



CHILDREN OF THE ANDES

Bringing hope to street children and children at risk in Colombia

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 1998

4 Bath Place, Rivington Street, London EC2A 3DR Registered Charity No. 1002263

This year almost 3,000 children in Colombia are counting on Children of the Andes to....



...rescue those in need ~ on the streets of Bogotá, children are relying on the night-time patrols to bring them food and medical attention

...prevent suffering ~ in remote rainforest areas, sick children depend on the flying doctors

...provide rehabilitation ~ children addicted to drugs are counting on training to give them the chance of a better life

Thanks to your help Children of the Andes is working to meet these needs

Our Projects

- Our 'Buy a Brick' appeal raised over £100,00 for the new **Fundación Niños de los Andes** home in Manizales. Building work began in February.
- Princess Anne was treated to a 'royal command performance' in Colombia by **Circo Para Todos**, our circus training project which gives street children the chance of a job in the performing arts.
- We began work with **Mundos Hermanos**, offering vocational classes in bakery, furniture-making, upholstery and confectionery to 50 street children and children at risk.
- The experiences of families displaced by armed conflict will be published in a new book going on sale in Colombia to raise funds for **Cedavida**, the organisation with which we are working to reach these children.
- One year after government funds dried up, **Aprendiendo a Vivir's** home for girls rescued from the streets is still open, thanks to an emergency grant by Children of the Andes.
- Mothers are able to seek work while their children play safely at the **Colombo-Británica** nursery in a Bogotá shanty town.
- A new extension to the **Fe y Alegría** youth centre opened on February 26th after Children of the Andes helped to buy the plot of land.
- The Flying Doctors, **Patrulla Aérea Colombiana**, have been donated vital equipment from the British and Japanese embassies in Colombia.

More details inside...

Presidential candidates promise change

Colombian President, Ernesto Samper, will end his four-year term at the General Election on May 31st. As with the local elections, the weeks preceding voting have been marked by an increase in the number of political assassinations and rural violence as rival guerrilla factions attempt to sabotage the process. In some rural areas the fighting has been so bad that whole communities have abandoned their homes and headed for the relative security of the cities.

No-one expects a new government to have all the answers to Colombia's problems, but at least the events surrounding the run-up to the election have done something to focus world media attention on the country, its violent and bloody political struggle, the grinding poverty, and the dreadful conditions in which so many children exist. And hopefully more people around the world will be moved to do what they can to help.

Colombia is one of the most troubled countries in the world with a murder rate of 77.5 per 100,000 inhabitants (eight times higher than that of the United States), a parallel economy generated by

the drugs trade, and great social inequality with half of the nation's children living in poverty. Fighting in the rural areas forces people into the shanty towns and onto the streets of the major cities where their chances of finding work and food and bettering their lives are almost non-existent. Often the men drift away to try their luck elsewhere and children take on the responsibility of looking after the rest of the family either by finding work on the streets or by turning to crime. There is no way out.

However, the presidential candidates are united in acknowledging that the way forward is through the education and protection of children. This pledge was made by Latin American heads of state at the Summit of the Americas in Chile in April, a conference which was dominated by the situation in Colombia.

While social reform will be high on the agenda of the new government (along with monitoring of paramilitary groups and protection for people working in the area of human rights) it will take years for any effects to be felt. By which time, for thousands of children, it could all be too late.

Congratulations to El Caballero!



David Douglas, one of the founders of Children of the Andes and member of the Board of Trustees, was made a Knight of the Order of San Carlos at a special ceremony in London in February.

The honour, conferred upon him by Colombia's Foreign Minister, Dra María Emma Mejía Vélez (pictured here), in the presence of Dr Carlos Lemos Simmonds, Vice-President of Colombia and Ambassador to Great Britain, was "in recognition of his invaluable and tireless work for Colombian children and the significant contribution to social welfare made by the charity".

David said: "My involvement with Children of the Andes has been a fulfilling and moving experience. I am extremely gratified that the charity's work has been recognised in this way. On behalf of Children of the Andes I would especially like to thank our donors for their support, without which this charity would not exist."

STOP PRESS.... Children of the Andes' Director, Marilise Turnbull, will travel to Colombia in May to visit projects which we are funding. Marilise will go to the volatile Urabá region to mark the first birthday of the pre-school for children uprooted by the armed conflict. Then, from Medellín, she will accompany the flying doctors to a remote village in the Chocó, Colombia's poorest region where health services for children are severely limited.

Marilise will also spend several days with children and staff at the Hope Centre in Subachoque, and a trip to Manizales to check how building work on the new street children's home is progressing will round off her visit.

Street children meet Princess Anne

HHRH Princess Anne was treated to a spectacular performance by Circo Para Todos during her recent visit to Cali. This circus project, part-funded by Children of the Andes, is fast becoming famous for inspiring children on the streets and in shanty towns to change their lives.

Children of the Andes is funding circus clubs in desperately poor and violent areas to give children the motivation to stay drug-free and fit, instead of getting into gangs and crime. Those with special potential are trained to become project leaders and start new clubs.

This year three new clubs are planned in shanty areas of Cali, in a home for street children and in a juvenile prison. Here children will learn new skills, display their talents and take a pride in their achievements for the first time in their lives.



A promising future for Fundación children



The latest news of children at Fundación Niños de los Andes was brought to London in March by the Fundación's new director, Pedro Fernández. Pedro has worked with the Fundación since its earliest days and helped Jaime Jaramillo to set up the first home ten years ago. Asked by Jaime to take responsibility for the day to day running of the organisation, Pedro became director in July 1997.

While in London, Pedro was able to give interviews to the Latin American press in Britain, and gave a moving presentation to a group of Children of the Andes volunteers and fundraisers. Asked what happens to the children when they grow up, Pedro talked proudly of Hernando, Estefan, Alberto and many others.

Hernando (known to his friends as 'Ojos' because of his large brown eyes) was one of the first children rescued by the Fundación. He recently attended a prestigious ceremony in Bogotá to accept a humanitarian award on behalf of Jaime Jaramillo and took this opportunity to talk of his childhood. Hernando had lived in a sewer and was, like many street children, addicted to drugs.

After several years of rehabilitation the Fundación helped to find him employment, including casual work with oil companies, a job as a watchman, and as a live-in educator looking after a dormitory of younger boys at the Subachoque home. This year he found a permanent job as a warehouse administrator and is immensely proud to be trusted with such a responsible role. He has also just started going on rescue patrols with the other volunteers, letting more street children know about the Fundación and what it can offer them.



Hernando at work in the oil fields with Jaime

Estefan lived under a stairway on the streets of Bogotá with his mother, brothers and sisters. His oldest brother was already in prison for robbery and Estefan was heading the same way. He turned to the Fundación for support.

It was agreed that the best way to improve the life of Estefan's whole family was to help his mother, so the Fundación decided to buy her a small mobile hot-dog stand, along with the first supply of ingredients she needed. This allowed her the chance to earn a living, regain her dignity and support her children. The Fundación also persuaded Estefan to do his obligatory military service, as without proof of completing this he would never be able to get a proper job. Knowing that his mother could now support his younger brothers and sisters, Estefan agreed to take his first positive step towards making a life for himself and thinking about his future.

Alberto wrote a letter of thanks to Children of the Andes' supporters which we featured in our Spring Newsletter last year. In it he told us that he had left street life behind and was making plans for the future. He said he wanted to study languages and travel, to be someone in life and help others make their dreams come true.

Alberto's own dreams came true shortly afterwards. Having come top of his class at secondary school, the Fundación encouraged him to enter for a travel scholarship offered by the American Field Service. Alberto won a full scholarship to study at a school in France for a year.

The year nearly up, Alberto (now speaking very good French) will be returning to Colombia. His future looks bright. Alberto has been offered a second scholarship to the Javeriana University in Bogotá on the condition that he finishes school and 'makes the grade'. With luck, he will be the first child from the Fundación to go to university.



Alberto says 'au revoir' to his friends at the Fundación

Girls' home saved from closure



It is not only boys who suffer on the streets. Girls are often abused at home, forced into prostitution or single motherhood before they reach the age of 16. Few learn any skills they can use to make a home or earn a living, and most never have the chance to escape the life they were born into

before passing the legacy of despair to their own children. Our work with Aprendiendo a Vivir is trying to break that cycle.

The home in Bogotá provides protection and care for thirty teenage girls at risk. The popularity and importance of the programme is clear from the way that, when government funding dried up, the girls absolutely refused to leave the home. They even began fundraising themselves, baking biscuits to sell to local schools and companies. Now, one year on, thanks to the girls' determination and an emergency grant from Children of the Andes, Aprendiendo a Vivir is still going strong.

The girls' efforts to keep the home going demonstrate the success of the programme. This is designed not only to provide food, shelter and training, but to give the girls self-respect, pride and independence. Their education is obviously an inspiration; not content with raising funds for their own home, the girls recently took part in a Red Cross march through Bogotá to raise awareness of all street children and the organisations which help them.

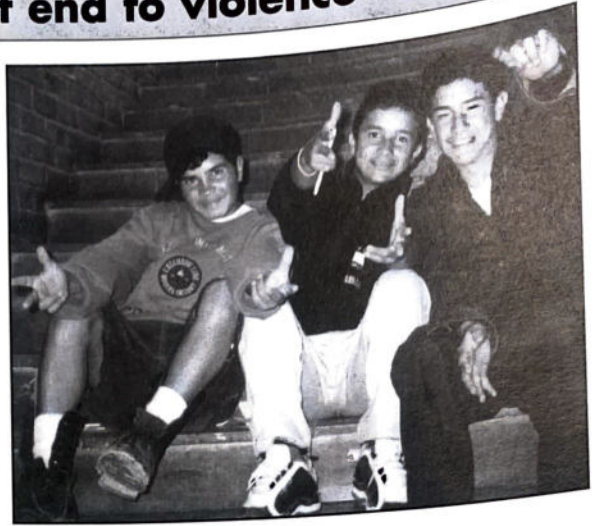
Young gangs want end to violence

For many children in Colombia, to belong is to belong to a gang. Poverty and violence soon take their toll, breaking up families struggling to survive in the shanty towns. It is the gangs, made up of children from the same backgrounds, fighting the same problems and facing the same bleak future, which have replaced the traditional family to become the source of support and influence in children's lives.

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Whether we like it or not, gangs are the new social order in parts of Colombia. The children who join them want to break out of the poverty trap but see crime as the only way. Since the 70's, guerrilla movements and drug cartels have used young gangs to do their dirty work and paid them well enough for the recruits to return to their shanty towns as heroes with plenty of money to flash about. The message is 'violence pays'.

Children of the Andes is supporting a peace-building and youth initiative with the children in Usme, a poor neighbourhood of Bogotá. The project aims to listen to their side of the story and bring them back into the fold, channelling their ambition, team spirit, leadership skills and competitive energies into something good. To do this Children of the Andes is working with Fe y Alegría, a local organisation whose youth centre is filled with over 1000 children and teenagers each week. The activities are so popular that we have also funded an extension so that more young people can take part.



Children in gangs or on the brink of joining one are encouraged to get involved in the project to make sure the youth centre offers the type of activities that will keep their interest and meet their needs. They have chosen music as a way to voice their concerns and make their problems heard. 'Rap', associated with life in the ghettos, has become the theme music for gangs. For all the tough stance, the words are very moving and personal and allow young people to explain how poverty, abuse, crime and drugs are ruining their lives. Already the children involved in the project are throwing their energy into rehearsing for rap concerts they will be giving during Colombia's 'Week for Peace' in September.

The children have also said they need all the help they can get to stay in school. The cramped, squalid shacks where they live are hardly conducive to study, and for the many who suffer from poor nutrition, neglect and physical abuse, the chances of benefiting from school are slim.

The children need all the help they can get to stay in school

So the project is providing them with a safe, quiet place to do their homework, a library service so they can borrow the books their families cannot afford to buy, and a support network set up by local students. With a decent education these children will stand a much better chance of finding jobs and working their way out of poverty. But they need Children of the Andes' help to make it.

◁ Children in Bogotá march for peace (paz)



Diary Dates

WALK THE ANDES

in the UK

Summer is just around the corner, and Walk the Andes is here again! We hope you will want to join us in our attempt to walk the equivalent length of the Andes. That's 5,000 km - from the southern tip of Chile to the end of the Andes range in Colombia.

Why not get together for a countryside ramble or an outing to a local beauty spot?

But you don't need to go to South America to take part in Walk the Andes 98. Just arrange a walk at any time that suits you between May and September, and ask some friends to join you or sponsor you. Why not get together for a countryside ramble or an outing to a local beauty spot? Make a day of it - take a picnic or hold a barbecue at the finish-line!

And remember, you can also run, swim, row or cycle the Andes! Last year supporters literally climbed mountains, navigated rivers and trekked from coast to coast as part of this event. The message is 'anything goes'.....as long as you keep track of the distance you cover and the money you raise!

To take part, simply send off for a walker's pack containing a sponsor form, posters and tips for organising a walk. The supporter who raises the most money in sponsorship will win an elegant travel bag generously donated by Avianca, the airline of Colombia. The organisers of the four most unusual events will win a presentation pack of finest Colombian coffee fresh from the Andes, kindly donated by Alan J Ridge and Bremner.

P.S.

If you are planning a fundraising event, however large or small, please let us know. We can provide posters, leaflets and even come along to give a talk if you wish!

A song from the Andes

The prize-winning Choir of the University of the Andes in Bogotá will be giving a benefit performance in aid of Children of the Andes in London this summer as the culmination of their tour of Great Britain to promote the beauty of Colombian culture and traditions.

The concert, to be held at Westminster Cathedral Hall on the evening of Saturday 4th of July, will include both folk and classical music from Colombia and Latin America, promising to be one of the highlights of the season's fundraising events.

To reserve tickets (at £9 or £6 concession), call our office on 0171 739 1328 or complete the reply coupon enclosed with this newsletter. We hope to see you there!

Gifts in Kind

Our warmest thanks go to the generous supporters who responded to the request in our Christmas newsletter for computers, a display system, a projector and a screen. We are now the very happy owners of all of these pieces of equipment! Your marvellous donations have made a huge difference.



Thank you for your support