

News from Belize: Easter 2009

From Maggie Patchett

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Greetings to everyone, from Belize. Recently I was asked what a typical week for me was like and I thought that by telling you, it may give an idea of what I'm doing here, as well as highlighting some of the issues in Belize, so.....

Sunday Sunday Worship at Ebenezer is at 8am and typically lasts about 2 hours. As chair of the Mission and Evangelism committee, I am sometimes involved with planning and leading worship - usually when there is a specific theme, Last Sunday was Violence Prevention Lord's Day and we had a special service with the theme of 'Putting your faith into action to prevent, reduce and eliminate gun and other violence in our communities'. We had a power point presentation instead of the regular sermon, explaining some of the facts and issues behind the street and gun violence here. Today I need to make sure I'm leaving by 10.15, to go and pick up the preacher for Hattieville, - a village about $\frac{1}{2}$ hr drive away - for the 11am service there. We get back to Belize City by 1.15, and Barbara gives me some of her Belizean cooking to take home for Sunday lunch. Sunday afternoons are a good time to take a rest - especially at the minute as it is very hot and humid. 7pm: sometimes I go along to the evening service at Wesley Church. I usually end up giving some people a lift afterwards and get home after 9pm.

Monday Drive up to YES at Lords Bank to discuss details for a funding proposal, to expand the non-traditional skills training. This will be a joint proposal with other organisations, with the focus on economic empowerment for vulnerable females (domestic violence, abuse, HIV) so will involve several meetings and a lot of coordination over the next couple of weeks. I spend the afternoon in the office replying to emails and finishing off preparing for a workshop I have to deliver tomorrow. In the evening I work with the board of the Methodist High School, Wesley College, on their long term planning. We finish at 8.30pm, and eat a meal together.



YES students in the craft room



Truancy officers and teachers acting out a 'skit' at the CSEC training

Tuesday The penultimate of a series of workshops I have been delivering to teachers throughout the country about commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Attending this one are the truancy officers as well as staff from the quality assurance and development service of the ministry of education - responsible for curriculum content and in-service teacher training. We hope they will be able to cascade the training to those teachers we have not been able to reach. We finish at 4pm, so I have a couple of hours before a meeting at church with the children and youth commission committee where we talk about fundraising initiatives, start making plans for the

children's camp in July, and discuss how a team from a church in the US can assist us. We finish after 9pm, and I give a couple of people a lift home.

Wednesday 8-9.30am, getting the CSEC workshop report finished so it can be sent off to the funders, and sending information to the Ministry of Education so the teachers can get their CPD credits for attending, before going to the annual Women's Summit - part of Women's Month. The theme is 'Creating opportunities for development through women's economic empowerment, and there are panel presentations and discussions. Get back to the office in time to deal with emails and other paperwork. At 7pm attend the weekly Lenten worship at Ebenezer. When I get home I print off the fundraiser tickets which I agreed to do at last night's meeting - 1000 of them!

Thursday This morning I'm in the office, working on the new YES funding proposal, before going to a meeting with some other funder's external evaluation team, looking at all the CSEC projects they funded in Belize. After calling by the hospital to speak with the parents of a burn victim (their whole house was burnt down and the family of 7 lost everything; four of the children attend one of our rural Methodist schools and the circuit has held a collection to assist them), I go round the Methodist primary schools in the city to deliver the tickets for the Easter fundraiser. (The next week we filled 1000 Easter bags with donated chocolates, sweets and 'cup-cakes'. We sold the Easter bags for \$2 each and so have raised \$2000). In the afternoon, I start working on writing a couple of lessons for the church (Sunday) school curriculum - I'm doing a little bit in a big project taking place throughout the whole Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas (MCCA) to write a new set of 3 years of lessons to be used throughout the Connexion for all ages. Each District has been assigned an age group (Belize has the teenagers), and a team of people have attended training and we now need to get the first year's lessons written by 15th June.

Friday I call some of the Church leaders regarding attendees for a district-wide strategy workshop about children and young people's work, and start the planning for this. I also arrange to have my car cleaned - the builders next door to me have again managed to spray it with cement! Go to YES Teen Mums centre for 3.30pm to attend a focus group looking at a new TV advert they are working on about CSEC 'My future is not for sale'.



The facilitators at the teen mum's centre have to be adaptable!

Saturday morning, go to the airport to meet a mission team from Oklahoma and see them on their way to Dangriga, further south in Belize. They have been here before and helped to build new classrooms at one of the Methodist Primary schools, and are here for the official opening of the building next week, as well as to finish a few things off. Get back to Belize City in time for a circuit Council meeting at 1pm. then, as the deadline for the YES funding is so short, I have arranged to meet another church member who is also the Women's Issues Network Exec Director, to see if we can make some progress with it.



The good thing about so many meeting this week is that I haven't had to do much cooking - meals have been provided at most of them. Good job I like Belizean rice and beans! Not all weeks are quite as hectic as this one, but it is kind of typical.

Please keep in your prayers

- families affected by the violence and guns in Belize City
- the Ramirez family - whose house was burnt down, especially 19 yr old Victor, who suffered burns when he went back in to ensure all his young brothers were safe
- the planned developments at YES and the work they are doing in raising the awareness of sexual exploitation of children
- the preparations for the children and youth camp; that we will have enough camp counsellors and funding to make it a meaningful experience for the 100 young people who will attend
- the long-term planning for children and youth work in the church.
- those writing the church school lessons - throughout the MCCA.

Oh, and I nearly forgot to mention I will be back in England from 14th July for 3 months before returning to Belize in October. I'm really looking forward to seeing family and friends.

With love and prayers,

Maggie