



Children of the Andes

Building a better future for vulnerable children in Colombia

Autumn 2009

Deadly Toys

The danger of landmines in Colombia

One of the most devastating consequences of Colombia's long-running conflict is the proliferation of landmines. In areas of conflict they can be found anywhere, even close to footpaths used by children to go to school. Once they explode their impact is indiscriminate – they kill and maim soldiers, civilians and children alike.

Since 1990 there have been more landmine victims in Colombia than any other country in the world. The true number is likely to be even higher than official statistics as many injuries and deaths are not reported.

Children are particularly vulnerable as mines and explosive devices can be hidden in brightly coloured objects, designed to attract attention and easily mistaken as toys – with deadly consequences.

Landmines can cause horrific injuries, resulting in the loss of legs, arms and hands. In an instant a child's future can be shattered. As well as causing psychological trauma, physical disabilities resulting from injuries can make it difficult for children to access education and build a livelihood as adults.

Thanks to your commitment, we have been able to help thousands of vulnerable children.

But with more children being affected by landmines every day, it is vital we continue our work.

With your support we can.

Please make a donation today.

Deadly Toys

The danger of landmines in Colombia

How is Children of the Andes helping?

Colombia is one of the few countries in the world where landmines are still being actively planted. They affect communities across the country, but the problem is most extreme in rural conflict zones.

The Colombian government has signed the 1997 Ottawa Convention, which forbids the use and production of anti-personnel landmines. But while the armed forces are believed to have stopped planting mines in the past few years, many of Colombia's irregular armed groups continue to lay them in combat zones.

Child-led Mine Risk Education

Children of the Andes has been working with the Fundación Restrepo Barco (FRB) since 2002 in response to the problem of landmines. Our work aims to prevent landmine accidents among children and young people

by raising awareness of the problem and teaching safe behaviour.

With funding from the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, COTA and FRB have developed a child-led mine awareness programme – the first to be developed in a country where landmines are actively being planted. The programme is focused around an educational tool-kit, 'Misión Segura' (Secure Mission), which was developed with children in three of the most heavily mined regions in Colombia (Bolívar in the North, Cauca in the South and Meta in the Eastern plains).

The tool-kit is made up of a series of fun games and activities which help children think about the daily risks presented by landmines, explore and dispel myths associated with them and work out ways to protect themselves and their communities.

Working in small groups, children start by exploring their knowledge of landmines, in terms of the risks and what they perceive to be ways to protect themselves. Another exercise involves receiving secret messages and decoding them to reveal facts about landmines and safe behaviour. Children map out their community, identifying all the routes they take as part of their daily routine – to get to school, when playing, when helping their parents – and identify places where landmines might be. They then work together to decide how they would respond to different mine risk scenarios.

'Misión Segura' also takes children through the process of developing an awareness campaign to share

what they have learnt with their friends, families and communities. These campaigns are then taken forward by local schools and community organisations. As part of the programme children have designed poster and billboard campaigns, recorded radio and TV advertising and even written mine awareness songs that have been played on local radio.

The programme has been so effective that it has been accredited by the United Nations and taken forward in many of Colombia's most heavily mined regions to help protect thousands of vulnerable children.

"The problem that the Colombian soldiers and civilians have to deal with on a daily basis is similar to what our troops have to deal with in Afghanistan, if not worse."

British Royal Engineer

Working with teachers and community leaders

Children of the Andes is continuing to support landmine risk education in Colombia. Over the past year we have helped FRB train a hundred teachers, community and youth leaders in Nariño, Santander and Montes de María as a way of further expanding the reach and impact of 'Misión Segura'.

We are now working with FRB to reach younger children. With COTA support, FRB has trialled a programme working with 'community mothers' (Colombian Social Services-funded child minders who look after younger children), to teach them about the risks of landmines and train them to promote safe behaviour to young children and their families.

"If I see a landmine I know I have to go back the same way I came and tell an adult as soon as possible so that they can deal with it."

10-year-old girl

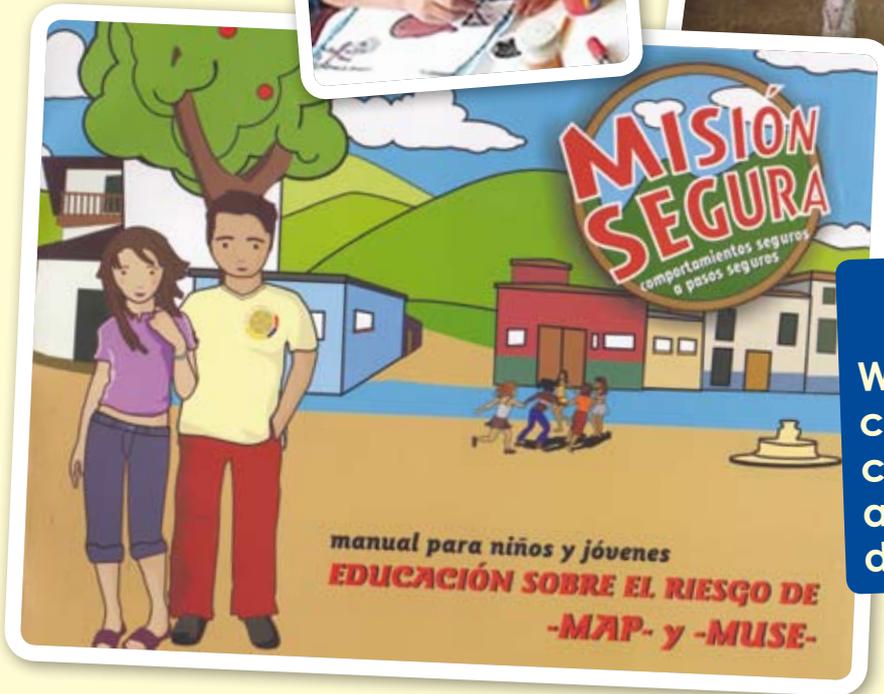


radio awareness campaign



"When we go out in the country, we say to our parents let's not go over there to play, because there could be mines over there and we're scared something might happen to us"

9-year-old boy



With your support, we can continue to ensure that children across Colombia are protected from the dangers of landmines.



Telling their own stories

In June, Children of the Andes volunteer Sandra Rodríguez worked with a group of ex-street children from the Albergue Infantil Mamá Yolanda to help them explore their ideas and feelings through photography.

In the following interview Sandra, a media workshop coordinator, tells us about her experiences.

Who are the children that took part in the photo project?

The children are between 12 and 16 years old and are all living at the Albergue Infantil Mamá Yolanda. Before joining the Albergue, their lives were characterised by neglect and abandonment – a situation that in most cases led them to live on the streets. At the Albergue they have shelter, food, education and professional support.

What was the aim of the project?

The main aim was to help these children to use photography and images to express their own thoughts, feelings and experiences, as only

they can really know them. I also wanted to encourage the children to believe in the importance of their stories being seen, recognised and valued by others.

What were the project activities?

The project took place over six workshops. The children had never taken a photo before, so in the first workshop I showed them how to use a camera and explained the key elements of a good photograph. We played various 'photo-games' that helped them to become familiar with the cameras and practise taking photos. In the following workshops the children

“In the photo I took I look serious, that’s what I’m like. I would like to achieve a lot with my life, to have a family, children, a home and to make the most of the opportunities that life offers me.”



were free to take pictures of anything they liked or that seemed interesting to them – this was an opportunity for the children to explore their own ideas and perceptions.

In the last workshop I showed the children the printed photos they had taken. We discussed why they had taken certain photos and how the photos made them feel. I then asked them to select a photo they would like to present at an exhibition and to write something about it. In this way I tried to encourage the children to go even further into their inner worlds. Working with the text was not an easy task as some of the children found it difficult to write. We then organised an exhibition of the photos and their texts, and invited the staff from the Albergue and children from other care homes.

How did the project affect the children?

The children loved holding the cameras in their hands and were eager to learn how to take photos by themselves. Little by little they began to understand



“I took a photo of a bird standing alone on a tree branch because it looks beautiful and gentle. It also seems to be neglected and abandoned.”

how they could use photography to communicate their views and needs. In particular, the photos and texts tended to reveal the children’s future hopes and dreams, and how they would like to live. They also expressed their likes and dislikes. I was surprised by just how much the project boosted their confidence and self-esteem. It was amazing to see how proud they were to organise the exhibition and show their photos to others. By the end of the project the children were able to recognise their achievements and realise how capable they really are.

What have you learnt from this experience?

It has confirmed what I have learnt throughout my professional experience – the need to really listen to what children have to say because they, more than anyone else, are the experts on their lives and their suffering. It would be very difficult to really know what they need without listening to their stories from their point of view. Vulnerable children often find it more difficult to express their experiences and opinions, which is why it is so important to find creative ways to work with them.

I am so happy I had the opportunity to experience the fun and magic of photography with the children and to learn so much from them.

Fundraising News

Dear Friends

This issue of our newsletter focuses on landmines, weapons that can cause serious psychological trauma as well as physical harm. Those living in Colombia's conflict zones live in constant fear of landmines, which limits what they can do, where they can go and can make them feel like virtual hostages in their own homes.

It is this fear – fear of landmines as well as the numerous other brutal consequences of conflict – that drives so many to leave their homes.

Recent UN figures confirm that there are at least 3 million displaced people in Colombia, *more than any other country in the world*. Despite their enormous number, displaced people are invisible – they merge with the rest of the population, often settling in the vast slum areas that surround Colombia's cities. Traumatized by their experiences and separated from their friends and family back home, displaced children are particularly vulnerable.

With your support, we are helping children to protect themselves from the dangers of landmines. What's more, your donations are also enabling us to address the social consequences of landmines. From Formemos' rural education programme to Colombo-Britanica's nursery and Paz y Bien's peace-building programme for ex-gang members, our partners are working alongside displaced children and young people to give them the support they need to rebuild their lives.

As the recent UN report reminds us, vulnerable children in Colombia are in more need than ever.

Please donate today and help us continue our vital work.



Rachel Joseph
Executive Director

P.S. You may have noticed that we have refreshed the design of our newsletter. We are also considering giving the newsletter a name. If you have any names you would like us to consider, or any feed-back on the new look, please let us know!

Recent Events



Thames Walk

We had a very sunny day and over 200 participants, the largest group since the COTA charity walk started. Thanks to all the supporters who participated and helped us smash our target by raising over £7,500. The next COTA Thames Walk will be on Sunday 2nd May 2010.



Salsa Party

Thanks to our friends who joined COTA's 18th birthday party in London on Saturday 11th July. We had a great time dancing and raised almost £3,500.

**Thank you also to our sponsors –
Office & General Cleaning,
Soliman Travel and Cubana**

Thank yous

Thanks to all our supporters whose generous donations make our work possible.

Individuals

Thanks to those of you who have helped us fundraise by asking your friends to make a donation to Children of the Andes in lieu of birthday presents. Mr and Mrs McEntire raised £145 on their 50th birthday and Eleanor Larby raised £100 on her 9th birthday.

Thanks to Steve Henderson who organised a fundraising concert and raised over £400 for Children of the Andes.

Thanks to Peter MacMurdie who organised a special collection among his friends when visiting Colombia a few months ago and to Verity King who continues to organise fundraising activities in Stathern.

In the lead up to the festive season, why not organise a fundraising activity for Children of the Andes? For ideas or support please email Heidi – heidy@childrenoftheandes.org or phone on 020 7549 0225

Sports and Challenges

A big thank you to Tom Mendes da Costa who cycled from Lands End to John O'Groats to raise funds for our work.

We would like to thank Nestor Mosquera who raised £590 and John Sykes who raised £997 by running the London Marathon 2009.

John said "This was the first time I'd run a marathon and it will also be the last. I decided to run this year because Anna, our baby girl, was born and she made me think of other children who aren't as lucky as her. We have supported COTA for several years and Martha, my wife, used to work in the London office as a volunteer. It took a lot of training and effort to complete the whole marathon but it was worth it, now we can celebrate!"



Community

A big thank you to all the pupils at Court Moor School (Fleet), who raised £1,320 and at the Cavendish School (London), who raised £348 for Children of the Andes' work.

Thanks to all the churches and religious groups that have supported us in recent months including: Alexandra Presbyterian Church (Belfast), Carmelite Monastery (Preston), The Community of the Transfiguration (Loanhead), Southdown Methodist Church (Harpenden), St Andrews Clubmoor (Liverpool), St Bartholomew's Church (Nettlebed), St Botolph Lullingstone Parochial Church (Orpington), St Joseph's Catholic Church (South Molton), St Leonard's Toddler Group (Teignmouth), St Peter's Church (Marlow) and Westminster Abbey.



Standing Order Appeal

Autumn 2009

To the Manager

Name of the Bank or Building Society: _____

Address: _____ Postcode: _____ / _____

Account No.: ____ / ____ / ____ / ____ Sort Code: ____ / ____ / ____

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

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ / _____

Signed: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____ (dd/mm/yy)

Please return completed form to Children of the Andes.

Yes, I do require an acknowledgement (please tick or we will assume you do not; this will help us save on administration costs).

Gift Aid Declaration

I would like Children of the Andes to reclaim tax on any donations I have made over the last 6 years and all future donations until I notify you otherwise.

Signature: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Please let us know if you change your address or if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains equal to the tax we will reclaim on your donation (currently 28p for every £1 you give).

For more information about Gift Aid, standing orders, legacies, payroll giving, greeting cards, alternative gifts or fundraising, please telephone our office on: 020 7549 0225

Thank you!

Field Office Diary

Duncan Millar, COTA's Head of Programmes, visited Colombia in September 2008. Here he writes about one of the children he met:

"It is banal to say that all the children we support are individuals with their own unique life stories. Of course they are. But sometimes, even though we know this, the need to generalise in order to make our work easily understandable means that individual stories don't get told. I feel it's important to remember the stories of individual children for many reasons. One of these really came home to me during a conversation I had with a little girl in Cali.

Gisela is a self-confident 11-year-old who attends a COTA project which helps working children get off the streets and into school. If not the most cheerful of the children I met at the project, then she was certainly one of the most talkative. We had a long chat, about school, her friends, her favourite food. She seemed to enjoy her own eloquence in describing her everyday likes and dislikes to this strange man with a funny accent. Then she suddenly said, 'But I'm afraid of death.'

She went on to tell me the story of how her mother used to take

her and her younger brother and sister to a busy traffic light every day, where she would sell sweets to passing motorists. Her mother couldn't leave them at home alone and had nowhere else to take them. One day a truck sped past and killed her brother on the road in front of her.

Naturally, your reaction to hearing this is to want to change the facts. You want to make it so that someone had managed to pull Gisela's brother out of the path of the truck. Or that she didn't have to witness the accident. But they didn't. And she did. She will just have to battle on with this grief, with what resources a child of eleven has managed to acquire.

COTA is working to make sure that Gisela doesn't have to go to the traffic lights any more. Instead, she is going to school away from the dangers that killed her brother. What is more, the help that she and her family are getting with her education is increasing her chances of avoiding the sort of life that made street selling the only option for her mother.

It feels like a great privilege to be told this story of immense importance, thrown in amongst the everyday. Gisela was inviting me into her world.

But whether or not we have the chance to actually meet Gisela, it struck me that all of us, COTA staff, volunteers and supporters, are in some way being invited into Gisela's world. And we are being invited in to change it.

This is an enormous privilege. With that privilege comes a great responsibility that we should not take up or abandon lightly. Thank you to all of our supporters for taking on this responsibility."



Please donate now

Payment details

I would like to make a donation of

£5 £10 £25 £50

£100 Other £ _____

Cheque (Please make cheques payable to **Children of the Andes**)

Visa Mastercard

CAF Charitycard.

Card No.:

Expiry Date: ___ / ___ / ___ (mm/yy)

Signed: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / ___ (dd/mm/yy)

Donor details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ / _____

Tel: (_____) _____

Fax: (_____) _____

E-mail: _____

Yes, I do require an acknowledgement (please tick or we will assume you do not; this will help us save on administration costs).

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Thank you!