



Children  
of the  
Andes  
Ireland

# newsletter

AUTUMN 1997

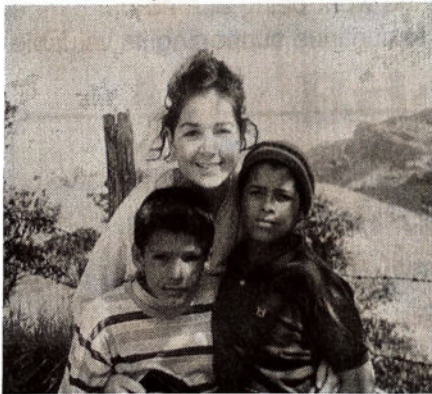
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**Louise O'Reilly from Dublin and Michael McNamara from Limerick have both returned from a three month stay at the Foundation home in Subachoque where they worked in a voluntary capacity. The following is an account of their experiences there.**

## **LOUISE O'REILLY**

"Having seen a TV documentary about the plight of the children who live on the streets of Bogota, I was determined that one day I would go to Colombia to help these children in any way I could. In December 1996 I finally realised my dream and went to Bogota to work as a volunteer with the *Fundacion Ninos de los Andes*, an experience which has truly enriched my life.

My first visit to the Hope Centre at Subachoque was a memorable one. The centre which is home to 100 children is situated about 50K west of Bogota. It is in an idyllic setting surrounded by the most beautiful countryside, free from the chaotic and dangerous environment of the capital. My first encounter with the children was one of sheer joy. As I stepped off the bus I was greeted with huge hugs and smiles as if I had always been part of their lives. I was so happy to have finally reached my destination.



● Louise O'Reilly with two "rescued" children at the Hope Centre

Before leaving Dublin I had been told that the children were on school holidays so I decided to prepare a programme which included sports and games. I knew that physical activity played an important role in the children's rehabilitation programme and most especially for those who were being weaned off drugs. Thanks to some

great friends in my local tennis club I arrived armed with lots of donated tennis rackets and balls. The children were delighted to see the "goodies" coming out of my bag and within hours of my arrival I had given almost every child at the centre "a go" with their new toys.

Getting started was easy as the children were so open and ready for anything. Tennis proved to be a great success but whether it was organised team games, hide and seek in the fields or chasing the three Foundation dogs around the place, everyone had fun! What impressed me so much was how normal the children were despite the hardship they had endured before being rescued from the streets.

The second part of my programme was teaching English. Though definitely a more difficult task than teaching sports, the children wanted so much to learn that again we had a lot of fun.

As well as working with the children, I spent two days a week helping out at the Foundation office at San Cristobal in Bogota. An extra pair of hands to assist in the day-to-day administration was warmly received and it gave me a chance to see how the Fundacion operates. It is from this small office that all decisions regarding the children are made - education programmes are devised, rescue patrols are organised and food and clothes supplies are gathered and stored. The staff work long hours (8am to 8pm) and every one of them are driven by the same goal; to keep the Hope Centre running and to continue rescuing children from the streets.

One of my most rewarding experiences was going out on the streets at night with the "rescue patrols". I would meet up with a group of volunteers three times a week and we would drive around the city in the Foundation Ambulance bringing clothes, food and medication with us.

Rain or thunderstorms never stopped us from making our visits as the children expected us to turn up and we would never let them down. The patrols are the Foundation's first point of contact with the children. On meeting the children (whose ages ranged from six to sixteen) I was overwhelmed by the conditions in which they lived but seeing their courage and their desire to change their circumstances made me want to continue working all through the night.



● One of Bogotas' 5,000 street Children

**"When I first started meeting the children on the streets I used to ask myself what are these children looking for out of life. The answer became so simple - all they want is a future."**

When a child decided that he was ready to leave the streets, we would take him directly to the Hope Centre no matter how late at night it was. To make him feel comfortable and to ease his fear of the unknown we would have a sing-song during the two hour drive from the city to the Centre. I never sang so many Irish songs as I did when out on the rescue patrols!

The children at the Foundation gave me enormous joy and fulfilment. I can only hope that I returned in some small way something as precious to them.



## **MICHAEL McNAMARA**

"Although I didn't have a lot of Spanish on my arrival at the children's home in Subachoque, I found I had no trouble communicating with the children. They quickly helped me to lose any inhibitions that I had and together with the staff they made me feel part of life in the centre.

The tasks which I became involved in during my time at the Hope Centre were many and varied. As I have a background in building work some of my time at the beginning of my stay was spent doing some much needed maintenance work. As time progressed and I got to know the children and staff a little better, I began to introduce some of the projects which I had planned before leaving Ireland.

I thought that I would concentrate on teaching music i.e. the guitar and making simple percussion instruments. Thanks to the generosity of my family and friends in Limerick I arrived in Bogota with plenty of money to fund my projects. I was able to buy guitars and all the necessary materials needed as soon as I got to Bogota. As I hoped, the children love music and we had great *craic* making the instruments and plucking the strings of the guitar. Eventually we managed to get a few good music sessions going!



● *Michael and his merry band!*

A walk through the streets of Bogota at any hour of the day or night holds much evidence of a city which cares little for the weakest and poorest members of its society. However, I was encouraged to see how Children of the Andes Irl. works for and on behalf of one of these groups, the forgotten and ignored children of this city.



● *Mid-morning in downtown Bogota*

My visit to Bogota gave me the opportunity to see at first hand the harsh reality of life for so many street children abandoned as young as six years of age. The genuine concern for children's welfare which I witnessed every day at the Hope Centre was a stark contrast to what I saw on the streets. The centre is a place where a true sense of community and belonging exists.



● *Michael teaches Pedro how to make a percussion instrument.*

## ***More News from Colombia***

Marina Curtis Evans, a representative from the Fundacion Ninos de los Andes, recently made a flying visit to Dublin where she gave a most informative talk to the Children of the Andes Irl. Trustees. Whilst much of her news of the political and social state of Colombia was extremely worrying, her news of the work being carried out by the *Fundacion* was most encouraging and made us more determined than ever to continue supporting its valuable work. Marina has a very clear message:

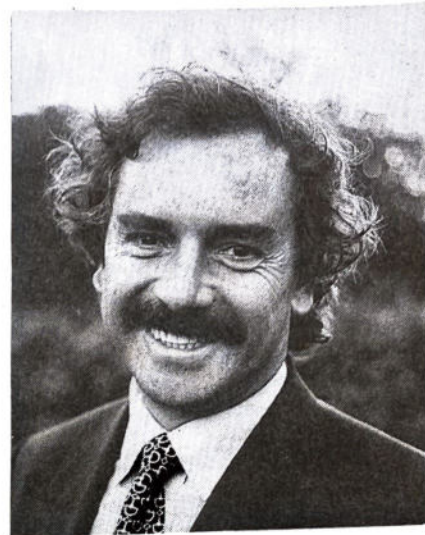
### **WHY THE FUNDACION NINOS DE LOS ANDES NEEDS OUR CONTINUED SUPPORT**

- 42% of children living in Colombia do so in conditions of poverty (Unicef figures for 1997).
- In 1996 180,000 people were forced to flee their homes because of rural violence in Colombia between left wing guerillas and right wing paramilitary groups. Almost half of all victims of this political breakdown are children.
- In March 1997, the United Nations and Colombian human rights organisations showed that in Colombia an average of 500 people are displaced from their homes every day and that Colombia had more internal refugees last year than Rwanda.
- As a direct result of this 10,000 people are arriving in Bogota monthly, usually without the necessary skills to support themselves in an urban environment and thus subjecting their children to the intolerable conditions which lead them to leave their homes.



# THE FUNDACION RECEIVES AN EARLY CHRISTMAS PRESENT

After twenty-five years of campaigning for the sewer and street children of Colombia and having personally funded the majority of running costs at the *Fundacion Ninos de los Andes*, Jaime Jaramillo was delighted to tell us that finally the Colombian Health Board, the *ICBF* has agreed to help a *Fundacion* project. As of this month the *ICBF* will fund all costs for 20 new children rescued by the *Fundacion* who will live at the Hope Centre. It is indeed a milestone to have the State finally taking such action particularly in light of the fact that for many years it was far from supportive of Jaime Jaramillo and the *Fundacion*. Jaime's tireless efforts are finally becoming recognised in his own country and we can only hope that this is the beginning of a future filled with lots of "home grown support".



● Jaime Jaramillo's 25 year campaign for the abandoned children of Colombia finally gains recognition in his own country.

## NEWS FROM HOME

### OH AH CANTONA!

Congratulations to Chris Quigley from Derry who recently paid £3,500 for a signed Eric Cantona jersey which Children of the Andes Irl. auctioned on 98FM radio. We were delighted with the marvellous response we received and we are very grateful to Mr Quigley for his generous support. This donation has been used to sponsor a six month education programme for 14 "special needs" children at the Foundation. The auction was the brain-wave of our long-time volunteer Brendan Flynn who kindly supplied us with the jersey. We are indebted to him for another wonderful fund-raising idea.

Children of the Andes Irl. wishes to thank Denis O'Brien, Chairman and Geoff O'Brien, Station Manager of 98FM who kindly allowed the running of this auction.



● Chris Quigley receives his Cantona Jersey from Christine Thornton, Director of Children of the Andes Irl.

## Any Brick-A-Brack to Spare?

Rachel Mackin from Wexford has been a volunteer with Children of the Andes Irl. for the last four years. Not content with organising school talks and selling Christmas cards, she has set up a charity shop for Children of the Andes Irl. and Bosnia.

*"This is my little shop where I work four days a week. I had a lot of trouble with vandals at first. I also had two fires and several times the windows of the shop were broken. I very nearly gave up. However, things have picked up in the last year and the proceeds of my sales go to Children of the Andes Irl. and to Bosnia. Last year I was able to send Children of the Andes £700. There are so many I want to help. So much of the world is hungry and poor.*

*I would be grateful for any help or time anyone could offer. Bric-A-Brac sells well. I will carry on as long as God allows me and with his help".*

Children of the Andes Irl. wishes to express its deepest gratitude to Rachel for her great efforts.



● Rachel Mackin in her Charity shop.

**RACHEL MACKIN ,  
THE CHARITY SHOP,  
MAIN STREET, BUNCLODY, Co.  
WEXFORD  
TEL: (054) 77756**



# How your Donations have helped

Thanks to your continued support, Children of the Andes Irl. sent £30,000 to the Fundacion Ninos de los Andes in 1997. This money has been used to:

- Maintain the Hope Centre covering some of the large monthly costs such as food and transport.
- Purchase school uniforms.
- Fund an Education Programme for many special needs children.



● The children proudly show off their school uniforms

## CHRISTMAS CARDS

Having sold all 5,000 Christmas cards last year we have increased our number of cards to 7,000 this year! The cards are sold in packs of 9 with three different designs. The cards have been printed and packaged in Ireland and are immediately available.

1 PACK OF 9 CARDS = £3.45



### POSTAGE

1 - 2 packs: 50p

3 - 4 packs: £1

5 - 10 packs: £2

PLEASE ALLOW ONE WEEK FOR POSTAGE

CUT ✂

Name: .....

Address: .....

No. packs: ..... £ ..... enclosed

*On behalf of COTA IRL., and the children of the Fundacion, we extend our warmest wishes for a Happy and Peaceful Christmas.*

*Christine Thornton  
Director*