

CASE STUDY

FUNDACIÓN MUNASIM KULLAKITA IN BOLIVIA

How to work with communities to change attitudes toward boys and to build trust-based relations with boys living in street situations and at high risk.



SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF
BOYS



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Table of Contents

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION	2
INTRODUCTION	3
METHODOLOGY FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE	4
FOCUS OF THE FMK'S WORK WITH BOYS	5
MAIN CHALLENGES IN WORKING WITH BOYS	6
WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO CHANGE THE PERCEPTION ON BOYS	8
HOW HAS THIS APPROACH MADE POSSIBLE TO WORK WITH BOYS?	11
THE WORK WHEN ENGAGING WITH BOYS: DEVELOPING A TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIP	13
TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES	15
CAPITALIZING ON THE WORK WITH BOYS: FINAL REMARKS	17

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION

Given that programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, [ECPAT International](#) launched the [Global Boys Initiative \(GBI\)](#) to explore the sexual exploitation of boys and the services available for their protection. The GBI embarked on a series of research projects in different countries around the world to shed light on understanding the scale of the sexual exploitation of boys: vulnerability and risk factors, the barriers to disclosure and access to services, and what needs to be improved in prevention and response strategies. Now that the first research phase of the Initiative has concluded, we can confidently speak on a number of pressing issues concerning the sexual exploitation of boys. Thus, we are able to consolidate what we know to influence and frame agenda of the project, its advocacy actions and further research. We know that the sexual exploitation of boys is a global issue. We have consolidated information on the main factors leading to sexual exploitation and abuse and their context in which situations of risk, gender norms, and barriers to access are important points to consider. We now focus on how to address these challenges and how to support boys and service providers involved in the fight against sexual exploitation.

In July 2022, we began mobilising ECPAT members in different regions to inform them about the GBI. We explored possibilities of implementing the Initiative at national and regional levels and capitalising on the wealth of experiences that our members have in their work with boys.

In August 2022, ECPAT International and ECPAT Bolivia coalition published a report on the [Sexual Exploitation of Boys in Bolivia](#). The ECPAT Bolivia coalition has been at the forefront of actions to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia since 2015. In partnership with the ECPAT International secretariat, the study was based on primary field research (with frontline social workers supporting sexually exploited boys in the country) and on secondary data (a desk review of the national legal framework on child protection against sexual exploitation and a literature review with a focus on boys). By identifying the most salient issues, the study results aim to improve the services and ensure that these are gender-sensitive and accessible for all children regardless of their gender. Results are also expected to help eradicate the stigma and taboos linked to child sexual abuse or exploitation. Clear recommendations are also provided for evidence-driven improvements.

Discussions with [Fundación Munasim Kullakita](#) (FMK) in Bolivia raised several points of interest and relevant collaborations that contributed to the success of the GBI at both national and global levels. Among them, the documentation work relative to the mobilization and engagement with the local communities and boys in street situations and at high risk.

The objective was to document prevention and engagement practices with boys at risk of sexual exploitation to capitalize on these experiences and encourage learning in other organizations from third countries. Moreover, we aimed at answering the following question to improve the hands-on knowledge of the GBI: **“how can we work with boys at risk or survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse with a gender-sensitive approach?”**.

INTRODUCTION

FMK is a member of the [ECPAT Bolivia](#) coalition; whose mission consists of following up processes of social inclusion of people in situations of social suffering. This is done based on the active participation of the community as an inclusive entity that promotes the improvement of living conditions and prevention and care policies.

FMK implements as its intervention model the Community Treatment or EC02¹, which proposes a change of social representations towards groups in situation of social suffering. Likewise, it focuses on networking, follows a rigorous system of information gathering, and aims at doing research that leads to action. All of this to adopt an intervention model that best adapts to the milieu, involves the entire local community, and best responds to reducing damage and risks.

The projects cover the municipalities of El Alto, La Paz, Desaguadero, Caranavi, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Guayaramerin, Rurrenabaque, and Uyuni, and are looking to expand as well to Tarija and Copacabana. For FMK, each operation constitutes a model system on its own that favours a particular perspective of reality. Hence, the need for linking them in a reticular and transdisciplinary way.

The reference “Ethics and Community” sets the baseline for the intervention: the respect for the dignity of people and communities and the compromise to reduce and counteract the phenomena of exclusion and social suffering in a professional manner. It implies recognition and reflection of the team’s motivations, limitations, errors, and the need for continuous self-evaluation and supervision.

¹ The name of the [EC02 model](#) was created, from some essential elements, as a word game: Epistemology of Complexity (ECO), Ethics and Community (ECO), and therefore, EC02.

METHODOLOGY OF DOCUMENTATION PRACTICES

The documentation of this case study was carried out through the use of an assessment and learning tool pre-developed by ECPAT International's research and GBI teams. Direct observations of different departments at the FMK and its local partners in La Paz and El Alto were equally taken into consideration.

A questionnaire to evaluate the implementation phases of care and prevention strategies was supplied to different teams² at the FMK in El Alto. This set of questions were designed to better understand the approaches, challenges, and opportunities regarding the implementation of working practices. The answers provided by the different team members were recorded and verified in the meetings held with the communities during the interventions in La Paz and El Alto. During the group interviews, new questions and documentation practices arose, which were later considered and integrated into a final report.

Visits to field operations and interviews with each care and prevention team were conducted in late September 2022 and were co-organized between the FMK and ECPAT International. These counted on the voluntary participation of members of the communities involved in prevention and community mobilization activities in El Alto. These included a girls group from a care center in El Alto, collaborators of the Centro de Escucha para Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadores (NNATS) in La Paz, the staff of the El Alto bus terminal, and representatives of the LGBTQIA+ community in El Alto.

Given existing research on sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia and other countries, we know that boys can resort to living on the streets when escaping from issues related to sexual abuse and exploitation in their families and communities. Studies equally reveal that boys can also be exposed to the dynamics of sexual exploitation and child trafficking due to the lack of supervision and support. This case study focuses on the importance of working with communities to ensure so that a protective environment for these boys is provided. Special attention is given to the first steps in building a trust-based relationship with them to prevent and respond to situations of sexual abuse and exploitation. The document is part of a series of case studies that are intended to cover various aspects on working with boys. Likewise, they provide insights and recommendations based on good practices and knowledge acquired through the implementation of activities with boys.

² 12 team members.

Focus of the FMK's work with boys

During the work with girls conducted in 2018 and 2019, it was clear that the sexual exploitation of boys was prominent in these communities. The first boy was then assisted, which instigated further investigation. Boys were mainly identified as regular inhalant users, which turned out to be one of their various coping mechanisms in the face of sexual exploitation. This information was cross-referenced with the observations made in collaboration with the NNATS in La Paz. It was also identified that many of the boys who were engaged in child labour and street situations suffered from sexual abuse and exploitation. Confirming such suspicions and disclosing these situations by some of the boys and their families was a long, delicate, and complex process that called for the creation of a network of contacts³.

Providing assistance to boy survivors of sexual exploitation was difficult at first, as boys themselves did not perceive such abuse as a problem but rather as a form of protection that men could grant them. Once they were referred to local authorities, they did not want to report the facts. Since then, the team at the FMK has further worked on building their trust and has assumed a leadership role in conducting the first investigation into the sexual exploitation of boys in the country⁴. The trust-building process with the community represented the initial step in the work with vulnerable boys, especially those living on the street and in high-risk situations.

³ This process took approximately 5 years of progressive work.

⁴ https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GLOBAL-BOYS_BOLIVIA_2022JULY_v5.pdf

Main challenges in working with boys

The stigma over boys who may have suffered violence and sexual exploitation is a reality that manifests at many levels in Bolivian society, even within their own families.

The community did not react positively when starting the intervention with boys in street situations. At the time, the boys were seen as criminals. Overall, they were perceived as being problematic and dangerous. Due to being in street situations and as a survival mechanism, many boys resorted to theft and other petty crimes. Understanding the community's biases towards boys was an important lesson for the FMK. At first, the boys were also afraid and did not understand that someone genuinely wanted to care about their situation and help them. Accustomed to being abused and insulted, making direct contact with them wasn't easy, hence the immediate need to develop new strategies. These will be presented here below.

The grouping of boys done by the FMK's teams was perceived as dangerous by some parts of the community. The social workers initially faced quite a few obstacles from community members, who did not necessarily understand their intervention. Working on the street, the FMK's social workers realized that the community was surveilling them. They even had water thrown at them at times.

Engaging with boys on the streets in these communities was not possible back then. This required the FMK to reflect on how to adapt its intervention model. It proved necessary to turn the community into an ally so that the boys could be protected against different forms of violence, specifically against sexual exploitation.

Obtaining permission and validation from the local authorities was difficult when in direct contact with the communities and the boys. The police and the community shared the same negative views about the boys. Hence, changing their perception of boys became another challenge when starting to work with boys.

“During street work, the police came to ask many times why they were working with boys.”

Main challenges for boys in Bolivia



Facing complex child protection issues;

Varied reactions to their problems;

Help seeking behaviours are not supported for boys;

Can be perceived as problematic

Working with the community and local authorities to change the perception on boys

To face these initial challenges, the teams of the FMK based their work on a community-focused combination of actions. This approach consists of understanding the community as an active agent in social change and child protection. In this regard, community work is not observed as a series of activities aiming to raise awareness and mobilize the communities. Instead, it is seen as a way to create trust-based relationships with its members, which begins by understanding their problems and concerns. The FMK learned that implementing a community-based approach was key to gaining access to the boys and, consequently, realized the importance of the following factors:

- The change of perceptions and attitudes of communities towards boys and the feeling of empathy for their life situation, problems, and survival strategies;
- The use of community resources and the capacities of its members to implement interventions to identify and solve potential protection issues for these boys. And to later guarantee a permanent presence in the territory;
- To create an informal community-based security system. This allows the teams to engage with boys on the street safely.

In the first place, communities where the rates of violence and child sexual exploitation remained high were pre-identified. The municipality of El Alto was the first location where this type of intervention was implemented. Later, it was adapted to other locations, according to what was learned and in line with the specific dynamics of each context. For instance, boys in street situation were involved in preparing chocolates and gifts for the women of their community during Mother's Day celebrations. This type of action helped greatly in changing attitudes toward boys. This good practice was replicated successively in La Paz, also showing positive results.

Offering practical solutions to community problems – here below – was key to creating the ground for a conversation on issues related to sexual violence, including the sexual exploitation of children.

In parallel, the FMK also focused on coordinating different police units in the municipalities where it intervened to change their perception of boys and the street dynamics. The training was conducted after a participatory evaluation of their strengthening needs, which allowed the FMK to bring added value to the work of the police. This helped raise awareness on the issue of violence against children. Likewise, this practice allowed the FMK to have an insight into the specific situations of boys in street situations and the protection challenges that these boys have to face. Contact between local authorities and communities was also facilitated, enabling the communities to demand their rights and draw attention to the lack of protection for boys in streets situations and at high risk.

Additionally, the FMK agreed in 2018 to explain in El Alto the importance of the active involvement of the community. It began to use the ECO2 model for community treatment, with a teamwork approach between the FMK and the City Hall. The role of the community was important to this regard, as many community members mobilized and demand changes and improvements in their security and living conditions.

The work of engaging with the community developed went on for five years and involved a series of daily direct contacts and network activities. Although essential, this was often perceived as an invisible work. The steps that followed were:

- Direct observation of community dynamics and the involvement of the FMK's teams in the daily activities of some community members, such as the informal sale of sweets and other products on the street by women;
- It was decided to work mainly with women leaders of the communities due to their constant presence and given their active role in monitoring the dynamics and problems in the community;
- Conversations with the ladies working as vendors on their personal and work-related concerns or those related to the dynamics that they could observe in the community;
- Design of a problem tree analysis with the women leaders of the communities. The lack of street cleanliness and citizen insecurity appeared to be elements of concern during this exercise;
- An engagement initiative was to start working on cleaning projects. Developing specific actions to support individual and collective problems and concerns identified during conversations with them was key to gaining their trust. This resulted in a change of their attitudes toward boys and the complexity of their behaviours;
- In the process of obtaining responses to identified issues, boys were also consulted to demonstrate that they could play a key role in sustaining the community and, therefore, helping change the perceptions towards them eventually⁵;
- First, the involvement of boys went through a long period of work made on behalf of the intervention teams. During this phase, social workers became reliable actors with whom boys could safely share their problems and concerns. The teams created this bond by organizing informal conversations with the boys, where teams would actively listen to the boys' concerns and share information that could help them find solutions to their problems.

⁵ This activity was reinforced and complemented by a series of workshops in coordinated and simultaneous work to raise awareness among members of the community, women leaders, and boys.

Aligned to these, it was equally essential:

1. The opening of the “Luz Verde” centre, where different community members – mainly women with their children – could access laundry and childcare services. The centre was essential in allowing the community to have a specific and safe resource that meets their basic needs. The FMK knew how to become a point of reference. They gained the community’s trust also by creating the space for having discussions on sensitive issues, such as sexuality and gender-based violence. The services provided at the centre facilitated contact with boys and their families. This allowed organizing activities of support directly with them to better understand their specific situations and concerns;
2. Community tents working as listening centres were installed. These were devoted to the organization of activities for the community members. The installations would begin with a small table that would gradually get bigger with the addition of other materials (in line with a more significant involvement of the authorities in working with the community). Inside the tents, there is today a psychologist assisting the community and actively listening to their issues of concerns. Outside, there are recreational activities for boys, who can also access psychosocial support services. Tents became a focal point in the communities and strengthened the relationship among women leaders, other community members, and boys in street situations. The tents provided a permanent and safe space where leaders, community members, and children could meet and socialize, promoting empathy among themselves.

How has this approach made possible to work with boys?

Changing attitudes towards boys in the communities, with the support of key figures within the communities themselves, has been fundamental. Listening to the community's problems and offering relevant direct services to their needs raised awareness about the living conditions of boys in street situations. This approach has allowed the FMK to be perceived as a supportive and trustworthy actor. This has predisposed community members to listen. People started to understand the reasons why many boys were on the streets when listening to their stories directly from them.

The problem tree analysis was replicated simultaneously with the boys, so their take on the community's problems could also be understood. Abuses by the police, alongside insults by different community members, turned out to be their main concerns. These results were shared with the active women in the community and made them more aware of the everyday life of boys in street situations.

Mindful to the fact that the police were perceived as an element of fear by the boys, the work conducted with police officers in the intervention areas helped generate empathy toward the boys' conditions. Staff turnover in local authorities and other public institutions represented a challenge that the FMK overcame thanks to its strong reputation as an ally organization to the work of the police. Such a consideration allowed FMK to be seen as a reference trainer during staff turnover. Moreover, it was considered a reliable actor for offering assistance in interventions and attention to issues related to community protection. The close collaboration between its teams and the police was not perceived as a risk by the boys involved in FMK's activities, as social workers were able to facilitate contact between these two actors and build trust and empathy.

The understanding by womends leaders and other community members of the reasons why boys could end up in street situations or had been kicked out by their families was especially important. Once these actors realized that boys did not enjoy a support network, they began to understand the transformative role that local communities may play in these affairs. Peer pressure eventually has negative consequences on some boys, with many of them getting into gangs, committing theft, and using or selling drugs as a means to survive. These gangs denote a new support network for boys in street situations and thus giving them a general feeling of connectedness. This often results in boys getting involved in dangerous behaviours, such as trafficking and sexual exploitation networks.

The community became an actor of transformation and change for the boys and had an impact on the mental health and the emotional well-being of the boys. This brought a feeling of hope. Previous work of the FMK with the community leaders was key to achieving this feeling of empathy and awareness about the boys' situation. FMK gained the community's trust by offering services such as the installation of community tents, cleaning services, and the "Luz Verde" centre. Fundación Munasim Kullakita was

perceived then as an actor that could provide practical solutions to community problems able to improve its members' living conditions. It created the necessary ground so that the leaders and other members would be willing to listen and understand the problems of boys in street situations. Another critical point was being able to show how these boys could serve the interests of the community. By helping them, security issues in the communities could also be improved.

The change in attitudes was not limited solely to understanding their situation and tolerating their presence in the community. A strong feeling of empathy grew to make the women leaders become agents of protection of the boys. An example of this shift of attitude is the fact that women, constituting active minorities, organized themselves to be able to offer support to boys in street situations.

Women from active minorities now help identify situations of exploitation and risk. For instance, they currently know how to identify the population of boys in street situations. The constant presence of women leaders in the communities has allowed FMK to remain updated of any changes in the dynamic at all times. This facilitates the identification and monitoring of already spotted child protection cases, including those related to sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

“These women are reference people for the community. They are the eyes of the community. They know what happens. They are very well aware of the street dynamics”.

In particular, these women were actively involved in designing and developing a community route of action⁶. In doing so, they learnt who to refer child protection cases to, how, and according to what mechanisms. To facilitate their intervention, a contact number of different teams at the FMK was made available in case of concern so that women could share their observations in a safely and timely manner. The ladies were trained to identify risk situations and potential child exploitation cases and to refer them confidentially. Considering the existing dynamics of sexual exploitation of children in these communities, the women received comprehensive training on how to identify these cases without causing harm. The teams' attention and response capacity are tremendously important for maintaining trust-based relationships. Community tents often represent the starting point of the identification and activation of protection strategies, since teams from the FMK and community members can establish reliable interactions with boys in a safe environment.



Establishing alliances with the communities allowed FMK to have a permanent presence on the streets and access to updated information on the number of boys in street situations and any changes in their dynamics. Another beneficial aspect was to guarantee a certain level of security for the FMK in their work when engaging with vulnerable populations on the streets of El Alto at night time. During their work, the FMK's social workers know they are being surveilled by the allied community members, who can quickly activate warning systems in case of risk and danger.

⁶ It is currently available and displayed in the community for the information of all its members.

The work when engaging with boys: developing a trust-based relationship

During their field work, the FMK engages directly with boys on the street at night time in the areas most affected by dynamics of violence and sexual exploitation of women and children in El Alto.

The teams at FMK comprises both men and women and conduct street work where they can monitor exploitation and make direct contact with potential victims. They wear identification vests and pay attention to the street dynamics so that potentially vulnerable or at risk individuals can be identified. After assessing the surroundings, a person from the team approaches and starts talking to an individual or a group of boys. The initial contact is based on an informal conversation and presentation of Fundación Munasim Kullakita. Such an interaction is simple and done in respectful manner and is not necessarily geared toward collecting detailed information about the boy or his circumstances.

This informal contact with the boy in street situations represents the first step of an entire trust-building process, which develops little by little with an active listening approach. In this sense, the first conversation with the social worker serves to understand the boy's real concerns and gives a general picture of the boy's situation. These concerns can have different characteristics and be far from what the teams could initially observe. For instance, boys may share their concerns about arguments with other community members or talk about something else, like food. However, the FMK's team members can notice different behaviours in the boys that may reveal engagement in dangerous dynamics with other boys or a proximity to sites where sexual exploitation is taking place. It is essential to make the boys understand that someone listens to them and is effectively taking an interest in their life, thus acknowledging and validating their problems and concerns. As seen previously, many boys in street situations have lost contact with their families and lack a support network; hence, this moment is essential in the process. Especially with boys involved in cases of sexual exploitation, the moment of active listening and building a pressure-free and trust-based relationship is crucial. Boys have greater difficulties sharing information on these issues, as the feeling of guilt and shame, together with the fear of suffering stigma and discrimination, are factors that must be taken into account when making contact with them.

Getting more detailed information about the boys' living situations and the risks they may be exposed to is difficult, as they want to appear stoic and are afraid of being discriminated against. In particular, many boys do not share situations of sexual abuse and exploitation for fear of stigma and of being perceived as homosexual. It may happen that after the first meeting, some boys go to the FMK's office in El Alto and want to receive some services or hear more about what could be done for their particular situations. However, this is not always the case and this curiosity is often registered after several encounters on the street. In cases where boys go to the centres of the FMK, the staff provides active listening services for their situation and shares information that may be useful for their concerns. The services offered by the "Luz Verde" centre (washing machines, recreational activities, etc.) are also available for the boys.

This first contact is systematically registered in a field diary⁷ upon returning from the night shift. If possible, information about the boys' contact details is transcribed, and issues of concern are shared as well as any other relevant observations. In addition, information on follow-up actions and dates of contact with the boy are also included. Follow-up actions can be as simple as promising another conversation and looking for possible solutions to the boy's initial concerns. It is important to know that the diary is filled at first with notes from the perspective of the social worker.

In this process, the role of the reference person is essential. This is the team member who has made the first contact and has discussed follow-up actions with the boy directly. To achieve a trust-based relationship, several elements must be taken into account:

- The initial contact with the boys proves to be crucial. The first image and what the boy initially perceives count significantly. The way to approach depends greatly on the person making contact. It should always happen, however, in a relaxed and respectful manner. It should too be based on values of empathy.
- Although direct contact is made between the social worker and the boy, it is essential that the rest of the team on the ground is also present at the time of interaction and identify themselves as FMK's professionals so the boy can easily recognize them;
- Boys usually prefer to continue talking with the same reference person that they encountered at first, but if this option is no longer possible, three factors play a key role:
 - » The presence of more team members on the ground, clearly identifiable as members of Fundación Munasim Kullakita;
 - » Share information about other team members on the ground and introduce them, if possible;
 - » Document as much information as possible about the boy and the highlights during the first interaction, including the actions and promises discussed. It is essential to record this information and share it confidentially with other social workers on the ground who could resume contact with the same boy in future occasions.

Ensuring continuity and coherence throughout the process is key to generating effective bonds with the boys. For the abovementioned reasons, such as the fear of adults or the lack of trust, it is necessary to respect the promises made to the boy during the first and subsequent encounters. It has been noticed that, when promises were not kept, the bond halted and regaining the boy's trust proved to be extremely difficult. The need for recreating the feeling of mutual understanding is particularly relevant in boys who have lost their support network.

⁷ ECO2 Community Approach Tool.

Technical and material resources

Implementing community work and engaging with boys in street situations require human, technical, and material resources. In order to maintain trust-based relationships with boys and communities in the intervened areas, it is important to have the FMK's social workers frequently in place. This reinforces the figure of a reference person for both the boys and communities and facilitates awareness of the constantly-evolving dynamics and concerns of all actors involved.

Team members at the FMK are trained in child and community-friendly communications strategies and in creating safe spaces for targetted groups. The capacity-building sessions consist of a combination of theoretical and technical knowledge with practical training. In that sense, new staff is always partnered with older team members of the FMK when it comes to street and community-based work, which enables a solid process of in-place mentoring and a feeling of support and safety network. Moreover, it allows a real transmission of the best practices in engaging with the boys and gives a smooth introduction to the communities. Considering the emotional burden of this type of intervention and the physical risks assumed by the teams, conducting fieldwork by a group of professionals of all levels is a key element to success.

This support process also positively affects the psycho-emotional well-being of the teams, who know that they can count on their colleagues at any time – considering the difficulties that street work implies. Psycho-emotional health is also ensured by regular sessions of sharing emotions and sensations with the same team and on sporadic team-building outdoor activities.

An element to highlight is the continuous staff turnover, which ensures that all staff at the FMK, regardless of their position, can participate in fieldwork. And this encompasses different advantages:

1. Everyone is aware of the street dynamics and does not lose contact with the realities of boys and local communities. This contact is beneficial for teams working on advocacy and in close collaboration with institutions that possess specific and updated information on the situation on the ground;
2. It allows boys and community members to easily identify the FMK's teams and know how to receive assistance from them;
3. In the field, there is a constant exchange of knowledge, information, and perceptions between different team members;
4. To regularly monitor the implementation of the child safeguarding policy of the FMK and to respect its principles and work methods.

Regarding material resources, it is important to highlight the following:

- A vehicle that allows mobility of teams during night shifts in the intervened communities and that is available in case of urgent need;
- Identification material, such as FMK's vests, brochures, and other items that allow boys and communities to recognize team members. These materials also ensure the teams' security at work since they are easily recognizable. Their safety is equally guaranteed by the women and community members, who monitor the risks while the units are operating;
- An emergency fund is available and can be swiftly activated in case a boy needs urgent attention. It is thus essential to have a network of contacts and agreements with service providers in the areas of intervention.

The installation of community tents requires several logistical and material aspects that must be considered:

- Providing a tent with table and chairs and materials from the FMK that are easily identifiable and display the services provided;
- Playful and creative materials for the boys of the community, with various options according to age, idiosyncrasy, etc.;
- Availability of water, soft drinks, and snacks during the activities and discussions with the participants;
- Basic first aid kit and medical supplies.

The availability of different playful and creative initiatives in the tent had unexpected advantages. Recent achievements of the FMK's intervention in El Alto such as nail-painting activities for girls and women encouraged a higher level of engagement. Similar to nail-painting, other initiatives were budgeted to offer various services in the tent. These also positively affected other children, especially those with different sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, who also felt appealed to visit the tent. With this, the FMK's teams were able for the first time to come into direct contact with boys and young people from the LGBTQIA+ community among the local groups and began a progressive process of building a trust-based relationship with them. This shift made the team adjust their way of communicating and organizing the activities. It also constituted an opportunity to establish links with group representatives in the areas of intervention.

Capitalizing on the work with boys: final remarks

The approach to the work of Fundación Munasim Kullakita in Bolivia is based on a flexible and evolving operational model that responds to the needs observed during fieldwork.

When initiating direct work with boys in street situations and at high risk, the intervention has been structured around three parallel processes, which are summarized as follows:

1. To comprehend the problems and concerns of the communities with the objective to offer concrete solutions and begin a transformation process in their role as child protection agents. To understand the perception that communities hold of boys and their presence on the streets to change prejudices, attitudes and behaviours toward them;
2. To generate trust-based relationships with boys and achieve a real understanding of their life conditions, problems, and needs when it comes to survival and psychosocial well-being;
3. To cooperate with different local authorities' representatives to create spaces for training and skills sharing. This should be established with a focus on collaborative and complementary work aiming to improve the living conditions of local communities to ensure that boys feel safe.

Considering that there was no initial plan to work directly with boys on matters concerning sexual abuse and exploitation, this has been a progressive learning process. The recurring presence of the teams on the street and the input gathered through direct exchanges with the boys made it possible to develop this type of experience and hands-on knowledge. From a practical point of view, a flexible use of the budget and the resources available is recommended to further implement the intervention if needed be. Equally essential is to ensure open and adequate information exchange and communication strategies in the FMK's teams. An important guideline is to enable a reflection space where observations compiled during fieldwork can be shared. This keeps the teams informed about the current states in the dynamics between boys. Overall, there is room for new proposals and creative ideas that could potentially improve the intervention model and the services provided to the communities.

Over the years, Fundación Munasim Kullakita has validated the relevance and quality of its approach and it has built a solid reputation in the eyes of the boys, communities, and local government institutions. This has positively influenced changes for better protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse.

The approach based on creating empathetic synergies that respect the dignity of all people has been proven successful. It has created a positive working environment for capitalizing on its current practices and starting up new promising practices. In particular, the following capitalizing opportunities are worth highlighting:

- The study on the situation of sexual exploitation of boys in Bolivia has allowed the FMK to position itself as the leading actor on this issue and has enabled it to design evidence-based social and political advocacy actions;
- The amassed experience in building connections with boys allows us to extend this intervention to more communities, as well as to expand the work on the streets with the design of specific activities addressed to the boys;
- Gaining the trust and respect of the communities have reinforced their role as agents of transformation. In particular, the work conducted at the “Luz Verde” centre has strengthened the support networks with families, this allowing to establish safe spaces for conversation with boys on issues concerning violence and abuse;
- The evolving nature and the flexibility in the use of the resources for the implementation of activities in the community tents allow us to adapt the intervention according to the community’s needs. For instance, the unexpected positive effects of the nail painting activity, such as enabling further relations with the LGBTQIA+ community, illustrate this and promote spaces for mutual learning;
- The ability of the teams at Fundación Munasim Kullakita to integrate into the local community from areas at risk allows us to envision a replication of the program in other areas of the country with a high level of marginalized and vulnerable people, such as ‘los torrantes’⁸.

⁸ Los torrantes are places in the cities of Bolivia where homeless people, usually with alcohol dependence, spend the night, such as: beneath bridges, by the banks of a river, etc.

To delve deeper into this

- To learn more about the work of Fundación Munasim Kullakita in Bolivia and have more details about its intervention approach and work with boys at-risk situations: <https://munasimkullakita.org/>
- To learn about the risks, vulnerabilities, and barriers to accessing services by boys victims of sexual abuse and exploitation in Bolivia: <https://ecpat.org/resource/global-boys-initiative-bolivia/>
- To better understand the issue of sexual exploitation of boys and what the ECPAT International Network is doing globally in this regard: <https://ecpat.org/global-boys-initiative/>
- To know more about the work of ECPAT International, please visit: <https://ecpat.org>



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