



**CHILDREN  
CHANGE  
COLOMBIA**

## The chance of a better education

“Me and my friends dream of getting a better education,” says 12-year old Cristina. She lives with her mum in a small village on the banks of the San Juan River, which flows through the jungles of western Colombia into the Pacific Ocean.

As in other remote parts of Colombia, schools in the San Juan region face huge challenges – attainment is far below the national average, buildings are crumbling and poorly-equipped, and it is extremely difficult to find teachers who are willing to work there. Classrooms are being deserted as more and more pupils drop out to work or join armed groups – both seemingly attractive options for children living in extreme poverty.

“It’s beautiful where I live,” she told us, “but there’s lots of things we don’t have – healthcare, good housing, education – and the armed conflict is causing us more and more problems. I want to learn how to overcome the

problems we face in our region and to make the most of the resources our land has to offer. For this we need better schools – otherwise children like me will keep joining armed groups or move away to the city – we’ll make our families sad and our local culture and traditions will be lost forever.”

We believe that just because Cristina and her classmates live in one of the remotest parts of their country, it doesn’t mean they should have fewer opportunities than children elsewhere.

**WITH YOUR SUPPORT, we can give them the chance of a quality education and all the opportunities this can bring.**

**PLEASE DONATE TODAY**



# A golden opportunity for change



**This spring we are starting work with a new partner organisation, Acadesan, in the San Juan area of Colombia's western Chocó province. Acadesan is an Afro-Colombian Community Council that represents 72 villages situated along the banks and tributaries of the San Juan River. This is one of the most biodiverse parts of our planet but it is best known for one key resource – gold.**

While mining has the potential to offer employment and development opportunities to the communities where it takes place, in the San Juan area gold mining operations have become increasingly exploitative of both workers and the natural environment. We have chosen to work in this region after identifying the serious, multiple risks the mining industry poses to children and young people growing up there.

## Risks to children

Ninety nine percent of mines in Chocó are illegal and their aggressive extraction methods have created an environmental crisis that is putting children's lives at risk. Toxic poisoning (from mercury used in gold mining) is a huge problem. River water and fish are heavily contaminated, but in the remote villages where we will be working people have no option but to consume them daily. Statistics are hard to come by, but we know that in 2014, 37 children from the region

died from mercury poisoning, but there has been little change in mining practices since. On top of this, the heavy machinery used by miners is destroying the land – as riverbanks collapse and deforestation rates rise each year, flooding is causing serious damage to riverside villages.

As Cristina's story on the front cover reveals, the region's problems are exacerbated by a heavy presence of armed groups. These groups have close links with illegal mining and children face a high risk of being forcibly recruited for activities directly or indirectly related to mining or trafficked to mining towns where they are sexually exploited. The groups' violent and intimidating control methods are forcing families to flee the area in large numbers. One of the most damaging outcomes of this forced displacement in terms of children's rights is its effect on education – schools across San Juan face closure due to dwindling pupil numbers.



In fact, education in San Juan faces numerous challenges. Extreme poverty and a widespread lack of awareness of children's rights has led parents to encourage their young children to drop out of school to work. For children who do attend school, the quality of teaching is generally poor. Acadesan has found that the teachers appointed to their region often lack motivation and skills, have little understanding of or interest in the communities and their culture and may fail to turn up to work for prolonged periods or entirely abandon their posts.

## Education holds the key to change

Acadesan, whose members are all local people, are working to bring about genuine, sustainable changes in all areas of life in San Juan. Due to a legacy of poor quality education, many local families are unaware of the urgent need to act to protect their natural environment from destruction and to demand an end to state neglect of their region. Acadesan is committed to engaging everyone in their communities in securing a fair and peaceful future for themselves and generations to come, and they

see education as the key to making this change possible.

## What are we planning to do?

This year, we plan to run a pilot project that will lay the groundwork for a complete overhaul of education in San Juan.

This project will work in four schools, where 80 children will participate in Acadesan's development of a new school curriculum that does away with traditional learning-by-rote teaching and instead makes lessons fun and participative. The curriculum will integrate teaching about the children's Afro-Colombian culture and rights into regular school subjects. For instance, children could learn about traditional music and its history, endemic plants and wildlife, and their constitutional rights as Afro-Colombians. In this way, education will become much more relevant to the children's everyday lives.

There will also be a focus on developing children's social and emotional skills so that they can contribute to creating a peaceful, collaborative environment within their schools, making them into protective

places where pupils and teachers want to be.

Crucially, the curriculum will also focus on environmental issues so that schools can become local champions in denouncing the damage caused by mining.

In addition, Acadesan will work intensively to engage schoolteachers more in their work – helping them develop more effective teaching strategies, leading to better educational outcomes, more rewarding teaching experiences and therefore better retention.

They will also work with the children's parents to encourage them to recognise the benefits of their children remaining in school instead of working.

The environmental crisis that communities in San Juan are living through every day may not make international headlines, but it is for this precise reason that we are working there.

**We need your help today to provide children in San Juan with quality education that teaches them how to protect themselves and their beautiful, biodiverse region from exploitation and neglect. -PLEASE DONATE NOW**





# How dance, drama and music can protect children

This year our Project Talk focused on the ways that our partners' projects use arts activities as practical tools for defending children against threats to their safety and for protecting their rights in the long term.

We proudly premiered our new short film on the night. It features young people from two of our partners' projects who explain how getting involved in bands, dance groups and theatre has given them a new outlook on life, helped them to channel their fears and develop the confidence to change their lives and their communities for the better.

**YOU CAN WATCH THE FILM ONLINE AT:**  
[childrenchangecolombia.org/resources/films](http://childrenchangecolombia.org/resources/films)

As context for the films, our team explained that our experience, backed up by a wealth of independent research, has shown us that children's participation in the arts helps to make their lives safer.



Here are some examples of this happening within our projects...

## Spotlight on Bogotá

Our partner ACJ uses creative arts to help to protect children living in poverty in Bogotá from being groomed and sold for sex. In one activity last year, children made clay models that depicted their goals and the challenges they face in achieving them. Talking about their models helped the children to gain confidence to communicate their thoughts and feelings to others. This is a crucial protective factor – abusers often rely on children feeling unable to talk about what is happening to them.

**“Research shows that children with an arts deficit are disadvantaged educationally and economically while their more fortunate peers...are more resilient, healthier, do better in school, are more likely to vote, to go to university, to get a job and to keep it.”**

UK Cultural Learning Alliance

**“I once heard that a child who picks up a guitar or any other instrument, or who picks up a book, will never pick up a weapon. I believe that's true”**

Augusto, father of Pedrito,  
a participant in the project in Quibdó.

## Spotlight on Quibdó

Last year, we supported 60 children from three of the city's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods to devise and present a dance performance. In it, the children explored risks they face every day – violence, neglect, forced displacement. It proved an important conversation-starter as the children depicted dangers that adult audience members hadn't been aware of. The performance also demonstrated the children's commitment to helping to create a more peaceful city. This is so important in dispelling prejudices that make adults, including the authorities, assume children from marginalised areas are bound to be involved with armed groups. It represents a first step towards adults recognising the importance of children's ideas and opinions and committing to protecting their rights.

**Thank you to all who attended and contributed to making the evening a great success!**

# I Define Me!

Since 2017 we have been running a project under Comic Relief's I Define Me programme, exploring the neglected issue of girls involved in gangs. We are proud to be one of seven organisations involved; others are working in the UK, South Africa and Colombia.

Our project, run by our partner Tiempo de Juego, works with girls and young women who are in residential care in Bogotá because of their involvement in criminal or gang-related activities. We have been working with the girls themselves, their families, and staff at the care home, and this year we will start training local community organisations to replicate the project's activities. 2019 will be the final year of the project.

Alongside Tiempo de Juego, who has expertise in developing young people's life skills through arts activities and promoting youth leadership, the family element of the project was run by our partner AIMY from 2017-18 and will be run by Fundación CRAN in 2019.

Combining the models and expertise of more than one local partner has proved very successful, enabling us to support girls in different spheres of their lives simultaneously – in their care centre, their family and their community.

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RELIEF**

## Who we've worked with:

- 266 girls and young women
- 155 parents and carers
- 175 children – the girls' siblings or close relations
- 18 care centre staff

## Achievements so far:

- The girls have started putting into practice new life skills, such as teamwork and conflict resolution, that will help them achieve the new life-goals they have set themselves. They have greater self-esteem and now understand that they have a right to a life outside of the gangs they see around them every day.
- Families have learnt to resolve problems through dialogue rather than aggression, opening up opportunities to understand and protect their children from the risks they face.
- Professionals in the care centre are able to provide better care to the girls and have the tools to replicate project activities when our team are not there.

## What we've learnt about why girls join gangs:

- Sexual and gender-based violence at home is one of the most common factors that pushes girls out of their families and onto the streets, where they become involved with gangs.
- The majority of the girls are from single parent households, where children spend a lot of time alone while their parent works to support the family. This lack of family support is a huge risk factor.
- Girls have told us they feel a need to use violence and aggression to assert themselves and gain respect on the streets as a way to combat the gender inequality that invades every aspect of their lives.

# Thank you

Thanks to all our supporters whose generous donations make our work possible!

## Individuals



**Luisa Fulcher** gave Spanish classes in exchange for donations. **The Everett family** fundraised during their trip to Colombia. **Alfred Davies** organised a fundraising reggaeton party at **Bristol University**. **Daniela Galán** held classes on Latin American art at the **Tate Modern** and donated a percentage from the ticket sales. **Diana Varaden** nominated us as the beneficiary charity of her work's Christmas raffle

at **King's College** and **Steve Henderson** donated the proceeds from a concert. **Carlos Valencia** organised a fundraising coffee morning at **UCL** and **Margaret Barry** asked for donations to CCC in lieu of birthday presents. **Maeve Murray Smith** from **Capital International**, **Gordon Lee** from **AIESEC UCL** and **Rod Long** invited us to have fundraising stalls at their events.

Over one hundred people fundraised on Facebook by setting up "fundraisers" and asking for donations to us instead of birthday presents!

## Community

A big thank you to everyone at **Colby School**.

Thanks to religious groups that have supported our work in recent months, including: **Alderney Quaker Meeting**, **Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast)**, **Canterbury Cathedral**, **Congregation of La Retraite**, **St. Andrew's Clubmoor (Liverpool)**, **St. Edward the Confessor (Golders Green)**, **St. Joseph's Catholic Church (South Molton)** and **The Parochial Church Council of East Clandon**.

## Sports Challenges

Thanks to everyone who raised funds through sporting challenges, including: **Juan Betancourt**, **Leslie and Michael Jarvis** and **Cristian Pedraza**.

The Hampton Court Palace Half Marathon team: **Martin Diaz** and **Isobel Findlay**.



# Upcoming events

## Thames Walk Saturday 8th June 2019

Don't miss our annual ten mile sponsored walk around Richmond Park! Join us and invite your friends and family to spend a fantastic day out with us. You'll meet new people who care about Colombia as much as you do, you can practice your Spanish or your English or both, you'll have fun and raise money for Colombia's most at risk children. (We ask everyone to try to raise a minimum of £50 sponsorship.)

## Stewards needed

We urgently need volunteer stewards for the Thames Walk. Stewards will need to be available for a "Dummy Walk" on 11th May, as well as the actual walk on 8th June. If you'd like to volunteer please contact Grace ([grace@childrenchange colombia.org](mailto:grace@childrenchange colombia.org)) by 3rd May.



## Help us spread the word!

By distributing Children Change Colombia leaflets around your local community, whether it is your school, church, library or workplace, you are helping us tell more people about what we do! Please contact Grace ([grace@childrenchange colombia.org](mailto:grace@childrenchange colombia.org)) if you would like to help.

If you would like to organise an event to fundraise in support of our work or for more information about fundraising challenges please contact [grace@childrenchange colombia.org](mailto:grace@childrenchange colombia.org) or 020 3559 6756.



# Letter from the Director

## Dear Friends

The children we work with are bubbling over with energy, creativity and hope in the face of some pretty daunting obstacles. Cristina's story on the front page is a fantastic example of this. She is a child who knows that she and her community have been systematically short-changed when it comes to the security and opportunity that other people take for granted. What is so admirable is that not only is she able to articulate this so clearly, but she has a wonderful sense of optimism that she can get the education that is her right.

We are in the privileged position of being able to help her get it. You can do this too by making or increasing your regular donation to CCC, or by doing your own fundraising.

For those of you in the London area on Saturday 8th June there's an easy way to do this that couldn't be more fun. Please come and join our annual sponsored walk around Richmond Park (see details on page 6). It is more important than ever than we get a big turnout so that Cristina and the thousands of children and young people we work with all over Colombia can hear that there are people like you in the UK who are looking out for them. And we will tell them.

It's important, too, that you bring as many of your friends and family as possible and make sure that you all raise at least £50 in sponsorship each! If you aren't able to do the walk, you can still sponsor a friend – and perhaps just come along for the picnic!

I know it's a lot to ask, but when you've heard the inspiring story of Cristina – or about the tough time had by the project workers that support children like Cristina – then I hope it won't seem quite so daunting.

With warmest thanks from us all for all your fabulous support.



Duncan Millar,  
Executive Director

Spring 2019



## Regular Giving

### Instructions to the Manager

#### Your account

Name of bank or building society:

Address:

Postcode:

Account No.       Sort Code  -  -

#### Your donation

Please pay **Children Change Colombia** (Account No.: **22052801**, Sort Code: **60-07-02**) at NatWest Bank plc, 14 High Street, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1AX,

**The sum of £**  on the day of  /  /20

(This date should be at least one month from today).

**And the same sum**  Monthly  Quarterly  Yearly

#### Your details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Tel:

Signed:

Date: dd/mm/yy

### Gift Aid Declaration

I am a UK Tax Payer and I would like Children Change Colombia to reclaim the tax on all qualifying donations I have made to them in the past 4 years as well as any future donations. I will notify them if I am no longer eligible or if I change address.

To qualify for gift aid I understand that I must have paid income / capital gains tax that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs I donate to will reclaim on my Gift Aid donations in the tax year in which they are received and that other taxes such as Council Tax and VAT do not count for this purpose.

Signed:

Date: dd/mm/yy

# Colombian diary

## “They don’t need to know they’re heroes”

writes CCC Executive Director, Duncan.

“I was recently in Bogotá with a group of amazingly dedicated staff from our partner projects. Unusually, the meeting was not about the young people they work with.

All of them work face to face with children in very difficult situations of risk and exploitation. Obviously, this can be very hard to cope with. But if they are to properly support the children in their care, they must be able to look after themselves. That’s what we were there to discuss.

For one participant, just being in a group of people eager to focus on her was too much– she broke down in tears shortly after the introductions. She cares for young people who go home in the evening bolstered enough by the love and solidarity they’ve experienced during the day to live with the fear of what

they might hear in the night, or what might happen to them or those they love. She doesn’t want to show frightened children that she’s frightened. She never wants to let despairing children glimpse her despair. With her colleagues in this room, though, she could let it out for once.

One obvious conclusion was that these carers need time to relax and care for themselves. (Yes, there was a little bit of finger painting and clay modelling...)

Another conclusion was that they all tend to take too much responsibility upon their shoulders. They often feel that they must not rest or another child could be at risk. This can affect their physical and mental health. They reminded each other repeatedly that they can only do so



much, that they are not the only ones responsible for the wellbeing of the children they care for.

They are exceptional people, with extraordinary powers of empathy, courage and perseverance. Sometimes, though, to be constantly told this can encourage them to push themselves too hard. So even though we know they are superheroes, it’s often healthier for them to be reminded that they are only human.”

## Please donate now

### Donor details (We won't share your details with anyone else.)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Tel:

### Your donation

I would like to make a donation of: £5  ; £10  ; £25  ; £50  ; £100  ; Other £

### Payment details

(By BACS transfer: **Children Change Colombia**; Sort code **60-07-02**; Account no. **31623212**)

Cheque (Please make cheques payable to **Children Change Colombia**)

Visa;  Mastercard;

CAF Charitycard Card No.

3 digit security number (on signature strip):  Expiry Date:  /  (mm/yy)

Signed:

Date:

### Gift Aid Declaration

I am a UK Tax Payer and I would like Children Change Colombia to reclaim the tax on all qualifying donations I have made to them in the past 4 years as well as any future donations. I will notify them if I am no longer eligible or if I change address.

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Signed:

Date:

Yes, I require an acknowledgement (please tick or we will assume you do not; this will help us save on administration costs).

Please send me a fundraising pack

Children Change Colombia, The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E2 9DA.

t: 020 3559 6756 e: info@childrenchangecolombia.org w: childrenchangecolombia.org

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All photos have been taken with the children's permission and full consent has been given for their use in Children Change Colombia publications.

All names have been changed and photos carefully chosen to protect the child's identity.

## Thank you!