



# Mark and Rosalie Balfour

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**Location:** Guatemala



**What we do:** Providing pastoral support for workers in urban ministries, especially Street Kids Direct and partner projects in Guatemala and Honduras.

Dear friends,

As we are writing this it is just under two months since the beginning of September when we returned from our UK home assignment. So much has happened since then that it feels a lot longer, but through it all we have known the Lord's faithfulness.

Our UK visit was a great encouragement. Every church we visited had stories of how Jesus is changing lives, even while we are aware of the many challenges faced by UK churches right now. Thank you to the many people who offered hospitality, encouragement and friendship to us during that time. We are very grateful too for the opportunity to spend time with our family.

A major focus of the past two months has been accompanying members of the team of Street Kids Direct Guatemala (SKDG) through a period of some uncertainty as the organisation considers its future structure and work and the best use of the resources at its disposal. SKDG, supported by Street Kids Direct, are committed to continuing to work with children and their families in some of the most difficult and challenging areas of Guatemala City. Our hope is to develop with them a better culture of care for staff and volunteers that could be a model for other organisations operating in similar contexts. Linked to that, Mark has begun the second year of a three-year part-time MA in "Staff Care and Wellbeing" with All Nations Christian College.

A highlight in September was celebrating Independence Day in Guatemala – we and Lynda, a visitor from one of our UK supporting churches, joined the SKDG team, children and young people in the distinctively Guatemalan activity known as the "Antorcha" ("torch" in English). In Guatemala City hundreds of groups set off from their schools or places of work for the Obelisk, a monument commemorating independence at the heart of the city, where they had their torches set alight and then ran (or walked) back with the flaming torches to where they started. Even with the enormous number of people taking part, this year's Antorcha had a safe party atmosphere with lots of noise, fun and laughter. A group of older boys who had been through the SKDG mentoring programme showed great leadership taking care of the younger children, making sure that none got lost or left behind.

A few weeks later the political situation here in Guatemala meant a rather different atmosphere as pro-democracy demonstrations and a fortnight of roadblocks brought the country to a standstill. The protest is against those in power who are seen to be blocking the transition to power (in January) of the democratically



*Celebrating Independence Day with  
Street Kids Direct Guatemala.*

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To the edges**



elected president Bernardo Arévalo. The protestors are demanding the resignation of the attorney general and other political figures and an end to corruption in government. At the time of writing most of the roadblocks have been taken down but the protests and demonstrations continue, especially in Guatemala City, and the political situation remains at an impasse. Please pray for peace and justice and that there is no escalation of violence, as many fear there might be.

Not only did we have Lynda visit us but also Andrew Johnson, who works with the CMS Latin America team and was visiting mission partners in Central America. Both visits were a great encouragement to us and we took the opportunity with both of them to accompany the SKDG team around the Terminal, the large market area where most of the children in the programme live.

One incident on our night visit to the streets with SKDG illustrates the tough nature of the work. As we were heading for a part of the city where there is a community of people living on the streets, a member of the team had just been telling us about a young man who used to be part of that group – we first knew him six years ago – but who had been living off the streets with a relative for around three years. In fact, they had had a phone conversation with him a couple of days before. Good news! – until we turned the corner and there he was, back on the streets, crashed out on a filthy mattress and high on solvents. We tried talking with him but he was, mostly, unintelligible. A heartbreaking reminder of how addictive street life is and why SKDG's work in prevention with children who are becoming "street connected" is so vital.

In September we drove to Honduras specially to connect with Proyecto Alas – supported by SKD – and fellow CMS mission partners Lindsey and Steve Poulson. Not an easy journey by any means, especially the border crossing which this time involved multiple face-offs with oncoming lorries on a single carriageway. It was good to spend some time talking and praying with Lorena and Christian, coordinator and administrator/youth worker for Alas. We also happened to be there for the one-year celebration of the barber shop run by Owen –whom we have known for twelve years – whose testimony of coming to know Jesus you can currently read on the CMS website.

Thank you as ever to all of those who pray for us and financially support us, so that we can come alongside those doing extraordinary things here in Guatemala and in Honduras. We always want to keep in mind that is only in Jesus that true hope and freedom are found and that, in everything, we want his name to be glorified. Keep praying that we keep our eyes on him,

Love

Mark and Rosalie



**Photos from top to bottom:** At the Antorcha – waiting for the torches to be lit; Visiting the Terminal with Lynda and SKDG; Cooking mentoring with SKDG; With Christian in Honduras outside the Alas project.



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