



# Children of the Andes

Defending Children's Rights in Colombia

Autumn 2014

## Children without Childhoods

Daniela lives in Buenaventura, Colombia's most violent city. Most people there live in poverty and few have even completed primary school. By the age of 10, Daniela already had all of the responsibilities, and worries, of an adult. Every day she would go to school for half a day, then rush home to cook, clean, and care for her disabled brother. At the same time she was running a soft drinks stall from their house to supplement the meagre income that her mum brought home, despite working all day, every day. Before joining the project, it seemed like Daniela was destined to spend her life in this cycle of grinding poverty.

Then Daniela joined Carvajal's after school programme. As she says, it changed her life. "I feel like I can be a child again." They give her and her brother lunch so she doesn't need to cook or worry about going hungry, and they help to care for him. The activities are so much fun that she loves learning, and for the first time she can play with other children her age. She has already started to plan a future for herself away from her old routine: "Maths is now my favourite subject and when I grow up I want to study maths so that I can teach it the same way that I've learnt here, through playing!"

The situation in Buenaventura is so critical that COTA plans to begin work urgently with our partner Carvajal to run this programme. We want to help more children like Daniela regain their childhood and escape the cycle of poverty and violence, through education. But we can't start this work without you.

**With your help, hundreds of Colombia's most at risk children can break the cycle of poverty and violence.**

**Please donate today.**



## Buenaventura – violence, fear and poor education

In Buenaventura, situated on Colombia's pacific coast, 81% of the population lives in poverty, and 44% in extreme poverty. As Colombia's main port city, Buenaventura has become a battleground for two of Colombia's biggest illegal armed groups as they fight for territorial control. Surrounded by unimaginably brutal violence, residents caught in this conflict are living in fear, too scared to speak out in case they meet the fate that they know has befallen hundreds of others – torture, disappearance and death. In 2013 alone, 13,000 people were forced to flee their homes in Buenaventura to escape the violence, extortion and forced recruitment.

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Education levels here are lower than anywhere else in Colombia – less than 40% of the population have completed primary school. Of children who attend primary school, 80% repeatedly fail their year. Pupils

in Buenaventura score 10–13% less than the national average in language and science, with 51% of children not even meeting the minimum standards in maths.

With low levels of education themselves, parents are often unable to support their children with their school work. This, coupled with living in poverty, also means that parents are more likely to encourage their children to contribute to the family income, rather than prioritise their school work. This lack of education severely limits children. It means that they see no options for themselves outside their neighbourhood and the violence that surrounds them, and often begin to see the gang leaders who control the neighbourhoods as role models. In turn this increases their risk of being recruited by armed groups and dropping out of school altogether. This danger is particularly high because in Colombia children only attend school for half a day, leaving them at home alone or on the streets for the other half. The armed groups often encourage or even force recruitment of children, whether this is to act as informants, to carry drugs for them, or to carry out assassinations. In 2013, 17 times more children were recruited in Buenaventura than in 2009.

In this context social exclusion is perpetuated generation after generation. High quality, accessible education is necessary to help break

this cycle, and to offer an alternative for children to being on the streets or locked in their home for fear of going outside.

## Breaking the cycle – improving education

This project, with Fundacion Carvajal, will help children to develop the skills to protect themselves against violence and, by improving their educational performance, help them to lift themselves out of poverty.

It will address low attainment levels in 5 schools in Buenaventura by engaging 500 children aged 6–11 in educational reinforcement activities during their half day outside of school. This will also keep these children off the streets and safe by making productive use of their free time.

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The sessions will be aligned with regular school lessons so that they reinforce, in a fun way, what the children are studying at school. Activities will include creative writing, art, IT, maths, music, dance, drama, and environmental awareness, with all activities promoting local culture. Sessions will promote the development of principles such as respect, team work, and critical thinking, to help the children to make responsible decisions in their life outside of school. Activities will be run by young people living in the area, who will receive training in their chosen subjects. These youth leaders will also become positive role models for the children on the project. They typify the talent and resourcefulness of people in Buenaventura, which wants only the opportunity to express itself fully.

Children will receive a nutritious snack while they are at the project. This is crucial as a hungry child will be tired and less able to concentrate in class. They will also receive a school kit with basic materials, to ensure that the cost of materials does not deter any child from attending. Carvajal will also work with parents to help them understand the benefits of the programme over being at work, at home looking after younger siblings, or on the streets. There will also be community open days, which will be an opportunity for the children and the youth leaders to engage the rest of the community in a dialogue about the importance of education.

Carvajal sees the project as a way to build the dreams of the children of Buenaventura, helping them imagine a better life and giving them the opportunities to create it.

**“I’ve known many pupils who have been traumatised by the violence and the conflict they’ve experienced, but they decided to get out of this pattern and they showed the world that, even though they live in an incredibly violent neighbourhood, given the opportunity, they can overcome this and move forward.”**

Carvajal youth leader



# Why Colombian children need you

Good things are happening in Colombia. The economy is continuing to grow, the official number of people living in poverty is diminishing<sup>1</sup> and there are prospects for peace with the FARC and ELN guerrillas.

But not everything is rosy. Nearly 15 million Colombians still live in poverty, with 4.5 million in extreme poverty, lacking even the basics of life.

Of these millions of people struggling to survive, perhaps as many as half are children.

Particularly vulnerable are the 5.7 million people who have been forced from their homes because of violence as former paramilitaries and guerrillas continue to fight for control of the drugs trade, illegal mining and other lucrative sources of income.

So in this period of optimism, we need to work even harder to ensure that no child is left out, that the children who are most at risk in Colombia today are not forgotten.

One of the great privileges of COTA's work is that we get to meet many children, often cheerful against all the odds, and amazingly strong in the face of the injustices imposed upon them by the adult world. We also get to meet the dedicated adults who defend their rights.

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The stories they tell make it impossible to forget these children. We wanted to share one with you.

This story was told to us by the director of one of COTA's Cali based project partners that helps children defend their right to a childhood against armed groups who try to recruit them.

One day a boy of 9, who attends the foundation, came up to her, threatened her with a knife and stole her mobile phone. The next day he gave it back to her, asked for a cuddle and broke down in tears.

She said to him, "You know that we are friends, that I love you very much. Why did you rob me?"

He replied, "They forced me to do it."

It's boys like him, manipulated by a violent adult world, a world that he did not create and does not understand, that we must not forget.

With your support, we can help ensure that thousands of children like him are not forgotten.





# Remember the Forgotten Children of Colombia

**Dear Friends,**

COTA aims to work with the excluded children of Colombia, the children whose voices don't get heard.

These are the millions of children who, despite good news about the Colombian economy and prospects for an end to the long-running conflict, still face poverty, violence and social exclusion.

These children might be victims of sexual violence; they might have left abusive homes only to end up alone on the streets; or they might have been recruited into the terrifying life of a child soldier.

To work with these children, COTA must understand exactly who they are, where they are, and what specific problems they face.

Then we need to find the Colombian organisations that can do most to defend their rights.

And we need to help these organisations become even better at what they do, making sure we reach as many of these children as possible.

So that, at the end of it all, these excluded children are no longer excluded, and so that, after our work is done, these children can claim their right to a happier and safer childhood.

This is what we do. But it takes resources.

Much of this work is done by our team of three in Colombia. To make sure they can do this work, we need your support.

One of the best ways you can give this support is by remembering COTA in your will.

So please: **Remember the forgotten children of Colombia, remember COTA in your will.**

With warmest wishes,



Duncan Millar, Executive Director



**If you would like more information about remembering Colombia's excluded children in your will, please call COTA on: 020 7549 0225 or email [info@childrenoftheandes.org](mailto:info@childrenoftheandes.org). Thank you.**



# Thanks

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

## Individuals

**Lorena Cuervo & Christian Meyer-Ohlendorf, Grace & Kevin Da Silva Hill, and Manab Roy** asked for donations instead of wedding presents, anniversary presents, and leaving presents respectively, and the **Mosquera de Brigard family** asked for donations in lieu of presents for their children's birthdays. **Melissa Iacona & Aruna Patel** fundraised through work. **Geoffrey Hawtin** donated to COTA after his talk at the Radipole and Southill Horticultural Society. **Nils Klover** and the **Winchmore String Orchestra** organised a concert. **Alastair Sturgis** nominated COTA as a beneficiary charity at the Hurst Park Residents Association Quiz Night. **Lina Jeffery, Alex Jones & Yuly Sandoval** organised fundraising initiatives for COTA around the World Cup. **Anne FitzGerald (Alma Street Fair)** and **Spectrum Latino** invited us to have fundraising stalls at their events.



## Community

A big thank you to everyone at **Brampton College** and **Magdalene House Preparatory School (Wisbech Grammar School)**.

Thanks to religious groups that have supported our work in recent months, including: **Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast), Carmelite Monastery (Preston), The Ladies Circle at St Swithun's Church (Purley), The Peace and Justice Group at the Catholic Parish of the Most Holy Redeemer (Billericay), St Botolph Lullingstone (Orpington), St Andrew's Clubmoor (Liverpool), St Joseph Catholic Church (South Molton) and St Leonard's Toddler Group (Teighmouth).**



## Sports Challenges

Thanks to everyone who has raised funds through sporting challenges, including: **Liliana Correa, Steve Emery, Betty Encinales, Edith Lalwan, Marisol Neira, Yann-Pablo Terreyre & friends and Ed Watts.**

The British 10K 2014 team: **Paul Bautista, Mario Giraldo, Matthew Hurst (Succession Group), Andrea Restrepo, Mauricio Rodriguez and Fredy Sarmiento** raised over £2,600.

If you would like to organise an event to fundraise for COTA or for more info about fundraising challenges in your area please contact [victoria@childrenoftheandes.org](mailto:victoria@childrenoftheandes.org) or **020 7549 0225**.

Here are John & Liam Browne who raised £1,700 for COTA from their Everest Base Camp Challenge earlier this year – so nice to see the COTA t-shirt in Everest! Thanks John & Liam





# Upcoming events

## COTA's Salsa Party Wednesday 22nd October 2014

Join us for a(nother) fantastic party, including performances by professional salsa dancers from Cali Swing UK, the largest Colombian Salsa school in the UK, and a live salsa band. Don't miss it!

## COTA Thames Walk Sunday May 3rd 2015

Thanks to all the Thames Walk 2014 participants, we raised over **£4,500**. Join us next year, on **Sunday May 3rd 2015**.

# News

## Run the 2015 London Marathon for COTA Sunday 26th April 2015

Great news, COTA has **one** guaranteed place for the 2015 Virgin London Marathon! If you are interested in fundraising for our work in Colombia (£2000 minimum fundraising target) please contact: [victoria@childrenoftheandes.org](mailto:victoria@childrenoftheandes.org).

## Fernando Montaña's Latin Extravaganza

This year's show, with a distinctly Latin twist, was a phenomenal success raising over **£10,000**. The evening was filled with brilliant dance and music showcasing the very best Latin American talent. COTA would like to thank to everyone who helped to make the event a success.



Photo © DeborahJaffe.co.uk

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# Regular Giving

Remember: a standing order is the most cost effective way for us to administer your contribution

### Instructions to the Manager

#### Your account:

Name of the Bank or Building Society: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Account No.:       Sort Code:

#### Your donation:

Please pay **Children of the Andes** (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 would like Children of the Andes to reclaim tax on any donations I have made over the last 4 years and all future donations until I notify you otherwise.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Please let us know if you change your address or if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains equal to the tax we will reclaim on your donation (currently 25p for every £1 you give).

Please return completed form to Children of the Andes, Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, EC2A 4LT. For more information about Gift Aid, standing orders, legacies or payroll giving, please telephone our office on: 0207 549 0225

# Thank you!

# Field Office Diary

Johanna, our Admin Coordinator in Colombia, recently participated in an activity held by our partner Corpolatin to prevent and reduce violence at home and at school.

When we arrived at the school, the children were anxiously waiting for us to start the activity. Their faces were filled with happiness and they were paying close attention to the instructions for the day. The activity began by dividing the children into groups; some went outside and some stayed in the classroom. Our group found a cool spot underneath a tree and we all sat in a circle. We started by reading a story that included an example of violence at school, where the children had to identify the 'goodies' and the 'baddies', as well as the problems and conflicts in the story. Our mission was to create a superhero that would come and solve all these problems and conflicts.

Each child contributed to the creation of the superhero, from their hair colour and their name, to what

superpowers they would have.

Once the children finished drawing, all the groups got together again in the classroom to present their work to the rest of the class.

The solutions the children gave to the conflicts were very valuable, but the most striking thing about this was that all the groups agreed that the key to solving any type of problem, whether it is at school, with friends or at home, is good communication.

This was a great opportunity for the children to express their ideas, work in groups and set their imagination free. The most important thing about the activity was it motivated children to think about how they can solve their own problems. It was really inspiring to see the children learn that they can be part of the solution.



Children of the Andes: Keeping children safe, defending children's rights and strengthening children's organisations in Colombia.

## Please donate now

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

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Your donation:**

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

**Payment details:**

(By BACS transfer: **Children of the Andes**; Sort code **60-07-02**; Account no. **31623212**)

Cheque (Please make cheques payable to **Children of the Andes**)

Visa;  Mastercard;  CAF Charitycard

Card No.:                 Expiry Date:  /  (mm/yy)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (dd/mm/yy)

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Please let us know if you change your address or if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains equal to the tax we will reclaim on your donation (currently 25p for every £1 you give).

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 COTA fundraising pack

# Thank you!

Children of the Andes, Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London, EC2A 4LT t: 02075490225 e: info@childrenoftheandes.org w: www.childrenoftheandes.org  
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All names have been changed and photos carefully chosen to protect the child's identity.