completes the hole in his life: the unbounded beauty of His Father's love.

Su hermano en Cristo,

Michael Miller

MICAH
PROJECT
UPDATES

DOUBLE your IMPACT
in the lives of street-connected youth in Tegucigalpa

STAY in TOUCH

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YouTube Micah Project

If you too believe in our mission to provide homes to street-connected youth where they're taught about God's grace and love, we've got a great opportunity for you this fall! For every dollar you give to our ministry, another dollar will be donated by a group of supporters who have generously set up a matching grant of \$171,000. This "Double your Donation" challenge will last through the end of October. If you want to double your impact on the lives of street-connected kids in Honduras, we pray you'll consider making a donation this month.

You may donate on our website or by sending gifts to the following address.

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micahprojecthonduras.org