



Children of the Andes

Building a better future for vulnerable children in Colombia

Spring 2010

Silent victims

Speaking out against the sexual exploitation of children

Oscar was only eight when it first happened to him.

He was the baby of the family, and would usually tag along with whatever his 12 year old sister, Zara, was up to. She would often go to the beach to dance champeta, an erotic dance, for the tourists, hoping to make a bit of money to take home to their mother. Sometimes Zara would go to a hotel room with men they met, and he would crouch under the bed and cover his ears to block out the noise.

Then one day a man asked if he could touch Oscar, he said he would pay even more. Zara said no, but Oscar knew that his mother needed the money.

Shockingly, stories like Oscar and Zara's are becoming more common in Colombia. At least 35,000 children are sexually exploited every year.

Many are too afraid or too ashamed to ask for help. They find themselves trapped in an escalating cycle of violence and abuse that they feel powerless to change.

Children of the Andes (COTA) is working with the Renacer Foundation to support children like Oscar and Zara and, crucially, to help prevent more children from being exploited.

Please make a donation today and help bring an end to this appalling crime



Silent victims

Speaking out against the sexual exploitation of children

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is a growing problem in Colombia. Numbers are increasing and the age of children being exploited is falling – cases of children as young as four have been reported. In Cartagena, the country's tourism capital and a major destination for displaced people, the problem is acute.

As is so often the case, it is Colombia's most marginalised children who are most at risk – particularly those living or working on the streets and those who have already experienced abuse.

Despite the gravity of CSEC, research shows that many children feel unable to stop it and resign themselves to it being a part of life. There is a lack of awareness amongst families and communities that sexual exploitation is damaging, wrong and a crime. Indeed, in some cases, children are lured or pressurised into sexual exploitation by their own family, friends or neighbours.

“The workers on the farm would give me a few coins to do whatever they wanted to me. I couldn't tell anybody because they threatened me. I tried to tell my aunt but she said I was lying and slapped me” Diana

Supporting child victims

Renacer is one of the few Colombian NGOs addressing the issue of CSEC and is a leader in this area. The organisation's roots go back to 1988 when a group of people, concerned about the child prostitution they saw taking place on the streets of Bogotá, committed their free time to befriending and listening to these children. They wanted not only to help the

children involved but to create an environment where CSEC was not accepted or acceptable.

“We wanted to really understand the lives of the boys and girls involved in prostitution and work out the best way to help them build better, alternative lives for themselves” Renacer



Since then Renacer's work has expanded and now includes residential care, prevention programmes for children at high risk, advocacy and training, as well as outreach support.

Thanks in part to Renacer's work, the government has started to do more to address the problem. In 2006, the government introduced a National Action Plan to Prevent and Eradicate CSEC and in 2009 a new law was introduced to make it easier to prosecute those involved in CSEC. However, most work has focused on raising awareness of the problem at an institutional level. Much more needs to be done.

Changing attitudes and actions

COTA has responded to this urgent need by supporting Renacer's work in Cartagena. As well as funding direct work with children, we are working with Renacer to change attitudes that lead to children falling victim to this awful crime.

In 2008 COTA provided funds to Renacer to research the problem of CSEC from the “demand”

side, by working with Cartagena's tourist sector. Renacer talked to all the different people involved – including hotel staff, tour guides and taxi drivers – and came up with a comprehensive prevention plan, involving the tourist industry, local and national government and law enforcement agencies. Thanks to this research, Renacer was able to secure £250,000 from the Canadian government towards this initiative.

In 2009 COTA gave Renacer further support to develop a parallel project aimed at addressing the problem from within Cartagena's most marginalised communities.

The project will work with vulnerable children, families and communities to raise awareness of CSEC and action that can be taken to reduce the risks.

This will be the largest CSEC prevention project ever run in Colombia, reaching thousands and bringing together child victims, at risk children, families, communities, schools, health services, law enforcement, the legal sector and local government.

Direct work with child victims and their families will lie at the heart of this initiative. Renacer staff will provide intensive support to help them come to terms with the traumas they have experienced and, crucially, acknowledge the pain and damage they have suffered. They will be helped to strengthen relationships within the family, create stronger support networks within their community, and get better access to services – including education and legal support.

Beyond this group, the project will work with teachers and children in schools in high risk areas, community groups, health workers, child protection officers, judges, lawyers and police. As well as helping some of Cartagena's most vulnerable children and families to protect themselves against the risks of CSEC, this experience will also be used to help inform CSEC prevention policy at national and local levels.



Please donate now
With your support we can continue to protect Colombia's most vulnerable children from this crime.

Growing up with HIV/AIDS: children speak for themselves

COTA partner the Fundamor Foundation has been providing comprehensive support to orphaned and abandoned children with HIV/AIDS since 1992.

In recent years, Fundamor has led the way in the vital area of preparation for independent living. Children with HIV/AIDS need the medical, educational and emotional support that Fundamor provides. But it is also essential that they are helped to gain the confidence and the skills they need to build a fulfilling life once they leave care, taking an active role in their communities and challenging the stigma and prejudice they may encounter.

As part of this new focus, Fundamor organised Colombia's First National Convention on Children and Young People Affected by HIV and AIDS in September 2009, which brought together 120 children and young people from all over Colombia, 34 NGOs and numerous local and national government agencies.

The event was an opportunity for discussion, for sharing experience and for securing better services for children and young people with HIV/AIDS. Crucially, children and young people themselves were at the heart of the discussion. They were able to talk directly to service providers and decision makers about their experiences, and to give suggestions on how services could be improved.

One of the key demands made by the children was that they should be given a permanent platform from which to voice their needs and give direct input into policy and services affecting their rights. As a direct outcome of the Forum, youth representatives now have permanent seats on Colombia's National Committee on Children

and HIV/AIDS, which is the main national forum through which government and NGO services are discussed and developed. Four youth representatives participated in the Committee's meeting in December.

As well as enabling the children and young people to have their

voices heard, the Forum was an important opportunity for them to build friendships with people facing the same challenges. Following the Forum, the children and young people set up an online community through which they have continued to have regular contact, share ideas and experiences and support one another.

"...One of the first things I learnt was that for the meeting to go well we needed to have everything really well planned. So a group of us got together, as the Forum "leaders". We organised the activities, the meetings... We put together everything!

The Forum went so well! It was great to see all our plans coming to life, and to meet people from all over Colombia.

As a result of my involvement on the Forum, I was able to take part in the First Latin American and Caribbean Forum on HIV/AIDS in Peru. I was a representative for Colombia and was able to find out about how children with HIV/AIDS are treated in other countries, what the laws are, and what kind of health care support they get. Being able to travel and meet so many people from so many countries was a dream come true." Wilson, 12

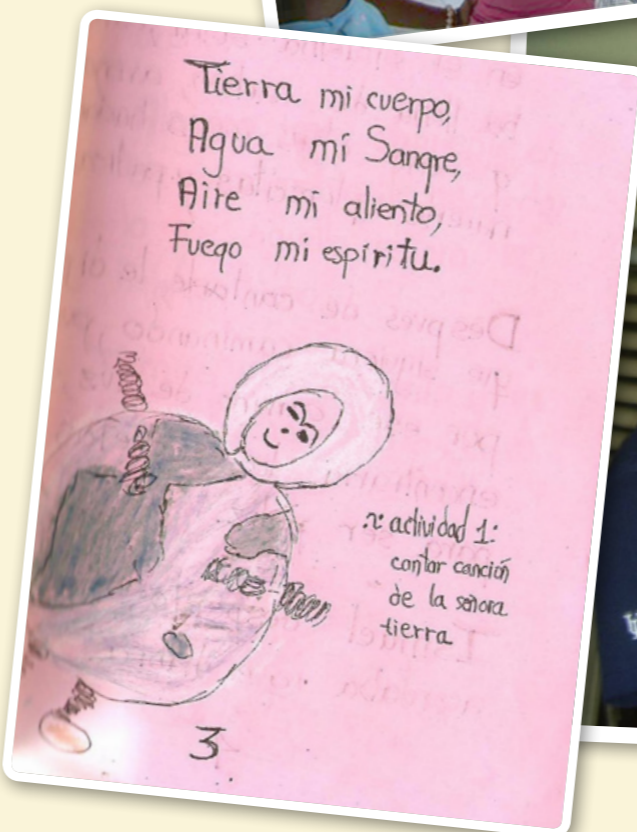
"One of the things that shocked me most was to hear about the experiences of some of the others – particularly at school, where some had been bullied to the point that they had to leave. It has been different for us. Even though other children have sometimes said horrible things, most have been accepting and see us as friends.

I learnt so much during the Forum, but what I loved most was making new friends in other cities, hearing about their lives and being able to stay in touch.

It was great that our proposal about participating on the National Committee was listened to. We are all working to try to improve the situation for children and young people with HIV and AIDS – I feel so happy and proud to be part of this." Mateo, 15



Activities and material from the Forum



Fundraising News

Dear Friends

There are so many vulnerable children in Colombia, it can sometimes be hard to decide which projects to support.

COTA strives to make sure that its work has as much impact as possible on children's welfare.

This is why we aim to concentrate on issues that relatively few others are working on, helping to create wider awareness of a particular problem and reaching the children who face the very toughest challenges.

Partly because of taboos and prejudices, children at risk from commercial sexual exploitation and those with HIV/AIDS have received relatively little attention in Colombia. This is why our partnerships with Renacer (see pages 1-3) and Fundamor (pages 4-5) are so important.

COTA believes that children are the experts on their own thoughts and feelings. Only by listening to children themselves are our partner projects likely to create permanent improvements in children's lives. What is more, for children used to being neglected or abused, feeling that what they say counts for something is in itself a source of happiness.

Both Renacer and Fundamor put listening to children at the very heart of their work. This is another reason why we are so proud to be working with them and so very grateful to you, the people who give us unfailing support, for enabling us to do so.

On behalf of all the children at Renacer and Fundamor, and all our other partner projects, thank you.

Rachel Joseph
Executive Director



Events update

Thames Walk

Our annual Charity Walk returns on Sunday 2nd May 2010. The 10 mile sponsored walk is a great opportunity to enjoy beautiful scenery, meet people and share a picnic with other COTA supporters. Join us with family and friends for this perfect bank holiday activity and help us to raise £7,500.

Volunteers needed

We urgently need volunteer stewards for this year's walk. Volunteers will need to participate in a 'dummy walk' on April 17th as well as being available on 2nd May.

If you would like to sign up as a steward, please contact Heidy at events@childrenoftheandes.org or 020 7549 0225 by April 13th.

Charioke

A big thank you to Laura Harrington and Jo Wickens who participated last year in the UK's first Karaoke Marathon (Charioke) to fundraise for COTA. Here Laura describes her experience:

"I didn't call this event 'My Everest' for no reason - my singing is appalling and I really didn't know if I'd have the energy to Karaoke for so long! But, looking back, I am so glad I took part. The event was so much fun and I quickly forgot my lack of musical skills! The COTA Charioke team raised over £700 and we are determined to do it all again this year and raise even more. I recommend everyone who reads this to give it a go in 2010 and see how much people will pay you to sing!!!"

If you'd like to sing for COTA in Charioke 2010, please contact Heidy.

Thank yous

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

Individuals

We would like to thank Juan Montoya and Yuri Torres who encouraged their colleagues to donate towards our work.

Thanks to Mr Thomas Madigan who made a donation to celebrate his daughter's 25th wedding anniversary and to the Piñol family, who asked for contributions to COTA in celebration of their son Pablo's christening.

Thanks to Sarah Hart Dyke who raised £100 by giving a talk in Snowland, to Brian Parry who donated £72 from a jewellery sale, to Mr and Mrs Dankoff who raised £316 in a cake sale and raffle at their church hall, and to salsa teachers Lilly Suarez and Jeff Davila who raised £250 at their Christmas party.

Our condolences to the families of the late Evelyn Inglin and Anne Worthington. We are so grateful for the generous donations made in their memory.

Sports and Challenges

Thanks to Hugo Serna who raised £220 by running the NYC Marathon and to Jamie Sullivan who helped us raise £440 by organising a football tournament.

Winning Team - Tetlow King Architects



Community

A big thank you to the boys at Magdalen College School who raised £135 for our work.

Thanks to all the churches and religious groups that have supported us in recent months, including: Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast), Barnstaple Religious Society of Friends, Billericay Catholic

Church, Bristol Cathedral, Church of the Immaculate Conception (Stroud), Religious Society of Friends (Alderney), St Albans' Quakers, St Joseph's Catholic Church (South Molton), St Leonard's Church (Exeter), St Peter's Church (Marlow), St Pius X Catholic Church (Guildford) and the Community of the Transfiguration (Loanhead).

For more info about participating in events and community fundraising please contact heidy@childrenoftheandes.org

Standing Order Appeal

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 6 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 28p for every £1 you give).

Please return completed form to Children of the Andes. For more information about Gift Aid, standing orders, legacies, payroll giving, greeting cards, alternative gifts or fundraising, please telephone our office on: 020 7549 0225

Thank you!



Field Office Diary

Based in the heart of Colombia's coffee-growing region, COTA partner La Rayuela works with vulnerable children who are at risk of dropping out of education and getting involved in child labour or crime.

Gina Ortiz, our Bogotá based Field Officer, here recounts her recent visit to La Rayuela when the children were putting on a show for family and friends:

“The night couldn't have been more beautiful: the full moon shone down on us and excitement filled the air. Although they were nervous, it was clear that all the boys and girls were looking forward to the show. Some were practising their lines, others were getting dressed up and a few children were racing around, too excited to contain themselves!

I was struck by how many more children than adults there were. Diana, La Rayuela's Director, sadly confirmed what I suspected: that many of the children aren't lucky enough to have families who care about their wellbeing and want to be involved in their lives. That's why many end up spending lots of time on their own on the streets, where they are vulnerable to getting caught up in gangs, drugs and crime.

Without a doubt, seeing the families who were there was real evidence of the importance of La Rayuela's work. Not only because they had taken the time to go to the show, but because they were so happy to be there and so incredibly proud of their children... Watching them help their children rehearse, make sure they

looked their best, seeing how they applauded, how their faces lit up with joy, reaffirmed what I have felt since joining COTA: that the work of our partners is really making a difference to the lives of vulnerable children.”

Thank you so much for making this possible.



Please donate now: 020 7549 0225

Your donation:

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

Payment details:

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)

Donor details:

We won't share your details with anyone else.

Title: ____ First name: _____

First name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: ____/____

Tel: (____) _____

E-mail: _____

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

Gift Aid Declaration

I would like Children of the Andes to reclaim tax on any donations I have made over the last 6 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 28p for every £1 you give).

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Thank you!