



# Children of the Andes

*Building a future for street children and child victims of violence in Colombia*

## Giving peace a chance

In a country like Colombia where the threat of murder, violence and abduction is part of everyday reality...

...projects to build peace and trust amongst children are crucial to a better future. With your help, **Children of the Andes** is supporting projects doing just that. Yurley Mosquera had to flee her home a year ago to protect her life. *"What I liked about home was the peace,"* she says. *"It was a very cheerful and quiet place... until the time we were forced to leave. We left because of threats and killings. Because if the paramilitaries went by and you were there, they would say you were guerrilla, and if the guerrilla went by and you were there, they would say you were paramilitary. You couldn't be safe."*

After such a traumatic experience so young in life, it is hard to imagine how Yurley could possibly laugh and joke again, or come to believe in a future without violence.

But since Yurley and her friends arrived as refugees in Urabá, they have been taking part in peace-building workshops, supported by **Children of the Andes** that have helped them overcome the trauma of their displacement and acquire the necessary skills to again learn to live in peace.



Displaced boy Photo: José Abad Colorado





# COLOMBIAN CHILDREN AS PEACE

## But what do we mean by 'peace-building'?

**Children of the Andes** feels strongly that peace-building is not only about achieving peace on a national or international level, but also about helping individuals find a sense of peace in their daily lives. Children in Colombia have had their trust in the world 'battered' as they engage with an environment steeped in images of violence and the destruction of war. The peace-building projects we support seek to increase their confidence and teach them non-violent alternatives to resolve the conflicts that they may face.

**A**gainst the background of contemporary Colombia, peace-building programmes are crucial. To be a child in Colombia is to live with the threat of murder, violence and abduction -every day. It is their fear and their reality. According to UNICEF, an average of 11 children are murdered in Colombia every day. This is a rate over double that of the United States, which has one of the highest juvenile homicide rates in the developed world.<sup>1</sup>

Many children grow up with thoughts of revenge and aggression as a way of coping with past suffering and betrayal. Colombian children need to rise from this context of never-ending violence to one of peace. It is vital that **Children of the Andes** helps them develop positive coping strategies. Exposure to daily violence is so damaging, that even if the fighting forces were to sign a peace treaty tomorrow, it would be meaningless if the children of Colombia still held fear and violence in their hearts and minds. A recent study by UNICEF revealed that of the 1,200 Colombian children they interviewed, their greatest fear was not lack of food, or a home, but the threat of violence (88%)<sup>2</sup>.


At **Children of the Andes** we strongly believe that we need to take this concern seriously. It is just as important for us to support peace-building programmes in Colombia, as it is to support the provision of material and nutritional aid.

Here are some examples of how projects supported by **Children of the Andes** are helping to build peace in Colombia.



## Child Peace-Building Networks

Two of COTA's partner organizations, **Cinde** and **Cedavida**, are working hard to establish networks of children across the whole of Colombia, who will become 'ambassadors of peace'. To date, tens of thousands of children in some of the most dangerous regions in Colombia have participated in their conflict resolution workshops and seminars.



**Cedavida** is known for the work it carries out in regions that receive large numbers of displaced communities. It works with the adolescent youth of rural communities, empowering youngsters so they can train their peers. Many of these youngsters have suffered the death of friends and family, feel great fear and distrust of the world around them, and have little hope for the future.

**Cinde** works with younger children in schools and care homes, using the school environment as an ideal forum to live out democracy and non-violent ways of resolving conflict. The seeds of its project are spread further by feeding their practical experiences back into research on child development, and through the publication of manuals, based on the children's thoughts and opinions, that are distributed nationally.



## Peace Education through the Arts

For a child who has witnessed the massacre of family members, it can be impossible to find the words to convey the feelings of fear, anger, and confusion caused by such a violent experience. But until they are able to express these feelings, these children may never truly recover from the horrific scenes of violence they have seen.

The arts allow these children to express feelings about their experiences and begin the process of healing.

**Fe y Alegria**, a community cultural and peace-building project, has been a friend to the poor neighbourhood of Usme, in Bogotá, since 1971. One of its most successful achievements has been the rap and break-dance workshops with street gang members from the area. Through these workshops, the gang members have learnt to respect others in the community, and to understand that via music and dance they can convey their message and opinions more powerfully and to a wider audience than by recourse to gang warfare and violence.

Working in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Cartagena, on the north coast of Colombia, **Colegio del Cuerpo** demonstrates how dance can help children who have witnessed war first-hand to recover their self-esteem and cope with life as a displaced young person in a hostile urban environment. Their innovative approach to working with displaced children has led to the nomination of **Colegio del Cuerpo** as Colombia's entry for the *UNESCO Peace Education Programme, 2003*.

## Dear friends,

Children in Colombia continue to be burdened with a war that is not theirs. In a recent study, UNICEF confirmed what we at **Children of the Andes** already knew: that children in Colombia are growing up with fear, and that they really are afraid.

Fear is a terrible emotion – it does not allow us to feel free, or to be happy. Can you imagine the nights of a child who has witnessed a massacre in which his father died? Or that of a young girl who was raped in the frenzy of war? These are experiences that leave deep scars. One of my colleagues, Barbara Inglin, recently visited our projects in Colombia. She told us how one of the children asked her, *"Is there a war in your country too?"* When told that there wasn't, he wondered, *"How is it to live without war?"*

We need to help these children heal their wounds. If we don't, their lives will be driven by the destructive forces of hate, resentment, and anger, leading to an inevitable repetition of violence. If the future of Colombia belongs to its children, then it is vital that they are given the opportunity to play an active role in shaping that future. Peace-building initiatives are a key part of ensuring that the shape of their future is a smile.

For all these reasons, at **Children of the Andes** we are increasing our assistance to peace-building programmes. We now support six programmes in different areas of the country, helping more than 10,000 children to learn to trust again, acquire skills to resolve conflicts peacefully, and enjoy their first opportunity to participate democratically in their schools and communities.

In this issue we are bringing you news of four of our peace-building projects. We also have a **video** available for you to purchase, in which you can see how the work carried out by **Cedavida**, our partner in the field, has transformed the lives of children like Yurley (*in our main feature*). Seeing what can be achieved is both moving and inspirational.

It is your support that makes all this work possible. Thank you very much on behalf of so many thousands of boys and girls who are beginning to smile again.

**Pilar Arango-Ribeck**  
Chief Executive

1 Fox & Zawitz 2001

2 Unicef Colombia, Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven Encuesta 2000



# PROJECT NEWS



## PONTE EN MI LUGAR (Put Yourself in My Place)

In the heart of Bogotá's old town, a large, colonial-style house rings with the chatter and laughter of children and teenagers. Here, the Torres family have created a safe, loving and supportive environment for the care of almost 100 boys and girls whose families are unable to cope with the endless struggle to make ends meet.

Abuse, exploitation, hunger and abandonment are just some of the consequences of poverty that have scarred the lives of the children at Ponte, and all of them arrive malnourished and in poor health. And yet, when you visit Ponte the overwhelming impression is one of vitality and optimism, as the children



greet you with smiles and proudly show you around 'their house'. Indeed, as the name of the project suggests, this is a very much a house where children come first. Every effort is made to help the children overcome their tragic life stories and build a future as bright as the colourful walls of the house itself.

Most of the children attend Ponte during the day, but there is also a residential programme for a small group of particularly vulnerable boys and girls. Every day, the children receive hot, nutritious food and take part in

numeracy and literacy classes, as well as other educational and recreational activities. They also receive help in accessing healthcare and mainstream educational services.

*For these children, Ponte represents the start in life they never had.*

## FUNDACION CARVAJAL

The *Fundación Carvajal* has over 20 years experience of developing educational opportunities for marginalised communities in the District of Aguablanca, Cali – one of the poorest sectors of the city, with high levels of unemployment, gang warfare and insecurity.

Life for most children is harsh enough, but for disabled children in Aguablanca the burdens of poverty are even heavier. Official sources indicate that approximately 13,000 children in the District suffer from some form of disability. However, this figure may well be even higher, as a lack of adequate infrastructure makes it difficult for many disabled children to leave their home, and so they go largely unnoticed and uncounted.

Facilities such as wheelchair access and audible signals at pedestrian crossings, simply do not exist in Aguablanca, and schools in the area are poorly equipped to deal with the specific needs of disabled children.

In an effort to address the needs of these children more directly, the *Fundación Carvajal* is building a Learning Resource Centre in Aguablanca especially adapted to



## BUILDING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

facilitate disabled access. The Centre will provide much needed educational support and resources for disabled children, their families and teachers. It will include a library, an arts room, a computer room and a music room, and children will have access to information in Braille, talking books and voice-command computers.

This is the first centre of its kind in Cali and it will make an enormous difference to the lives of disabled children and their families. Children of the Andes is proud to be funding this project and, with your support, we hope to be able to fund more centres like this one in other areas of Colombia.

### HOGARES MARIA GORETTI

Located in the neighbourhood of San Antonio, in Cali, **Maria Goretti** is a residential care and rehabilitation home for girls who have been victims of sexual abuse. Since its establishment thirty years ago, it has provided more than 2000 girls and young women with long-term support and love.

Currently, fifteen girls aged between 7 and 18 years live at **Maria Goretti** where they are fed, clothed, supported emotionally and psychologically, and assisted with homework.

All the resident children at **Maria Goretti** attend the local school, as it is crucial that they interact and form friendships with girls at a 'regular' school.

The girls' families, particularly their mothers, are deeply involved in the process of empowerment and recuperation. An alarmingly high number of the mothers were themselves abused as children, and one of **Maria Goretti's** primary tools of intervention is to address the effects this may have had on their children.

When the girls leave the institute, they receive a formal follow-up service for three months, consisting of weekly meetings with a psychologist and social worker, and general emotional and livelihood support. After three months, **Maria Goretti** operates an 'open door' support system for the girls.

The organization also aims to develop the older girls' vocational and practical skills, as a stepping-stone towards employment. A clothes-making workshop, established last year, provides a viable and challenging alternative to domestic work as a cleaner. The girls also learn trades such as bakery, ceramics and beauty treatment.

This year, the girls at **Maria Goretti** are counting on the help of **Children of the Andes'** friends and supporters in paying for items such as books, uniforms and matriculation fees so they are able to attend school.





# FUNDRAISING AT CHILDREN

## Fundraising news

In February, Maria Carolina Alban (*pictured right*) and Alma Latina gave a marvellous show in **Colombia nuestra tierra, nuestro canto**. Jointly organised with Express News, a Latin American newspaper in London, the event provided excellent Colombian food, fun and dancing until midnight, and most importantly raised more than £3500. A special thank you to Distriandina for giving us five boxes of beer for the bar and to Tito's Restaurant for the food and raffle prize.



Carlos Gutierrez and Rafael Perez both took part in the **London Marathon** in April this year. If you would like to run for Children of the Andes next year, make sure you get your entry in! We expect to have Golden Bond places to offer our supporters within the next two years!

asked her wedding guests to donate to **Fundación Niños de los Andes, Manizales**, rather than send gifts (her fiancé proposed to her on a monitoring visit to the Fundación in January of this year!).

In April, the **Kingston Chamber Orchestra** played for us in a fundraising concert at one of our favourite classical venues, St James's Church, Piccadilly, raising more than £1800! A special thank you goes to NM Rothschild and Son for sponsorship of this event.



Laura Boyd (*left*) and her fellow students at St. Andrew's University raised £118 on a **pyjama day** just before Christmas. Why not organise a dress down/dress up day in your school or office?

**Personal gifts in kind** Some of our supporters have chosen to request that money be sent to **Children of the Andes**, rather than receive gifts. For example, David McErlain explained to his young children that there were many children in Colombia in need of food and education and they happily agreed that their Christmas present money be sent to children in Colombia, raising more than £300. Lesley Docksey raised £50 in celebration of her birthday and Mr and Mrs McEntire and their friends kindly donated over £500 to celebrate their Golden Wedding anniversary. Finally, our Trust and Community Fundraiser, Barbara Inglin, is getting married in August of this year and has kindly

**Derby Rotary Club** have had a grant for £6000 approved by the Rotary International office to equip a school for displaced

children that is currently being built in Villanueva, north of Cartagena. The school will be ready for the new school term in September 2003.

We would like to thank **The Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust** for their generous gift of £3000, which paid for two months' worth of daily meals for 500 destitute children at Nutrinfantil, a nutritional programme on the outskirts of Bogotá.

**Due to the constrictions of space, we're unable to thank all our individual supporters for their generosity. We value greatly the support we receive from everyone!**

## GREETINGS CARDS – "MY BEAUTIFUL COLOMBIA"



Earlier this year, five of our projects in Colombia held drawing competitions, generously sponsored by **Tim Best Travel**, to choose designs for this year's greetings cards. The children were asked to draw what they thought was the most beautiful aspect of Colombia, and we are sure you will agree that their drawings make wonderful greetings and Christmas cards. The cards will be available from August 2003 – packs of ten cards for £4.99, plus 50p postage and packaging. The Picasso Dove greetings cards are also available. Either send in a cheque or call us for an order form.





## The Clothworkers' Foundation

In our previous newsletter, we described the plight of *Aprainfante*, an organic farm that provides a home for abandoned, abused and displaced children in Northeast Colombia. At that time, the farm desperately needed funding to expand their dormitory and study space, in order to respond to the great demand by doubling their intake of children to 100.

To date, the 51 children who live at the home have to play, study and sleep cramped together in a barrack-style dormitory with no privacy or concession for age difference. There is no dedicated study or recreational area. They work hard to excel in the training programmes offered in carpentry, agriculture and bakery, but find it hard to sleep and relax in the currently available space.

**Children of the Andes** is thrilled to report that in December 2002, The Clothworkers' Foundation bestowed a grant of £17,000 to cover the full costs of construction and renovation.

The project, which began in April, will provide bitterly disadvantaged boys and girls with glorious bedrooms, a fully equipped library/study area and new bathrooms.

The project has generated hope and excitement in the community, and local residents will provide most of the labour.

**In our next newsletter, we will let you know how the project is progressing, and its impact on the community.**

## Standing Order and Gift Aid appeals

Thank you to everyone who responded to our recent Standing Order and Gift Aid appeals. Standing orders are particularly valuable, as they enable us to plan long term for our projects. The Gift Aid on donations amounted to more than £20,000 last year.

If you are a UK taxpayer, signing a Gift Aid declaration enables us to claim an additional 28p in every pound on all donations made since April 6, 2000. If you are eligible, and have not yet done so, please sign the form on our donation coupon.

We would like to thank you on behalf of the many children who will benefit from your support. For more information about how you can significantly increase the value of your donation, at little cost to you, please call us on 020 7485 8634.

## FUTURE EVENTS

Gabriela Daniel is busy organising her annual **Thames Walk**, which will take place on **Sunday, July 13th**, from Walton-on-Thames to Hampton Court – *and back*. Come and join us for a wonderful relaxing walk along the Thames, with plenty of stops on the way for some refreshment!

After the wonderful success of the event last year, Martha Hatfield is organising another **Salsa & Ceilidh** evening on **Saturday, September 27th** in Husthwaite, York.

A number of our supporters have already signed up for the **Flora Light Challenge for Women Fun Run** in Hyde Park on **Sunday, September 14th**. This has become an important annual fundraising event for us – it's only 3 miles, and if running is not for you, you can walk! If the weather is fine, join us for a picnic in the park afterwards.

**Salsa party** We will be holding a salsa party with Colombian music, food and drinks, and dancing, at the Conway Hall on **Friday, November 21st**. We are also organising a Salsa/Tango course in London over the summer months – perfect practice for the Salsa party!

For more information and/or sponsorship forms for these events, please contact us on 020 7485 8634.





# Legacies

We are extremely grateful for the legacies we receive from supporters, and the donations their loved ones make in their memory

Everyone should make a will - without one there is no guarantee that your wishes will be carried out. It is also an easy way to support your favourite charity.

During the last financial year, we received almost £140,000 from legacies and in-memoriam donations, including a fantastic £125,000 from Mrs Anita Sharples. The knowledge of a future legacy from you enables us to plan and develop long-term projects with our partner organisations in Colombia. By naming Children of the Andes in your will today, you are ensuring that we will have the funds to continue our work well into future.

## Your legacy can help us improve the lives of future generations of children in Colombia

In a recent newsletter we told you about a legacy we received from Mrs Sheila Reilly. The legacy was donated to Fe y Alegría - a community organisation that runs artistic, academic and recreational workshops for children and teenagers in a poor neighbourhood of Bogotá. With this legacy, we were able to fund the outright purchase of a house, which Fe Y Alegría will use as a permanent base for their workshop programme.



For many children and teenagers in the area, these workshops provide a vital alternative to street gangs and petty crime, and represent the only real opportunity to learn new skills.

Legacy funds have enabled us to support many other projects, including the Fundación Niños de los Andes, Manizales, in their aim to eradicate the worst forms of child labour in the city of Manizales. This programme provides 30 child workers with the necessary support, confidence, educational and pre-

vocational skills to stop working, return to school, and reclaim their right to a healthy and dignified childhood. (Image of child worker)

At the Fundación Niños de los Andes in Subachoque, legacy funding has reached out to many former street children through educational workshops.



Fundamor is home to 33 abandoned and orphaned children with HIV or AIDS. These children do not currently receive a formal education, either because they are too sick or because they fear the rejection of other schoolchildren. Thanks to legacy funds, we can help Fundamor with its plan to build an on-site school and give these boys and girls a chance to learn in an environment that meets their needs. (Fundamor photograph)

And finally, The Fundación Carvajal will be able to complete construction of the Learning Resource Centre mentioned on page 4 of this newsletter, due to funds available from a legacy grant.

## How do I make a legacy to Children of the Andes?

If you would like more information, or if you would like to discuss how to make a legacy to Children of the Andes, please call us on 020 7485 8634, or write to us at the address given at the bottom of this newsletter, and we will contact you.

## Children of the Andes

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