



Children of the Andes

Defending Children's Rights in Colombia

Autumn 2015



A Playground, not a Battleground

Colombia's ongoing conflict has brought violence into many of the country's most marginalised communities. As children become witnesses to frequent violence, they can come to see violence as a normal way of dealing with problems. Luis is one of these children.

Luis and his family fled to Cali from the violence in Buenaventura. In the barrio where they live, it is the criminal bosses that rule the streets, not the police. Both of Luis's brothers belong to the gangs that enforce the bosses' authority. Luis has tried to stay away from this, but sometimes, in order to save his life, he has been forced to do 'jobs' for them; 'jobs' that he won't speak about for his safety and ours.

Then Luis joined COTA's partner project Corpolatin. "I want to learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, to help my friends who are in danger. If I can do that, I'll be safer too." He doesn't have many friends and is reluctant to talk

to other children in the project – one of them might be with a different boss and could cause him trouble. Although he was recently suspended from school for fighting, he has tried hard to avoid getting involved in more violence and has continued to attend the project. He says "the project has helped me realise that if I'm feeling down and going hungry, then probably other kids are as well."

Corpolatin's new project directly targets violence in school, creating youth leaders who can support children experiencing violence inside and outside school, helping them to find other ways to resolve conflicts and to protect themselves from the violence that surrounds them.

We can only continue this vital work with your support. Please donate today.



Peaceful schools, peaceful communities

When exposed to high levels of violence in their community, children become more aggressive and turn to violence as a normal response to conflict, or a legitimate way to achieve their goals.

Colombia's children and young people have never known what it is to live without war and the violence it brings. The effects of the conflict are particularly visible in the communities that COTA's partners work in, where there is usually a strong presence of illegal armed groups. In these communities violent reprisals are common, whether for talking to the wrong person, for crossing an 'invisible border' into territory controlled by a different group, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It is unsurprising then that this violence in children's everyday lives spills over into violence in their school; indeed higher levels of community violence have been directly linked to higher levels of school violence. When exposed to high levels of violence in their community, children become more aggressive and turn to violence as

a normal response to conflict, or a legitimate way to achieve their goals.

This violence is one of the key causes of low educational performance in Colombia's most marginalised areas. A recent study of Colombian students found that 78% were affected by violence in their schools. Children reported a fear of attending school and a reduction in their academic performance. Many schools, especially those working in the most marginalised communities, do not have the structures in place to prevent violence or take action when violence within the school is identified. What's more, teachers don't have the time, the training or the tools to address these issues and promote peaceful co-existence between students in their classrooms. This means that more often than not, violence disrupts the classroom environment, negatively

impacting the quality of education that children receive. This creates a vicious cycle where community violence causes school violence, and children who experience school violence become adults that respond to situations with violence, creating more community violence and starting the cycle over again for the next generation of children.

Youth leaders making changes

Corpolatin works in schools in the most excluded communities in Cali. When their project began in 2012 their focus was on violence at home, but as the project developed they found more and more schools, teachers and children asking them for support to deal with violence in their school. Corpolatin has developed their project to address this problem of violence in 3 main ways:

1 Improving children's ability to protect themselves

In schools with high levels of violence, children and young people participate in training. This helps them to gain an understanding of

what situations increase their risk of violence and how to protect themselves from these. They also learn about what to do if they experience, or feel at risk of, violence in school, as well as the support networks available to them. These children take part in training to become youth leaders, able to give support, advice and training to other young people in their school – both those who experience violence and those who cause it.

2 Increasing the capacity of adults to protect children from violence

Parents and teachers learn about violence in school and how to recognise different risky situations. They take part in workshops that help them to understand how to prevent, or protect children from, these situations, as well as increasing their knowledge of the local and institutional support available. Parents also receive support to think about how levels of violence at home can cause, or increase a child's vulnerability to violence in schools and what they can do to reduce this – for example, use of non-violent punishments for

misbehaviour, and non-violent ways to resolve conflict. Teachers are helped to develop child protection systems for their school. Child representatives participate in this to ensure that the real risks of violence in the school are addressed.

3 Provision of immediate and ongoing crisis support

Corpolatin continue to provide their free, confidential helpline, which received nearly 17,000 calls for help in 2014. As well as offering immediate crisis support, the line also puts children and their families in touch with the services they need (social services, healthcare, education).

Children and young people participate in training, which helps them to gain an understanding of what situations increase their risk of violence and how to protect themselves from these.



Who do you think we are? Survey results

New name, same organisation

In our last newsletter, we told you that Children of the Andes would be changing its name and logo.

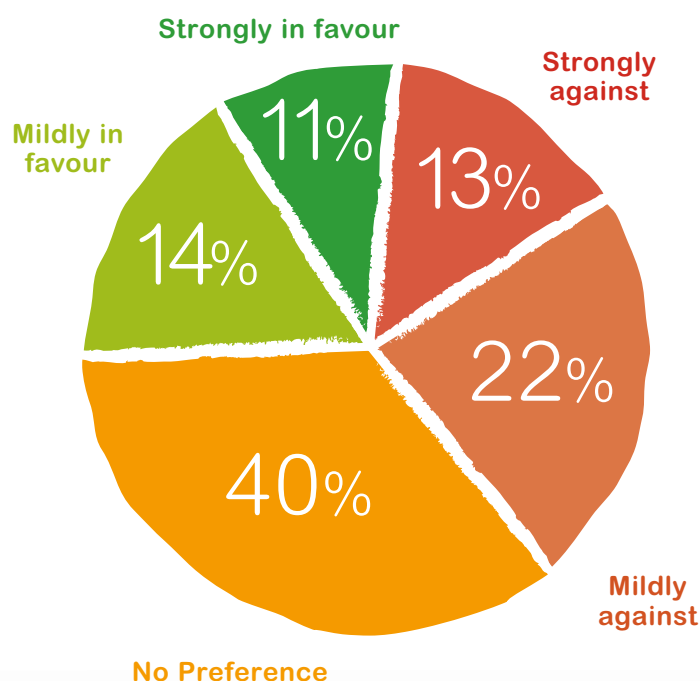
This is for three reasons:

- **To end any confusion about who we are.** Children of the Andes started out being closely connected with the important work of Fundación Niños de los Andes (FNA), rescuing children living in the sewers of Bogota. Thanks, in part, to the work of FNA, children no longer live in the sewers. But while COTA still works with children exposed to similar dangers, we no longer work with FNA. Translated into Spanish, of course, our name is 'Niños de los Andes'. It is not surprising then that often in Colombia, and sometimes in the UK, people think we are the same organisation as FNA. Now that we want to have a much higher public profile in Colombia, it is important that people don't make this understandable error. This confusion hinders our efforts to raise funds and awareness about our work. So we need a new name which clearly differentiates us from FNA.
- **To raise our profile and raise more money in Colombia and the UK.** With a higher profile, we can raise more money and reach more children at risk in Colombia. A new name will help us do this.
- **To reflect how we've changed over the last 25 years.** We've gone from being an emergency rescue mission for children on the streets to making long-term sustainable change in children's lives. A new name is the perfect opportunity to mark this development.

What do you think?

We also said that we didn't want to make this change without asking your opinion first, so we invited you to answer an online or paper survey. More than 100 of you did and we're extremely grateful for your responses.

We asked what your attitude to a name and logo change would be. This is what you said:



As you can see, some of you were strongly against the idea and an almost equal number were strongly in favour. We do not take your strong feelings lightly. COTA would have achieved very little over the years without this sort of enthusiastic interest in our work.

Although change like this can be unsettling, and presents some risks, we feel it is necessary to give us opportunities to really expand our work in Colombia. Given the risks that millions of Colombian children still face, we think it is our duty to seize these opportunities.

So, reassured that the majority of you are not strongly against name change, and in the hope that those of you who are will not lose enthusiasm for our work because of it, we are going ahead with a new name.

We feel the change is necessary to give us opportunities to really expand our work in Colombia.

So what is the new name going to be?

We also asked you to let us know what three words best describe COTA to you. You gave some fantastic responses, which have given us real food for thought when considering what the new name should be...

Smiles Possibilities
Commitment
Hope Partnership
Sustainability
Determination Love
Joyous Kindness
Education Courage

Some of you even suggested complete new names, which were great. These included Andean Children's Action, Children of Hope and Esperanza de los Andes. We can't list them all, but we are trying to take all these ideas into account. We will of course let you know if we choose your suggestion!

What are we going to do next?

We have been moved by your enthusiasm for COTA and inspired by your suggestions for new names.

Using the results of this survey, through workshops in the UK and Colombia - and with much expert and mostly pro bono advice - we are going to make our final choice of new name and reveal it in October.

Whatever our new name is, **we are not changing what we do or what we stand for.**

We will still work exclusively in Colombia.

We will still target the most at risk children and young people affected by issues that are neglected by others.

And we will still need your support; because many thousands of **children in Colombia still need your support** to transform their lives and to overcome poverty, violence and inequality.



Upcoming events

Thames Walk & Run Saturday 11th June 2016

Thanks to all the Thames Walk participants this year, we raised over **£7,200**. Join us next June to walk or run our traditional route along the riverside and into the beautiful Richmond Park.

News

COTA's Viva la Rumba

Our Viva la Rumba in July raised over **£2,400**. COTA would like to thank everyone who attended and everyone who made it a success.



Letter from the Director

Dear Friends

As you can read on these pages, Children of the Andes is going to change its name.

To all of us who have been involved in various ways in the work of Children of the Andes over the past 25 years this can seem like a big deal. But the most important story is not what's happening to Children of the Andes but what's happening to the children and young people that we work with in Colombia.

Luis's story on our front page illustrates one of the critical problems that so many children face every day in Colombia – how to have a safe and peaceful childhood when the neighbourhood you live in is anything but safe and peaceful. There is no easy solution to this problem.

Part of it must be finding a solution to the armed conflict which so influences the levels of violence that children and young people are exposed to. Children of the Andes' experience suggests that another part of it must be to help the children caught up in this violence – whether it is through recruitment into armed groups, threats from gangs in their neighbourhood or bullying at school – to protect themselves against the expectation that violence should be a normal part of life.

Children of the Andes is helping some of Colombia's most excluded children become confident and articulate champions both of their own rights and of a peaceful way of addressing Colombia's inequalities and injustices. We think this is one way to help ensure a more peaceful future for all Colombians.

We want to do more of this. We want these children's voices to be heard by more people both in the UK and in Colombia. It is to help this effort that we are changing our name.

So when you hear our new name – as you will in our BBC Radio 4 Charity Appeal on 22 November, as well as many other places – don't forget that we are the same organisation that is standing up for children, like Luis, who want a safer life and a safer Colombia. Please continue to stand up for children like him.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Duncan'.

Duncan Millar,
Executive Director

Thank you

A big thank you to all our supporters whose generous donations allow us to continue to have an impact in the lives of Colombia's most at risk children

Individuals

Carolina Munevar & Owen Prosser and **Lina Ramirez & Tony Hayward** asked for donations instead of wedding presents. **Patricia Sturgis** asked for donations in lieu of birthday presents. **Luisa Fulcher** donated Spanish classes in return for donations. **Phil Manzanera** donated his time and creative genius in return for donations. **Steve Henderson** organised a concert. **Tania Garcia, Melissa Iacona & Aruna Patel** fundraised through work. **Winifred Ryder** asked her neighbours for donations. **Yuly Sandoval** and **Angela Morse** organised a Colombian meal at Latin American restaurant Las Iguanas to fundraise for our work (get in touch with us if you would be interested doing this too!). The **Murray family** donated Andy & Jamie's tennis clothes to support our work. **Charlotte Henney (Alma Street Fair)** & **Teresa Molano (Calthorpe Project)** invited us to have fundraising stalls at their events.

Community

Thanks to religious groups that have supported our work in recent months, including: **Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast), Carmelite Monastery (Preston), Centro Cristiano Monte de Sion (London), Rugby Christian Life Centre Kids Alive Group, St Botolph Lullingstone (Orpington), St Andrew's Clubmoor (Liverpool), St Joseph Catholic Church (South Molton).**

Sports Challenges

Thanks to everyone who has raised funds through sporting challenges, including: **Heidy Araque, Carolina Garcia, Mario Giraldo, Amy Kennett, Edgar Luna.** The COTA 2015 Silverstone Half Marathon: **Felipe Usuga Gonzalez** and **Fredy Sarmiento** and the British 10K team: **John Browne, Alex & Catrin Jones, Maria Penaloza, Andrea Restrepo** and **Marcela Sierra** who all together raised over **£3,000.**

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 or **020 7549 0225.**



Regular Giving

Autumn 2015

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 am a UK Tax Payer and I would like Children of the Andes 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.

Signature: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Thank you!

Field Office Diary

Natalia, our Field Officer in Bogota, witnesses former child soldiers being reunited with their families

In Colombia we don't know exactly how many children and young people are members of the illegal armed groups. We also don't know exactly how many of them have escaped from these groups or been captured. What we do know is that these children left their families, and the places where they studied and played, to join these groups, and that some of those who have left are now in programmes to help them re-enter society. CRAN, COTA's new partner, runs one of these programmes and recently invited me to participate in one of their activities.

The activity was to be the first time that many of these children and young people would see the families that they left behind. It was simple – while the parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters waited in a room, CRAN showed them a video of each child. The child welcomed their family and spoke about what they hoped would come out of the meeting. Once the video ended, the child entered the room and their family welcomed them. They greeted each other and sat together while the next video was shown.

As I watched each child enter, be hugged by their family and share words of welcome, I thought about how strong these children are. I thought about everything they'd had to experience in their short lives, and about

everything that they would have to go through to be able to change their future. I thought about how different all of us Colombians are. I watched a young indigenous girl enter. Her parents didn't greet her, but her mum gave up her seat so that their daughter could sit in between her and her dad, who hadn't been able to lift his eyes from the floor. I thought about how fortunate I am to have had the opportunity to be in this space and to hear their stories. I thought about everything that I need to learn and to do to help these young people come back into our society in a genuine, happy and permanent way.



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.:

3 digit security number (on signature strip): Expiry Date: / (mm/yy)

Signed: _____ **Date:** ___ / ___ / ___ (dd/mm/yy)

Gift Aid Declaration

I am a UK Tax Payer and I would like Children of the Andes 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.

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Signature: _____

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 COTA fundraising pack

Thank you!