

Trip Report July-August 2007

My husband and I spent the months of July and August in Colombia, a mix of personal vacation and opportunity to spend more time with the various ColombiaCare projects. The following is a short summary of our visit to the projects.

The area where the Projects are taking place

As mentioned in other reports, the projects we are developing are in Cali's Communes 18 and 20. Most of the population in this area is displaced families from other places in Colombia. The move of this population is mainly due to the on-going conflict with armed groups in the country. These families build their homes from scraps, and survival is a challenge. The children are the most impacted by this situation.



Examples of the families in this area are the girls in the picture. Their families arrived just few months ago from the Pacific coast. These girls are at high risk. In a conversation with them, it was noticeable that they didn't have dreams or ideas of what they wanted in their futures.



One of them half joke half serious told me she wanted to be a "thief". They stay home alone or wander the streets. They don't have role models, their mothers are probably working or looking for work all day and in many cases they don't have fathers in their homes. The work we are doing is targeting children like these girls, and seeks to give them a healthy environment for them to grow into responsive adults. We are making a difference, and hope to improve the potential for these girls as well.

The 2007 Projects

Homework Clinics

We concluded in June 2007 this very successful project. However, we managed to extend its activities for the summer, taking advantage of the work that was done in the two Community Centers (Las Minas and Napoles) where the program was taking place.

Both community centers had to be fixed up since they were in no-condition to have children there. Once the two centers were fixed, in addition to the Homework Clinics, the community started using the centers for other activities with seniors and small children. The communities are very grateful for this and it has introduced additional community activities in the centers.



Community Center "Las Minas"



The Community Center "Napoles"

Children have access to a library, assistance in doing their homework, educational games, arts and crafts, music, and dance. Smaller children come to the centers as well.



Some play



It is getting exciting.



Time to read...



Can I get some help?



Let's dance.



It is fun when we come here.



Others prefer music.



Or to just be children and play.



Learning art craft.



How about these marionettes?

A Telling Play

During the summer activities the children prepared a "Play". They chose the subject, wrote, directed and acted the play. The subject was a family whose parents left their children alone while they would go partying and drinking. In the play the children had to help the drunken mother and ask for food from the neighbors for their smaller siblings. They presented the play in a family day and later discussed it with adults.



Preparing the play



Rehearsing



Rehearsing



The screen



The play

Vocational Training

The Carpentry training, as expected based on the Welding training experience of 2006, has been very successful. The facilities and the equipment are excellent and will serve for more training as it happened with the Welding training. Talking with the young people attending the training, their enthusiasm and hope for a better future is obvious. Here are some pictures of their activities and progress.



Showing some of their work



Attending class



A cabinet for his grandmother's kitchen



A Smile and a picture say it all



All the students participated in building this cabinet.

Teenage Mothers

As mentioned earlier, young girls is a population at a high risk of maintaining the cycle of poverty. The program, which includes personal and sewing training, has been very successful with the young women who have attended. However, it has been difficult to obtain more participation from the very young mothers (13,-16 years old). Sewing doesn't appear to appeal to very young teenagers. They get bored and don't come back. We are thinking about and exploring other possibilities to attract the very young and more-at-risk young women.

The program helped to fix the workshop where the training is taking place. This again is very useful for the community since it can be utilized again and again.



The facilities Before



Now and in full use. Here the young women receive part of the training



Showing off their accomplishments

Blouses, skirts, pants



A good number of the women who finished the workshop are already doing some work. As mentioned in the previous report, we were able to obtain a contract to make the uniforms for the local public school children. This allows the women not only to practice and improve their skills but to earn some badly-needed money.

How about these dresses?

Communications Project

This project's objective is to improve the communications and academic skills of the children of Las Palmas. This project gives individual attention to children who need the extra help and works with the teachers in improving their teaching skills and families to give more attention to the children.



The children love the attention. The progress has been remarkable

As mentioned in previous reports, we paid for a badly needed retention wall that not only saved the school from coming down the hill but allowed to have a safe play ground space for the children. Also, the children and students from the vocational project are planting trees in the area. We hope that in the near future this will be a beautiful park for the children and the local community. See [Las Palmas](#) for details on the retention wall.



We hope one day this side of the hill will look like the other side

In general the projects we have developed and the ones that are in progress have all been very successful. We were able to see first hand the results and impact of the projects. For instance, several of the young people who graduated from last year's Welding program are fully employed. The feedback from their employers has been very positive. Others started their own small business and even though they face a significant number of difficulties they are continuing with their efforts. Two of those former students are working as mentors in the current Carpentry program. Most important, when we talked to all of the young people we noticed a sense of pride, hope and determination to move forward that was very impressive.

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