



# COPA news

Building caring Christian communities



Kinder class  
in Bombita

**The children of Bombita and La Hoya join with the staff, volunteers and committee members in sending you best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.**

## **New Sponsors In Exmouth**

COPA welcomes several new sponsors from Glenorchy United Reformed Church, Exmouth where on Mission Sunday Sebert Lane was invited to speak about the work COPA is doing in the Dominican Republic. Following the Service the Church made a donation to COPA and several members became sponsors and others made generous donations too. Afterwards Sebert commented that he hoped that, as in other places, this would lead to invitations to make a COPA presentation from other Churches and organisations in Devon where he and Doreen are now living.

Visit the COPA website: [www.copa.org.uk](http://www.copa.org.uk)

December 2013

## The COPA UK AGM

The AGM of COPA UK was held on September 21st at Cricklade and the work of COPA over the last year was reported. The committee for the forthcoming year was also elected and we welcome two new members, Helen Samways and Ian Robertson. We thank the retiring member, Tony Veits for his time on the COPA committee. At the AGM, Bob Hampton, our new Project Director, gave an interesting talk on his experiences in the Dominican Republic when he and his wife, Alison, spent some time there working with another charity earlier this year. Geoff Haslam, Chairman, explained how the Dominican government are bringing in full time schooling throughout the country over the next few years which would involve major construction work in Bombita. In the evening a Barn Dance was held—report on page 8. On the Sunday morning a COPA Service was held at Cricklade United Church which included the commissioning of Bob and Alison Hampton prior to them leaving for the DR.



The committee members continue to work hard in the interests of the young people attending the COPA schools. Maintaining sponsorship records and communicating with individual sponsors, production and distribution of the regular Newsletter, staffing matters relating to the volunteers in the DR, budgeting, accounting, currency and banking matters, developing and maintaining data bases, monitoring and advising on the work in the schools, regular 'skype' conversations with COPA US and the Project Director in the DR, promoting the work of COPA—just some of the things the committee is responsible for. Successful talks/presentations have been given over the last few months and if you would like to arrange a talk for your church, WI or any other group please contact Geoff Haslam, the COPA UK chairman, at [geoff@gandphaslam.plus.com](mailto:geoff@gandphaslam.plus.com)



The committee would like to thank Connie DiLeo for stepping into the breach as Interim Project Director for the 6 months between Patrick leaving and Bob starting as Project Director. Her work and commitment to COPA is much appreciated, particularly as the last few months have seen negotiations with the Dominican government and the start of the new building at Bombita.

**This might look like just a pile of boxes on an airport runway** but inside



them are enough Christmas present boxes to give one to each student at Bombita and La Hoya schools. Just unloaded from a Mission Plane from the USA at Barahona airport, the boxes are as a result of hard work by members of the New Covenant United Methodist Church in Florida who have filled each box with toys, games, books, etc. In the next edition of the Newsletter we hope to have pictures of the children receiving their presents at Christmas.

A Gua Gua is a Dominican local bus but not the sort of bus we are used to in the UK. A cross between a truck and a battered mini bus it is always an 'experience' to catch a gua gua. Teresa, our Education Advisor, tells us all about it!

## GuaGua Adventures

Meringue beat  
Soundtracks the heat  
Under a tree  
Waiting to see  
Hopefully  
The guagua.

Squint in the sun  
See it come  
Fling out your hand  
Make a stand  
Don't want miss  
The guagua.

Skin to skin  
We all breathe in  
Sit on the floor  
Hang out the door  
Always room for one  
more  
In the guagua.

No aircon  
Same old song  
Sweaty feet  
Uncomfortable seat  
Pinchado!  
On the guagua.

Meringue beat  
Scorching heat  
Under a tree  
Waiting to see  
Hopefully  
A guagua.

## Bob and Alison Hampton have arrived!



The COPA team all went to Barahona to welcome Bob and Alison to their new adventure. It was an overcast day so they were accused of bringing British weather with them. They said they found it quite a bit warmer than British weather. All the volunteers just chuckled thinking, "Just wait!" For the volunteers they were thinking how cool the day was. *Left to right, Ruth, Teresa, Fiona, Bob, Alison, Gracie, Alice, Bryony and Ron. Photo taken by Connie*



Teresa writes: "Gracie and Riko are leaving in the next few weeks and they will be hugely missed. I can honestly say that this first few months would have been almost impossible without their friendship and patience. I have been so impressed by Riko's energy and we have all been blessed by the contacts she has made in the village and her working knowledge of Bombita. Gracie's hard work with the University sponsorship and her kindness and determination with the students makes me think that she will make a super teacher".

The COPA UK committee also thank Riko, our Health Advisor, and Gracie, a volunteer from the US, for all their hard work over the past year and wish them well for the future. We have appointed a new Health Advisor, Cathie Weir, who will be arriving in the DR before Christmas and will have a few weeks handover period with Riko.

## Yareidy Perez Perez Volunteer Assembly Director

I studied in COPA from the time I was four years old. My time in COPA was excellent. Thanks to COPA, I was educated by the best teachers and director.



One of the things that I always liked and I remember a lot about my school days were the assemblies. They were very special moments and were my favourite parts because I loved the dramas and the songs we sang together.

When I left COPA I was 13 years old and it was a moment when I didn't want to leave my favourite school in order to go to another school. I did receive a scholarship from COPA to attend Licateba, a private secondary school in Barahona and I attended there for two years. I left Licateba to attend another secondary school in order to study nursing because at that time Licateba did not offer this course. My time in both schools went very well.

Today I am 22 years old. I am studying clinical psychology in the university. I have finished three years and only have one left. Today I am giving what I have received because I am helping in COPA with the assemblies and I enjoy this very much; sharing with the children and seeing them experience what I experienced and enjoying what I enjoyed when I was a child. Also I am working in the Evangelical Church with my pastor, Connie, where I am a leader of the youth and I really enjoy doing dramas and liturgical dances. I am also a military nurse thanks to my classes I took in the technical school and I find this very interesting and fun. This also helps me with the money I need for the university.

I am thankful for the education that I received from COPA, because if COPA had not appeared in my childhood for my education, I would never have accomplished all that I have and wouldn't have received the Christian values that I developed. Thanks to God and to COPA.

(Edited by Connie DiLeo)

## Changing Lives—One at a Time

**A great celebration of COPA's presence and work!**

Arki Michel graduated from Ucateba University on Saturday, October 12, 2013. This was a major event as he is the first from Bombita to graduate from this private university and with a degree in law.

I had known Arki since my arrival in Bombita in 2002. One of my first meetings with the principal and a student was with his brother, Fraylin. Fraylin had a scholarship to Licateba, the private high school, but he was having serious attitude problems and we decided to pull him out and take away his scholarship. It was Arki who was there in place of the father. He understood the reasons and was very upset with his brother for misusing this opportunity. Arki's wife later had a baby who weighed less than 4 pounds. The baby was full term but Wendy, the mother, had TB and was malnourished. COPA stepped in to help both the mother and child. They both survived and Ambar is now in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and she has two healthy sisters as well!

One day I was at the courthouse with a young man from Bombita who was having a custodial problem with his wife and son. Arki was there with the wife. I watched as Arki talked with both of them scolding them for having let the situation get to this point and telling them they should have come to him or me before this so we could have helped them work it out. He explained how the only one who wins in a court case is the attorneys who will get the money! I also watched how he related to the different attorneys and judges and was surprised that he would know so many of them. I was also surprised at how respectful they all were towards Arki. Arki is of Haitian descent while all the others were Dominicans and respect is not usually shown in this situation.

I later asked Arki why he wasn't at the university studying law. He said he wanted to but when Ambar was born so small and his wife with TB he had to put aside this dream and work to help the family. I asked him if he wanted me to try and find a scholarship for him and if he was willing to put in the hard work that would be necessary. He was so excited and said, "YES." I contacted a friend of mine from my home church who agreed to help Arki.

Well, four years later, Arki has graduated! We celebrate with him as he has accomplished this wonderful challenge. I was pleased to see an entire busload of family and friends from Bombita who went to the graduation to celebrate this first from Bombita. Arki is the first from Bombita to graduate from this private university and the first to graduate with a degree in law. Arki is already thinking how he can help the undocumented children of Bombita receive their legal documents.

Once again, COPA is making a difference in the life and lives of people in the Dominican Republic. Changing lives one at a time! Post Note: Fraylin has since changed his attitude, is in college and is working as the physical education teacher in Bombita!



◆ ◆ ◆ **Connie DiLeo** ◆ ◆ ◆

## Walking the Inca Trail for COPA—by Helen Samways

After a year of preparation and fundraising, I finally boarded the plane for Peru with just a slight amount of trepidation! After travelling for 24 hours, we disembarked from our 3<sup>rd</sup> plane in Cusco and it was still only 9am! The group was a large one, totalling 32, the biggest they had ever had! So organising us was like a military operation; a task they performed with such skill and humour. The first task was to prepare lunch for us, a taste of what was to come!! Each of the lunch and dinner meals consisted of 3 courses, which made us all feel that we would come back with a few extra pounds! But we worked it all off. The amount of extra effort the body has to endure, just by coping with the lack of oxygen and hills was quite astounding.



On our acclimatisation walk, we visited some pre-Incan ruins, showing the civilisations that the Incans inherited. They conquered these colonies by giving them things they needed, as opposed to the Spaniards who just decimated all they could to rule supreme. The Incans were renowned for their sturdy foundations and structures. A testament to this was one particularly powerful earthquake which destroyed all of the Spanish buildings, but left the Incan ones still standing. Once on the main Lars trail, which we would follow until the Inca trail on the penultimate day, we visited the Lars hot springs. These were an almost scalding hot natural spring of muddy coloured water. Needless to say we were very much to the amusement of the locals! We stopped off at schools to give them the presents that we had taken with us. This was also our first night of camping. A bitterly cold, but bonding experience!

The Incan trail itself was nicknamed the 3000 steps, as the path was mainly steps, individually carved, up the mountain. The sheer engineering that went into completing the trails almost defies belief. We did about 8km of it, but whilst flying into Cusco, they could be seen from the air as they were thousands of km long. It was a thoroughly life-changing trip, with some friends for life made.

The total raised for COPA was, including gift aid, £3,679.51. A huge thank you to all who helped in the raising and donating of funds. This trip has made me hungry for more!!

Any one fancy Kilimanjaro next year....?



## Sports Day by Ron Tipan

“Con Ari! Whey! Con Animo! Whey!” the students chant as they march after the whistle-blowing, tone-setting Ari. Ari is the enthusiastic La Hoya gym teacher and a coordinator of this year’s celebration of the nationwide “Dia de Deportes”, Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup>.

“El Dia de Deportes” is akin the Sports Day we all knew and loved growing up. “Dia de Deportes” in the La Hoya & Bombita COPA schools consisted of all-around extracurricular *fun* featuring: the egg-on-spoon race, fill the water bucket relay, water balloon toss, hula-hoop contest, volleyball, musical chairs, steal the bacon, sack races, and balloon relays...*oh my!*

There were smiles, adrenaline, shouting and overall passion in the air, as with most things done in the Dominican spirit. Highlights included the preschoolers of Bombita playing their first game of musical chairs in which they forgot what was going on every single round, but thoroughly enjoying skipping and dancing in wide flow around chairs to bopping music. It also was especially heart-warming to see how many teachers at both locations got involved in the action, cheering on their students with much gusto.

Needless to say, “El Dia de Deportes” was enjoyed by all and we hope you also enjoy seeing some pictures of the fun here and on page 9.



**Bombita School** is one of the first schools chosen by the Dominican government to change from half day to full day schooling which will eventually be brought in country wide.

To enable this to happen much con-



struction work is taking place - more classrooms, new kitchen and dining area. Exciting times as the children will have access to a more thorough education. As can be seen in the photos walls and columns have been built and significant progress has been made and it is intended that these buildings will be ready for the start of the school year in August 2014.

## A successful evening

*Sandra Samways, our Sponsorship Secretary writes:* Members of the Executive Committee were joined by friends from far and wide who took part in the Barn Dance, which was held in Cricklade Town Hall on the evening of September 21<sup>st</sup>. Over eighty enthusiastic dancers took up the call to 'swing your partners'. There was no need to be afraid of making mistakes as the excellent Caller guided us through all the steps of the dance before it began. A band called 'The Bees Knees' provided the lively music, using a variety of instruments.

Paul Arthurs and his merry band of helpers provided a delicious ploughman's supper during the interval. He headed up a very slick operation, which consisted of plating up over eighty individual suppers! Well done Paul, and thank you.

A pay-bar kept the thirsty dancers topped up with liquid refreshment. Our thanks to John & Lin Youe for their stalwart work behind the bar. Another highlight of the evening was the Grand Draw. Guests were able to choose from a wide variety of prizes, so there were many lucky winners.

The final dance had almost everyone on the floor. We had to push the tables even further back against the wall to accommodate all the dancers.

The whole evening had a lovely community atmosphere about it. Many people said how much they had enjoyed it. It was pleasing that the majority of the people had no direct involvement with COPA and so it was a good opportunity to do a bit of publicising. Certainly after this event, COPA will be better known in the town. It was a most successful and enjoyable evening.

See this newsletter in colour on our website [www.copa.org.uk](http://www.copa.org.uk)



## First Impressions from our Project Trust volunteers

*Our Project Trust volunteers are young people who have decided they would like to spend a year working with COPA in the DR. They teach English and Art to the students of Bombita and La Hoya and are a great asset to the COPA project. For all of them it is a huge undertaking and commitment to leave their homes and families in the UK and spend a year in a developing country. They arrived in the DR at the beginning of the school year and over the next couple of pages you can read of their first impressions of life and experiences in the DR.*



The first thing I noticed about Bombita was the noise. Music blasts around the village all day and night, ending around midnight then starting again the next morning. Our house in Bombita is next to a farmyard area, so there are always noisy animals about, from an asthmatic donkey to pigs that sound like screaming humans. Sometimes the animals like to investigate our area, such as the two piglets that became stuck in the area between the houses and were running around trying to find a way out!

Another very noticeable thing about Bombita is how friendly and welcoming everyone is. A walk to the 'colmado' (village stores) to buy eggs takes twice as long as it should because we stop to say 'Hola' to everyone and all the kids want to hug us and hold our hands. There is a real sense of community here. My favourite place in Bombita is the Metro. It is the lake at the edge of the Batey (village) where there is a fish project run by local women, and it is a lovely place to go for a walk with mountains in the distance and palm trees swaying in the breeze. It is surrounded by sugar cane, and it is quiet, unlike the rest of Bombita!

❖ ❖ *Bryony Clear Hill* ❖ ❖

I have been in Bombita with COPA for over a month now and below are just some of my impressions of my project so far and the country itself. I'm learning a lot and enjoying my time here.

- Humidity
  - Noisy and dusty
  - Great kids
  - Loud music
  - Motor bikes
  - Crazy driving
  - Welcoming people
  - Friendly COPA staff
  - No water and no electricity!
  - The Bombita village is beautiful!
  - Lots of attention
  - Barahona is great.
- Everything is new to me so I'm still getting used to the life here but I think I'm adjusting very well.

❖ ❖ *Fiona Salisbury* ❖ ❖



More photos of Sports Day



## A busy ten days by Ruth Webster

Having been in the Dominican Republic for just over a week, it feels as though we've been here for much longer! I could probably fill a book with my experiences so far but here are a few things that have stood out to me:

- ◇ The heat and humidity that hit us as soon as we stepped out of Santo Domingo airport.
- ◇ Pulling into the village of La Hoya, knowing this was going to be my home for the year.
- ◇ Seeing shark as a filling option at a sandwich shop.
- ◇ Walking round the village with all the children who actually turned up on the first day of school, singing and clapping, trying to encourage the rest of the children to attend too.
- ◇ Being presented with various fruits and dishes and having no idea what they are, but eating them anyway and finding they're delicious.
- ◇ Having my hair styled like a Dominican, with my ponytail split into two twisted lengths, wrapped around each other and tied with a beaded bobble.
- ◇ Attending church services and having very little idea what is going on, especially during a particularly enthusiastic 45-minute sermon.
- ◇ The seemingly endless supply of plastic garden chairs people have in their homes.
- ◇ Our excitement whenever the power comes back on.
- ◇ Drinking coffee, Dominican-style, with lots and lots of brown sugar.
- ◇ Playing the 'Hello, my name is Jo' in Spanish.
- ◇ Seeing who can spot the most interesting thing on a passing motorbike (so far: three grown adults, a baby and a mattress)
- ◇ The sound of chickens and turkeys outside my bedroom window every night.
- ◇ Cockroach hunting.
- ◇ Hearing a song that sounds suspiciously like 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' but with Spanish lyrics.
- ◇ Sitting on the roof of our bungalow, taking in the sights and sounds of the nearby mountains, sugar cane fields and palm trees.

As you can see, it has been a very busy 10 days and I haven't even begun teaching yet! Planning and preparations have gone well so far and I'm feeling very excited and nervous about what the next few weeks will bring. I'm enjoying life here and things that originally seemed so strange and alien to us are quickly becoming part of our normal life. Hopefully soon I will be able to let you know about my successes as a teacher and what else I learn about life here in the Dominican Republic!



Ruth, Alice, Fiona and Bryony

*The fact that, no matter where you are in the world, all ice cream vans sound alike.*



## Totally Amazing by Alice Creasy

On Tuesday I left Edinburgh behind and headed south. After a night in London, I hopped on a 9hr flight to Miami with other Project Trust volunteers for a 2-hour layover before getting onto a shorter flight towards Santo Domingo. Woop woop Dominican Republic here we come! By the time we arrived in the country, it was around 9'o clock, local time, but about 3am UK time. We had all been up for roughly 22hrs... We were pretty tired. However, exhaustion was replaced with alarming realization as we stepped out of the airport into the heat! Sheesh! Santo Domingo was hot and humid! At this point, we were all wondering what we had let ourselves in for. However we battled on and got in a taxi. As we drove through the city listening to merengue and watching the life in this Caribbean country, our nerves calmed, that is until we hit traffic. It turned into a bit of a white knuckle ride. As we found out later, 'Dominicans don't follow any highway code'. The next morning we boarded a bus to Barahona. That's one adventure kicked off the list. Now. Onto part two.

These are a few notes about my impressions and experiences in the first week:

**House** - our house is small but we reckon it has a big heart. Within about 50 metres of the front door, there are 5 banana trees, 2 mango trees, an orange, guava and coconut tree. Also in close proximity are next door are noisy chickens, especially at around 6 in the morning. I'm not going to lie, we have a number of invertebrate friends of varying sizes. The other day I opened the lid of the coffee pot and inside was a huge cockroach, fairly terrifying! There are lots of lizards which are better, we like the lizards (although not when you find them on your bed at 11pm!).



**Motor bikes** - So mental! There are people on motorbikes everywhere. We regularly see 4 people on the same bike, in fact, it's rare to see a single rider. Many people can't afford cars so they transport whatever they can on their motor bikes. We have seen people riding with mattresses, huge baskets of bananas, children on the handle bars, bricks, chickens, gas canisters and water containers. Some of the bikes are fairly run down but people tend to improvise. For example, the Bombita girls saw a guy without a seat on his motorbike so he just put a coconut to sit on.

**School** started on Monday. Within the day, there are 2 tandas. Half of the children come in the morning and half in the afternoon. Monday began with a parade through the village, which was designed to remind children that school had started and to persuade the ones that hadn't turned up to attend. Most of the kids seem great and they are all very interested in us. I guess it would help if I understood what they were saying but I guess that will come soon enough.

**People** - Everyone here is very welcoming. It's hard for me to tell considering I have only been here a week but there seems to be a huge sense of community. In the evenings people sit outside their houses and just talk. Everyone is outside: talking, laughing, eating, and drinking coffee. There is invariably no power in the evenings so as it gets darker fires are lit in the street and torches come out. Music is always playing (often on repeat) from someone's house or a car radio. There is sometimes lightning in the evening so the street is sporadically lit with bright lights, which adds to the already crazy atmosphere. You can't walk down a street without someone shouting you over (or whistling at you, but that's a different story) giving you food and sweet coffee, pushing you into a chair, introducing you to their friends, family and neighbours.

Ok, well I could go on and on but I will force myself to stop for now. To conclude, the first week has been overwhelming, scary, mental but totally amazing. However, teaching starts on Monday... I have a feeling that the honeymoon period is about to come to an abrupt end.

## Contact names and addresses for COPA UK:

### **Treasurer:**

Mr David Rush  
Flat 98, Block B,  
The Paragon,  
Boston Park Road,  
BRENTFORD,  
Middlesex, TW8 9RP

### **Sponsorship Secretary for both La Hoya and Bombita:**

Mrs Sandra Samways  
57 Pauls Croft  
CRICKLADE  
Wiltshire  
SN6 6AJ

### **Treasurer: COPA Guernsey**

Mr Peter Keeling  
Les Poplairs  
Rue du Felconte  
ST SAVIOURS  
Guernsey  
GY7 9QD

### **Guernsey Sponsorship Secretary:**

Mrs Margaret Keeling  
Les Poplairs  
Rue du Felconte  
ST SAVIOURS  
Guernsey  
GY7 9QD

Registered Charity No. 1027117

If your address is incorrect or incomplete or the spelling of your name is incorrect we would like to correct this. Please could you inform me on [pam.tovey@btinternet.com](mailto:pam.tovey@btinternet.com) so that your details can be amended on our database. Many thanks.

## **If you're shopping online this Christmas, think easyfundraising!**



By shopping via easyfundraising you will be raising free donations for COPA. Just go to and register at <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/COPA> and then search for your desired vendors. You'll then use their websites as usual, but be raising money for COPA. It costs you only a few moments more, nothing else. Hundreds of retailers like Argos and Amazon donate money to supporters of good causes who shop on line through this site and we could be one of them! As well as the donation itself you can Gift Aid it and donate even more money to COPA.

Give the best gift you can, shop via easyfundraising, and spread the Christmas cheer to COPA.

**Tell all your friends, there really is no catch, its money for nothing.**

## **Sponsorship Letters and Cards**



The address for your letters and cards is:

**Child's name and sponsorship number  
Escuela de COPA (Bombita or La Hoya)  
Apartado 42  
BARAHONA  
Dominican Republic**

Please could you write your name and address on the reverse of the envelope. This will help the volunteers when they are delivering the letters and cards to the children.