



**CHILDREN
CHANGE
COLOMBIA**

A way out of conflict

Jairo was born into Colombia's conflict.

When his mother Maria was 16, guerrillas attacked her remote town and she was raped by two of their men. Maria fled to the nearest city, Quibdó, with her mother. She soon realised she was pregnant but was too ashamed to denounce the abuse to the authorities or to seek medical advice about her options.

Maria suffered severe psychological trauma as a result of her experience. She struggled to accept her son, so the only emotions that Jairo learned to feel were the anger and desperation he encountered at home. He dropped out of school, and with no support to help him understand why he felt this way, turned to the only people he thought could give him a purpose; he began running errands for a local armed group.

When he was 10, Jairo was invited to join the project run by our new partner Circulo de Estudios. At first, he was reluctant to take part and was aggressive towards the other children. But with support, Jairo changed his behaviour and began to make friends. He realised that he could be appreciated without having to resort to crime. Two years later he is a regular at the project and he's discovered hidden talents. He's a natural leader, his peers look up to him and he loves helping to run activities for the younger children. He's now known within the community for his work with children, not with the armed groups. He's back in school, Circulo de Estudios is helping his mum, and he has even set up a band playing traditional local music.

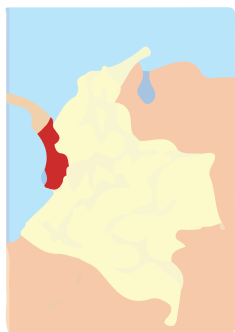
Jairo's story shows that being born into conflict does not have to define a child's life – with the right support they can begin to build a safe, happy future for themselves.

We urgently want to begin working in Quibdó to protect children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and prevent them from experiencing further violence. But we can't start this without you.

Please donate today.



Chocó: beauty and neglect



Chocó is a beautiful tropical region on Colombia's north-western coast. But years of weak state control have left room for widespread coca cultivation, drug trafficking and illegal mining. The army and illegal armed groups are locked in a constant struggle for control of the region and its resources.

The losers in this struggle are the local people, mainly Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups. They have faced massacres, torture, extortion and disappearances, forcing thousands to flee to the region's capital Quibdó. The city now has Colombia's largest proportion of internally displaced people. This high level of displacement, and the violence the local population has faced, mean that 72% of Chocó's population are registered as official victims of Colombia's conflict.

Broken communities

This situation has fractured community life – families have been torn apart; people live in makeshift shelters, at risk of eviction by the police; and armed groups stake out their areas of control with deadly 'invisible borders'. In this setting, it is very difficult to maintain the family and community networks which traditionally protect children. As a result, children in Quibdó are at high risk of being targeted by armed groups, and those who do not carry out the tasks requested of them risk accusations of collaborating with the 'other side' and face reprisals.

The presence of armed groups in the area puts children at increased risk of sexual violence, whether they are involved with these groups or not. This is not a new problem in Quibdó, but it remains largely invisible because victims do not speak out for fear of their abusers and there is a

widespread lack of knowledge of rights or where to go to demand protection. Violence and sexual abuse against children and women, within the family or community, are also hidden. In communities where these types of violence are unacknowledged, they can also be considered normal.

This means that children don't even realise they should be protected from it.

These problems are amplified by inefficient and uncoordinated state institutions. There is a severe lack of specialists to deliver care to child survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Moreover, corruption among public officials over many years has led many citizens to lose faith in the state's ability to support their needs. This only strengthens the armed groups' control.

What are we doing?

This year, we want to work with our new partner 'Circulo de Estudios' to reduce the risk of conflict-related sexual violence against children and young people in Quibdó and to increase adults' ability to protect children from it. The project will support children in the following ways:


1. Individual and group psychotherapy. Children will learn to understand and express emotions arising from the trauma of violence, displacement, family breakdown and the daily challenge of living alongside armed groups who control public life through fear and extreme machismo.
2. Learn about their rights. This helps children recognise they do not have to be passive victims, but can demand protection from adults at home, school and in local government bodies. They will also learn practical ways they can keep themselves safe.
3. Cross-cutting all the work is a focus on dance.

In addition, local adults will be trained to identify the signs that a child is experiencing violence and to share these skills with others in their communities. When a case of abuse or recruitment of children by armed groups is identified, Circulo de Estudios will typically refer it to local healthcare providers or police.

Circulo de Estudios will also work with local government bodies, healthcare providers and schools to encourage them to recognise their shared responsibility for protecting children and to commit to working together to improve the support they offer.

How does dance protect children?

- It helps them retake ownership of their body and value its abilities, instead of seeing it as an object of conflict or exploitation.
- It's a safe and creative way for them to express their experiences, when articulating them may be traumatic or difficult.
- It's fun and it keeps them coming back. It is one of the only opportunities they have to play and behave as children, in a community where they are more likely to be valued as a means of bringing in more income for their family or for carrying out tasks for an armed group.
- Dance culture in Chocó is very strong. Each cultural group has their own style, but for all of them it is a centuries-old tradition through which ordinary people come together to express themselves and resist the fear and despair brought by conflict and social exclusion.
- Community activists who stand up to armed groups can face violent reprisals. The dance element allows Circulo de Estudios to operate in the most high-risk communities without overtly promoting the work they do to challenge violence and abuse.



You can help children like Jairo who have experienced unimaginable trauma to keep safe from further violence and change the course of their lives. Each child that demands their right to a life free from violence is contributing to a safer, more peaceful future for Colombia.

Please help them claim their right to safety.

Donate today.



What does the peace agreement with the FARC mean for Colombia's children?

In February, after a peace agreement with the Colombian government, the FARC guerrillas began laying down their arms.

This is a hugely significant event for all Colombians, not least children, of whom 2.5 million have been officially recorded as victims of the armed conflict.

It means that many of the weapons that caused fear and suffering for children are disappearing from many communities. This is a great thing.

But does this mean that the work of Children Change Colombia is done? Unfortunately the answer is 'No'. The opportunities and risks that the peace agreement brings mean that our work is more important than ever. Below we explain why.

Children and young people must be helped to create peace, or it may fail

We believe that peace is more than just the absence of armed conflict.

Peace is a state in which the rights of everyone are protected, where all children have the opportunity to play and learn in safety and grow up with opportunities to make a fulfilling life for themselves. Peace must be created and actively maintained through measures to heal communities divided by conflict.

We believe that children and young people – particularly those who have experienced conflict and insecurity most directly – can and must play a central role in creating this peace.

If children and young people do not get the chance to play this role, there is a risk that the insecurity and hopelessness that fuels conflict will persist. This may mean that armed conflict never really goes away, but is only carried on by other groups, harming children in the same way.

This is why we must continue to create safe places where children, and the adults responsible for their protection, can be empowered to change their own lives and the lives of their communities.

FARC are not the only source of violence

Ending the conflict with the FARC is just one of many steps necessary to building lasting peace in Colombia. FARC is only one of many armed groups that threaten children.

Beyond the conflict with the FARC, children are exposed to multiple forms of violence, abuse and social exclusion. CCC is working to protect children from these. We work with children who risk recruitment into other armed groups and who continue to live in a cycle of poverty and social exclusion, the very things that fuel conflict.

Power vacuums may be filled by others

FARC's demobilisation risks creating power vacuums into which other criminal groups can expand. It is urgent that we don't allow one threat to children to be replaced by another. We're working to build strong communities capable of rejecting violence and manipulation by armed actors, with the knowledge of how to demand that the State fulfils its protective role. We're also helping to strengthen local State institutions so that they have the capacity to fulfil this role.

Implementation of the agreement in itself generates risks

During the second half of 2016, as the peace deal with the FARC was being finalised and after it was signed, there was a significant increase in murders of community activists, indigenous leaders, land-rights campaigners, and human rights defenders. This volatile situation demonstrates that much work remains to be done by civil society to create safe, peaceful and protective communities. In this very difficult context, we will continue working with our partners to ensure their peacebuilding work does not put them and, importantly, the children and young people they work with, at risk.

Marginalised groups must be involved in creating peaceful communities

The peace agreement promises that long-marginalised groups – including women and girls, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and the LGBTI population – will be able to fully participate in democratic politics. We're working with these communities to build their capacity to do this.

Ex-child combatants need support

Children Change Colombia works with Fundación CRAN to effectively reintegrate children and young people who have been part of illegal armed groups (including FARC) into civilian life. It is impossible to know with certainty how many children and young people have been recruited into armed groups. As an indication of the extent of the problem, between 1999 and 2013 Colombian Social Services worked with 5,417 children and adolescents who had left illegal armed groups. As FARC demobilisation occurs, many child and adolescent ex-combatants will need specialist support.



Thank you

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

Thank you to everyone who set up a regular donation to us in the last 6 months. Together you're contributing an amazing £2,000 annually & making a huge difference to our work in Colombia!

Individuals



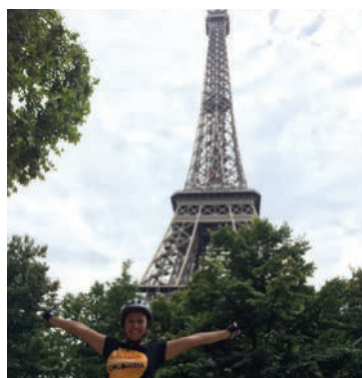
Luisa Fulcher donated Spanish classes in exchange for donations and **Paget Fulcher** proposed us as a beneficiary charity at work. **Judy Murray** donated a tennis lesson for auction. **Michael Stevens** organised a tour to the Houses of Parliament and **Aruna Patel, Zulma Cucunubá (1st Research Symposium), Maeve Murray Smith (Capital International)** and **Rod Long** all invited us to have fundraising stalls at their events. **Nana Clara Aldrin-Quaye** and **Jordana Mba** invited us to participate in their Anglo

Colombian celebration with a fundraising stall and an auction. **Yvonne Velasquez** and **Sandra Higgins** invited us to take part in "The new face of Colombia" exhibition and collected donations at the screening of **Kate Horne's** film "Gabo". **Steve Henderson** donated the proceeds from a concert and **Eduardo Martinez** raised funds by shaving off his moustache!

Community

A big thank you to everyone at **Kingston Grammar School**.

Thanks to religious groups that have supported our work in recent months, including: **Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast), Church Of The Immaculate Conception (Stroud), Didsbury United Reformed Church, Holy Trinity Church (Jesmond), St. Andrew's Clubmoor (Liverpool), St. Edward the Confessor (Golders Green), St. John's Hyde Park and St. Joseph's Catholic Church (South Molton)**.



Sports Challenges

Thanks to everyone who raised funds through sporting challenges, including: **Yuly Sandoval** and **Marcela Sierra**.

The 2017 North London Half Marathon Team: **Guilherme Damas, Andrew Edmonds, Owen Green, Andrea Meek, Pau Ocasar, Adriana Restrepo** and **Andrea Restrepo**.

Upcoming event

Fernando Montaña Gala
Sunday 21st May 2017

Fernando Montano and friends will perform classic numbers from hit musicals in a magical spectacle at London's Hippodrome. Don't miss it!

Thames Walk
Saturday 10th June 2017

Join us and invite your friends and family to our fun family day out and raise funds for Children Change Colombia! Our usual lovely ten mile walk into beautiful Richmond Park!



Stewards needed

We urgently need volunteer stewards for the Thames Walk. Stewards will need to be available for a "Dummy Walk" on 13th May, as well as the actual walk on 10th June. If you'd like to volunteer please contact Doreta ([doreta@ childrenchange colombia.org](mailto:doreta@childrenchange colombia.org)) by 5th May.

News

An evening with Phil Manzanera and Louis de Bernières raised nearly £12,000!

We would like to thank **Phil Manzanera, Louis de Bernières, The Hippodrome Casino** and all artists, volunteers and attendees for making this event such a great success.

If you would like to organise a fundraising event, take part in a fundraising challenge or just spread the word about Children Change Colombia, please contact [doreta@ childrenchange colombia.org](mailto:doreta@childrenchange colombia.org) or 020 7549 0225.

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends

On a recent trip to Colombia I met a group of thirty children who had managed to escape life in armed groups. We went for a day out in a beautiful eco-park just outside Bogota. For me, the climb we did up a steep path through eucalyptus and bamboo groves was just a lovely ramble in the forest.

It was only afterwards that I realised that for the girls and boys we were with it was not just a walk in the park. Admittedly, it did seem surprising that some of the muchachos chose to run up what to me was a challenging ascent. I couldn't understand, either, why they always seemed to be carrying one or other of the party and never seemed to want to dawdle.

But, of course, when you're part of an armed insurgency you move through the forest quickly and silently, and heavily laden. As one boy said, 'It feels strange to be hiking without a big backpack'.

On reflection, I think perhaps the children were mentally flipping between worlds. Between the nightmare world they'd escaped, of witnessing, fearing, inflicting or suffering violence in the jungle, and a much happier world they were trying to get into, where they could just

have a frolic in the woods and the chance to gasp at the beauty of a parrot.

In a sense, Children Change Colombia's job is to help as many children as possible make this transition from a past of painful memory to a much happier present. In doing so we are helping communities all over Colombia make a similar transition, from fear and conflict to security and optimism.

Now, more than ever, they need your support to make this happen.

Thank you for continuing to stand by them.

Duncan Millar
Executive Director

PS To help ensure we can provide long term support to children who've escaped the conflict, please consider setting up a regular donation through the form below, if you haven't already.

Spring 2017



Regular Giving

Donate by Direct Debit (this helps reduce our administration costs)

£5 £10 £20 Other£ **monthly/quarterly/annually** (please delete as appropriate)

starting on 1st 15th (please tick as appropriate) of (month) 20 (year)

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society: Please pay Charities Aid Foundation Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Charities Aid Foundation and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To **Bank/Building Society**

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Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Bank/Building Society Account number

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Service User Number
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CAF, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA

Your details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address:

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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.

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:

Colombia diary

Our new Project Officer, Camilo, shares his impressions of our partner Fundescodes' annual youth forum in Buenaventura.

"Buenaventura is Colombia's largest port – around 60% of the goods that enter and leave Colombia pass through there. Each year, this generates millions of pounds in profits, which you might think would benefit the city's 400,000 mostly Afro-Colombian inhabitants. But most locals are excluded from their city's development. The majority live in poverty and suffer from constant violence by gangs and drug traffickers, and extreme corruption within local government.

Children and young people are worst affected. At our partner Fundescodes' annual youth forum in November, 200 boys and girls discussed the risks they face and proposed solutions, requesting the support of the adults present.

The overriding need they identified was for safe parks and sports pitches. They also asked for cultural programmes, such as dance, music, theatre and sport, where they could develop their skills and interests. Another important issue for them was the danger they face when walking to and from school. They explained that they risk sexual attacks or recruitment by gangs, as well as hazardous traffic on the crowded streets.



Now, many of the solutions the children suggested are underway! With Fundescodes' support, the children are working with adults to improve local parks, they have refurbished an abandoned cultural centre and set up a theatre and dance group, and they are identifying safe routes to their schools.

Community leaders, families and teachers also attended the forum, which inspired them to commit to supporting the young people in their plans. Support from local government is still lacking, but the children hold out hope that their efforts will be recognised by those with the power to make their solutions sustainable. We at Children Change Colombia are committed to helping them because we too believe they can do it!"

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:

Children Change Colombia, Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London, EC2A 4LT
t: 02075490225 e: info@childrenchange colombia.org w: childrenchange colombia.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.

Children Change Colombia: Established in 1991. Formerly called 'Children of the Andes'

You can opt out of receiving this newsletter at any time, just contact us using any of the details above

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:

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

Thank you!