



FRIENDS OF ALALAY (SANTA CRUZ)

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AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER

I'd like to use this newsletter to tell the longer story of another girl student who we are funding through vocational training. Emelia (not her real name) is 15 years-old and only came to Alalay last year. Before that she was in a children's home in La Paz, where they helped her overcome her addiction to solvents and alcohol.

This however is a story with a difference, which is why I'll devote this whole newsletter to it, deliberately including no photo for reasons that I am sure that you will understand. Emelia is unusual amongst street-connected children in that her early years were spent with her mother, who was not on the streets, and with whom she had a good and loving relationship. I'm letting her tell her own story, which she does so powerfully, and is a poignant example of how everything can change for a child whose life began happily:

"when I lived with my mum, I prepared most of the food at home. My mum liked my cooking a lot and she told me that she would help me to study - she wanted to see me as a professional cook – and would support me financially to go to college to gain the necessary qualifications. I remember my mother with much love and I miss her a lot - she died in 2020.

One day she had a cold but apparently it was Covid 19; she drank herbal tea to try to heal herself and at first began to feel much better. I told her to rest and asked my siblings to take care of her while I went to sell small things on the street, to earn some money for our food. Returning to my house I saw that she hadn't rested at all, but had instead washed a load of clothes, and from there on she began to get a lot worse. One day she did not answer me when I called for her; so I shouted for my brothers and uncle. They told me that she had died. I felt very sad and cried a lot, because now I didn't have my mum.

My older sister took care of me and my siblings. I went out to work every day, and often I didn't have time to sleep and we didn't have enough food to eat. My brothers behaved badly and didn't want to help at home. I felt very sad; I tried to give them what food I could find, but I also felt constantly tired because I had to do everything. After a while we went to live with my uncle, because my older sister abandoned us. This was where one of my brothers abused me; I didn't tell anyone, because I was very afraid and ashamed.

My uncle found me very difficult to live with and I finally yelled at him and ran away to join my friends and drink stolen alcohol and sniff solvents. I soon became very dependent on these abusive substances and also violent".

Soon after this Emelia was rounded up by the police and sent to a children's home, where they helped her work on her behavioural problems and she received counselling and support to overcome her addictions. From there she came to Alalay, part of a loving family once more and determined to succeed in cookery, as her mother had hoped.

She is a very focussed young lady, who is now enrolled on a two-year cookery class, which we are funding. Her hope is to one day open her own business – probably a bakery – which she will name after her mother. Every child we support has a different story as to how they ended up living on the streets, but after such a tragic time it is incredible and very moving to be able to watch Emelia thrive and again pursue her dreams.

Annie Syrett-Jones, Bristol, UK – September 2023

www.alalay.co.uk