

¡Ay primo hermano!

News from the Lacey family in Colombia

...hermanos y hermanas de Venezuela... Ever since our initial training in Panama we have been aware of the “Venezuelan situation” in the area. Colombia, which shares a border of more than 2000 km with Venezuela, has become a refuge for more than a million Venezuelans. Life in Colombia is hard for the incoming migrants, most of whom are here without a valid passport - complicating their legalization. Without any source of income or access to health services, they are highly vulnerable to any kind of exploitation. You can read more at www.icmetodista.org/en/venezuela .

The city of Bucaramanga, some 200 km from the border, has been experiencing over 500 new daily arrivals, many of whom came on foot with children, exhausted and undernourished. The big international NGOs pass through the city but are nowhere to be seen on the streets of the city. However, the joint effort of many churches and individuals is making a lot of difference. Examples include an informal network of shelters between the border and the city, sustaining people on their journey, and a local restaurant that reinvests all its profit into a feeding programme handing out 700+ meals daily.

When we first received a call from pastor Gilberto, who lives in Bucaramanga, telling us about his desire to do something especially for the children and pregnant women, we thought we would have to wait months before starting anything due to a lack of finances.

However, thanks to a few individual sponsors back in the UK, we were able to start running a weekly activity club to give migrant children some sense of stability and the ability to form new friendships. This activity is a great testimony as to how much can be done with very little. Soon after introducing the idea, the Lutheran church decided to support the project as well, and have offered us a space as well as the help of a qualified psychologist. And four volunteers from *Youth With A Mission* have been assisting with the club’s activities as well as health brigades. In the first 5 weeks of the project we have registered nearly 40 children, many of whom have become regulars.

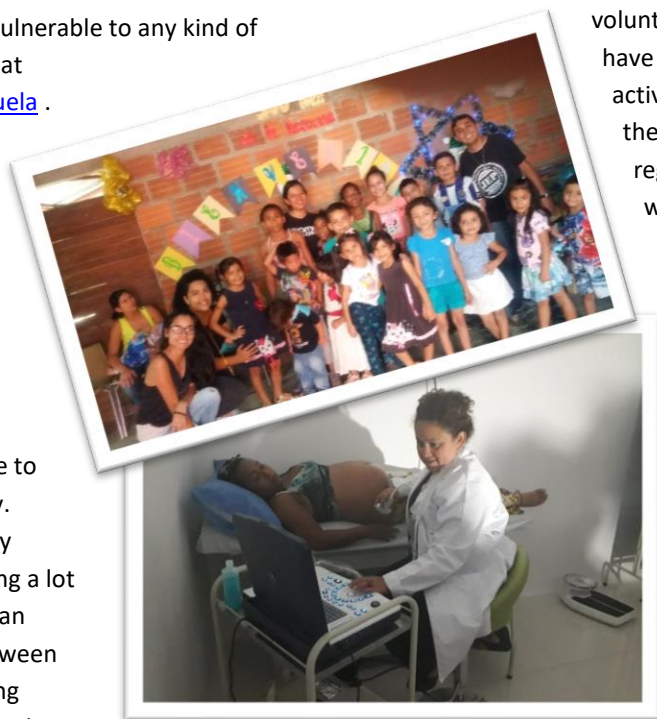
Through the voluntary support of a local GP and gynecologist we have provided nearly 100 women with antenatal checkups and ultrasound exams, and distributed basic food and supplements kits.

We are now thinking of expanding into other cities with high concentrations of migrants. Please pray for the outcome of our conversation with ADRA to be able to launch and sustain a

jointly-provided health service to migrant women, and for the positive outcome of our funding applications allowing us to continue our work in Bucaramanga and start something similar in Cartagena and Medellín.

Please contribute if you can at:

www.icmetodista.org/en/venezuela v.



...Venezolanos SOS...

One of the biggest problems identified by organisations working with Venezuelan migrants and *caminantes* across the country is the lack of readily available information concerning the services available to them, and their rights concerning work permits, education, and so on. Drawing upon the contacts built up by Vera in launching the project in Bucaramanga, we identified the need for an easily accessible, mobile-friendly, web-based tool to allow Venezuelan people in Colombia to see locally available services, close to their current location, quickly and easily.

With the assistance and contribution of 26 other agencies, we've therefore developed and launched www.venezolanosSOS.co a one-stop site providing information on services, walking routes (including altitudes - as often those arriving are very unaware of just how high the mountains here in Colombia are, and have been woefully ill-equipped to battle freezing temperatures at night), and general information. Each of the contributing organisations can update information as required, providing photos and points on the map to help their services be easily found. **C.**

Venezolanos SOS

En camino



Elevación (m)



1. Unidad de Atención en Salud Fija (Cruz Roja)

Se realizan consultas médicas, de crecimiento y desarrollo, plan familiar, primeros auxilios, consulta psicológica, hidratación.

Igualmente, los funcionarios facilitan la orientación en rutas de asistencia al migrante, el restablecimiento de contactos familiares mediante el servicio de wi-fi, llamadas y carga de baterías.

Dirección: La Parada, Norte de Santander
Detalles de contacto: <http://www.cruzrojacolombiana.org/donde-estamos/seccional-norte-de-santander>
2. Refugio Yo soy Jesus
Alojamiento
Capacidad de 280 personas
3. Refugio El Caminante
Alojamiento
Capacidad de 60 personas
4. Refugio Fundar 1
Alojamiento (gratis)
Alimentación (gratis)
Kits de aseo y equipo para llevar bebés
Capacidad de 200 personas
Dirección: vía, Cúcuta, Pamplona, Bochalema, Norte de Santander, Bochalema
Horas de servicio: todos los días y todas las horas
5. Carpa Esperanza JuCUM
Hidratación, atención primaria a los pies, refrigerio, ropa para frío y zapatos.
Lugar de paso no hay alojamiento.
6. Casas Refugios Marta y Douglas

...caña flecha... The Church here has always had a very strong ministry with various indigenous groups, and a recent donation from the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit allowed us to kick-start an exciting livelihoods project, which was proposed by one of the pastors in the region of Sucre. A strong tradition has always existed there of producing caña flecha braids, but the market value of these is fairly low - typically they are sold to travelling buyers who then use them to manufacture products of much higher value. Consequently, the idea of the project was to provide equipment and training to allow the people to produce finished products themselves, thus giving them the opportunity to increase their household incomes significantly. See www.icmetodista.org/en/node/142.

Bishop Juan and I purchased six industrial sewing machines, together with other equipment and materials, here in Medellín - as it's widely regarded as the textile production centre of the country - and then made the long 12 hour journey by road to deliver them to the two communities of Palmito and La Isla. The community members were given initial training by a technician as to how to operate the machines, and the Bishop and I then met with the state training institution, SENA, and were able to secure their support to provide 300 hours of vocational training to each of the two communities, followed by a further 300 hours in business and marketing.

I returned to the area in December, to participate in the graduation ceremony of 62 trainees, and was genuinely amazed by the quality of the products the groups had been able to produce after just six months. I also visited various locations and businesses with Pastor Danilo, who initially proposed the project, seeking possible sales outlets.



The business training will commence in February, and - once complete - the current plan is to attempt to sell the communities' products in three locations: a wholesaler with whom we forged a relationship in Tolu, a roadside stall which we have arranged to rent in Sincelejo (on a busy tourist route between Cartagena and Medellín), and on-line through a web site which I am currently building. Watch this space to learn how to purchase all of your gifts for next Christmas. **C.**

...expansion of Carambolas... The school which our girls attend is heavily involved in charitable work in two of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Medellín. In the midst of the informal settlements high up in the hills is the *Centro de Solidaridad* which distributes food and used clothes, and provides literacy training, parental training, health screening and counselling to the residents of the comuna.

Last year I discovered a possible funding opportunity by the Japanese Embassy for the extension of the centre, and with the organisation's director we applied for 70,000 USD of funding to help build an annex and accommodate all the people on the waiting list for the courses.

You can find out more about the project at www.carambolas.org, which Chris created. After a few months of no reply we grew disillusioned, only to receive a phone call in December notifying us that we've been preselected into the second round of applications - with a request to come for a meeting at the embassy.

Please pray for the successful outcome of this process as it would allow the center to reach over 50% of the neighbourhood. **V.**



...thanksgiving dinner... Whilst we predominantly work with Venezuelans in the areas where they are most numerous (mainly in border regions), there are still tens of thousands of them in other cities across the country, including Medellín.

The members of my bible study group were keen to show their support locally, and - given the fact we have a large number of Americans amongst us - we decided to hold a

Thanksgiving Supper and invite as many Venezuelan families as we could... using the event as a means to discover how we could best help them. Lots of people from church came along with their families and "pot luck" contributions, and a good time was had by all.

More importantly, we've been able to forge close relationships with a few of the Venezuelan families, helping to pay for temporary accommodation for some who were homeless, assist with legal fees for settling migration status, and helping to bring separated family members still in Venezuela to Medellín to be with their families.

Please continue to pray for all those who are continually affected by the worsening situation in Venezuela, and who have had no choice but to abandon their homes and families just to be able to feed themselves. **C.**



...Caja del Amor by Sofie Lacey...

Every year, during the month of December, our school *Sagrado Corazon* encourages the families of the students to participate in an event called *Caja del Amor* where one caring family fills up a box with food and presents to give to a different poor family. Additionally, around 90% of the students in a class bring some food or items to fill up a class box. On the day of the deadline, beautifully decorated boxes would be awaiting a lorry to collect them at the reception. The families that receive these boxes are helped economically and emotionally. **S.**



...running water in Brisas... I wrote in our previous newsletter about the community of *Brisas del Mar*: regarding the clinic, feeding programme, and the water pump and network which the church has instigated there.

Since writing, the network has continued to expand to include the majority of houses in the village - and plans are now in place to extend it to the neighbouring village 2km away. You can read more at www.icmetodista.org/en/salud-y-agua.

We visited as a family this month, to talk to Jhon the technician about the expansion of the system. It was the first time that the girls had been to the area, and represented a bit of a shock to the system as to just how great are the divides between rich and poor in the country.

Nonetheless, the girls soon made some local friends, and had great fun running around amongst the pigs and chickens, as well as distributing "Happy New Year" lollypops to the children in all the houses. **C.**



...health brigades in Brisas... During our visit to the Colombian coast I was able to visit some households in the Brisas area and run some baseline interviews. This was done as a part of our outreach health project which is trying to address the lack of preventative healthcare and health education in the area. Fortunately, we have been able to get funding from the Methodist Women in the US and in the UK as well as from the Pollock Memorial Mission Trust.

By the end of the project, we expect to see a reduction in diarrhoea (one of the greatest childhood killers) by 20% and more than half the community to know and practice good water storage and good hygiene.

Meet Etilivia - a 54 year old woman and long-term member of the Methodist Church in Brisas. She lives in a mud hut - house with 7 other people. Their combined monthly household income is £25. Unlike her neighbours, she has no chickens or pigs. The family eat once a day; protein, fruit and vegetables are lacking in their daily diet. The three children in the house get one hot meal a day in the church.



Unlike many others, Etilivia knows exactly what causes and how to prevent diarrhea. However, her house has no bathroom or latrine and the dirt floor of her house which cannot be easily cleaned represents a prime breeding ground for germs. Her family is one of the 40% of households that have reported to have had diarrhea in the last 4 weeks. Despite having children, she has never received any antenatal attention - something we are trying to improve in the community. **V.**



...VIII assembly...

More than 90 attendees, including members of the congregation from our local churches, pastors and superintendents from across Colombia, and esteemed foreign guests from our partner churches and organisations, joined us at our VIII National Assembly in October.



It was a good time for many of the national staff and pastors to meet and exchange experiences; due to the limited church travel budget it's a rare opportunity to do so. At many points, a good mixture of PortugoSpanGlish could be heard!

We particularly enjoyed meeting up with Pastor Luciano with whom we spent a lot of time during our training in Panama, and who provided our first introduction to Latin America. It was also very good to catch up and be able to share our highs and lows with Sandra, our coordinator in London. And we were able to show our US supporters more disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Medellín.

During the closing worship, our newly elected bishop, Rev Luis Andres Caicedo Guayara, was consecrated in his new role by Bishop Juan Alberto Cardona. Please keep Bishop Luis Andres in your prayers as he prepares to lead the national church in this new era. **V.**

...summary of prayer points... Please pray for:

- The newly appointed Bishop, Luis Andres Caicedo, in leading and growing the church.
- The hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans who have fled their country, and found refuge in Colombia.
- The people in poor indigenous communities, such as Brisas del Mar, Palmito and La Isla, who the church is seeking to help economically as well as spiritually.

January 2019

Chris and Véra Lacey, with their children Sofie and Abigail, are serving as mission partners with Iglesia Colombiana Metodista (the Colombian Methodist Church), providing IT solutions and identifying funding opportunities for their new Centre for Projects.

Please get in touch if you're interested:

*Cra. 77B # 45G - 88 Barrio el Velódromo, Medellín, Colombia
c.lacey@icmetodistia.org or v.lacey@icmetodista.org*

Web: www.icmetodista.org/en/proyectos

The **Methodist Church** 



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