



FRIENDS OF ALALAY (SANTA CRUZ)

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SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER

I'd like to begin with a happy photograph of a group of young boys, taken in 2006 when I first went to Alalay. It's easy to become dejected because we touch so relatively few lives through our work but it's very important to remind ourselves constantly that, even in the saddest circumstances, we are helping every child to leave the streets and have a very different future. With Alalay's support, these same boys have been loved, accommodated and fed, made friends, received an education, completed vocational training, and moved on to lead fulfilling lives. The alternative was that they could undoubtedly have ended up in crime, drugged and searching for their next meal in rubbish bins.



In our last note we outlined the backgrounds of some youngsters who we are supporting through their vocational training, and many people wrote to us saying that they found this particularly interesting and encouraging. We have decided therefore to repeat the idea this time and tell you about three more teenagers, each of whom this year is starting a catering course.

Catalina is sixteen years-old and came to Alalay when she was just nine years of age. Her life had been very tough up until then because her parents fought a lot - her father regularly beat her mother, Catalina and her siblings. Eventually her parents separated and her mother got a new boyfriend. One result was that the mother and new man were seldom at home, but away socialising, and the children were abandoned to fend for themselves. Finally neighbours reported them to the authorities as starving and being out of control, and they were brought to Alalay. Catalina says: *"at Alalay our lives changed. I had my own bed, space to store my new possessions and I went to school. I was so happy to remain with my brothers and sisters"*. She likes working in the kitchen, especially when making bread, pastries and dumplings, and is determined to achieve her dreams for the future.

Agustin is also a sixteen years-old, who lived with his mother before coming to Alalay. She was an alcoholic and kept him and his sisters locked in the house for long periods, without food or water. The children seldom went to school and once more neighbours tried to help but eventually reported the serious child neglect to the local Council. The mother has undergone treatment and is recovering from her alcoholism. She keeps in close touch with Agustin and his siblings. He takes a lot of responsibility for helping younger boys at Alalay, but his first interest is cooking, where he says he *"likes to learn the theory behind what he is doing and be very experimental"*. Others enjoy his chocolate and jelly mousse, flans, coconut cookies and cakes, and he is therefore very popular!

Emilia is fifteen years-old and is a little unusual amongst street-connected children because her early years were in a good and loving relationship with her mother. Her mother enjoyed her cooking and wanted to support her financially, so that she could train to be a professional caterer.

Sadly her mother died very suddenly in 2020 from Covid 19, leaving Emilia devastated and with an older sister to care single-handed for her and her siblings. Eventually the older sister abandoned them and they all moved in with an uncle. Here she was abused by one of her brothers and turned to alcohol and solvents by way of escape – she says *"I didn't tell anyone, because I was afraid and ashamed"*. A little later on she became very violent and was taken by the police to a centre for children and helped to overcome her addictions. Last year Emilia moved into Alalay, where she has many opportunities to cook. She is determined to live up to her mother's expectations and eventually open her own bakery – named after her mother.

At the end of their training Alalay helps the children find jobs that should use their newly acquired skills.

Annie Syrett-Jones, Bristol, UK – July 2023

www.alalay.co.uk