



# COPA

December 2015

Building Caring Christian Communities

The last few months have been very busy for COPA. The committees in the USA and UK have both seen new chairs elected. In the Dominican Republic we said good bye to Project Director Bob Hampton who returned to the UK in September after two years of dedicated service to the charity. We also said goodbye to health advisor Cathy Weir and our 2014/15 Project Trust volunteers Sophie, Lucy, Fiona and Laura. We thank them all for their hard work and wish them good luck for the future; COPA will miss you all.

In October Barry Bryce took over as Project Director—read a short welcome from Barry on page 3. We also say hello to Alisha, Chynah, Rebecca and Kirsty who will be teaching English and Art in the two villages for the next year; you can read an interview with them on pages 4 to 6.

The AGM and Barn Dance in Cricklade in October were a great success. We now look forward to Christmas and the excitement that this will bring to the two schools.

I hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter, and on behalf of everyone at COPA I hope that you have a lovely Christmas and that the new year is a good one.

Bryony Clear Hill—Editor



## FEATURES

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## MESSAGE FROM THE COPA UK CHAIRMAN

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**In September PETER GARDNER was elected as Chairman for COPA UK. Thanks must go to Geoff Haslam for all his work as Chairman, and we wish Peter the best of luck in his new role.**

What a privilege to be elected as Chairperson of COPA in its 25<sup>th</sup> Year! It is incredible the difference that COPA has made to the communities

in La Hoya and Bombita over that time. COPA began on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1991, with a Commissioning Service for Doreen and Seberty at Lonsdale Road Methodist Church in Gloucester. In the early stages, before even a brick was laid, people

started sponsoring future pupils at £1 a week. The generosity of all our Sponsors and the hard work and dedication of our Committees and our Volunteers through the years has made the growth of COPA possible. Over a hundred Volunteers have given one/two years or more of their lives to live and work in the communities. Each has shared their gifts and experience to work on our behalf. As a Committee member for most of the 25 years I have often wondered “where are we going to get the money?” or “how are we going to solve that?” Yet challenges have been resolved and miracles have happened.



Peter and Christine Gardner with Sebastian – having been his sponsors for over ten years it was wonderful to meet him in April.

This year, the International delegates witnessed two flourishing schools which are highly respected in the region. In August Bombita School was recognised nationally, as all its 35 Grade 8 pupils passed their external exams, 30 students being in the top 23% and 5 students in the top 7% in the whole country. Staggering results!! As we listened to former pupils, so many said, "I am what I am because of COPA" This is a tribute to everyone involved in COPA who has made this possible, changing lives one by one.

There is still work to be done. Much has changed but there is still unbelievable poverty in the villages. Our schools represent hope for the future. Please continue to tell the story of COPA.

### **A provisional date for your diary:**

A Thanksgiving Service for 25 years of COPA, at Lonsdale Road Methodist Church, Gloucester, on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 at 10.30am. We will celebrate the journey COPA has taken.

More details later.

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# NEW PROJECT DIRECTOR

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**In September we said goodbye and thank you to Project Director Bob Hampton. Here BARRY BRYCE, COPA's new Project Director, introduces himself.**

It has been just over a month that I have been in the position of Director and I am excited to be a part of this group for the advancement of education provision and to improve poverty, hardship and health provision in the communities of Bombita and La Hoya.

I have worked in development and finance for over 15 years focusing on poverty, economic reduction and growth initiatives in developing countries via Official Development Assistance (ODA).

I joined COPA to work more with grass roots activities and because COPA is a Christian organization.

# WELCOME TO OUR NEW PROJECT TRUST VOLUNTEERS



**In August COPA welcomed four new Project Trust volunteers: (L-R) Kirsty MacRae, Alisha Ekers, Chynah Hayde and Rebecca Kennedy. They will be teaching English and Art for**

**Where are you from?**

**Kirsty:** I'm from Linlithgow, Scotland.

**Chynah:** I live in London.

**Alisha:** I am from Surrey.

**Rebecca:** I'm from a little town called Donaghadee in Northern Ireland.

**Why did you decide to work for COPA?**

**Alisha:** I got involved with COPA through a charity called Project Trust who send volunteers all over the world to volunteer

in a variety of incredible projects. My love of the Spanish language and culture drew me straight towards The Dominican Republic. My mum had also visited many years ago and spoke so fondly of the country and its beautiful culture and urged to me consider Dom Rep. I knew I wanted to teach in a primary school and better my Spanish speaking skills and upon hearing the work COPA was doing in the Dominican Republic I immediately knew I wanted to go.

**Kirsty:** Living in the Dominican Republic had always appealed to me, teaching art sounded like great fun, and the work COPA was doing seemed very worthwhile, so it was a fairly obvious choice.

**What were your first impressions of your village?**

**Chynah:** When I first arrived in La Hoya village it was extremely intimidating as we were stared at by the villagers as soon as we entered in the gua gua probably wondering who we were and why we were there! It was also very hot, sweaty and very loud. We quickly came to accept that people in the Dominican villages do not play their music quietly; you can literally hear it from the other side of the village. However I've come to love the music; it sometimes gets me to sleep. Being surrounded by palm trees, bananas and orange trees is also wonderfully picturesque along with the amazing view that we have from the Copa compound (especially during sunset). But more than anything I noticed how friendly and welcoming the inhabitants of La Hoya are and I can definitely say that now I feel fully part of the La Hoya community and wouldn't change where I am for the world.

**Alisha:** On first arriving in La Hoya I was immediately aware of how vibrant and lively the town was, with colourful houses and people and children out in the streets waving and staring. Everyone was so welcoming and patient with my Spanish. The locals were very willing to come and chat to us and even offered to help us cook! I still remember our first few walks around the village, I must of said 'Hola' at least 100 times!

**Rebecca:** When I first arrived, there was a lot of staring and shouts of 'Americana!!' from the kids. It was very overwhelming at first. I'm still not used to the noise, as people socialise in the streets every evening, and noise carries very well. It took me a long time to get used to the incredibly loud music which consists of bachata, salsa or merengue. The kids are very cute and giving (when they aren't getting into mischief); they always run up to you and ask when they are next having artistica. It's difficult to stay grumpy when you gather an entourage of children just by walking across the playground.

**Kirsty:** The day after I arrived in Bombita I met a couple of sisters. They instantly welcomed me into their family, treating me as a sister and showing me how to cook traditional Dominican food. This is the same as most Dominicans, they don't hesitate to greet you and make you feel at home.

**What do you think of the Dominican Republic so far?**

**Kirsty:** The three months I've been here have been amazing. It's the most gorgeous country and we've visited some fabulous places. The people are lovely and always up for a chat even if our Spanish isn't so great. The food is delicious, and it's really fun cooking with Dominicans to get to know them. The kids in the school are great. They're totally insane, but so funny and never fail to make you smile. I'm loving life here, and so excited for the next 9 months!

## Continued from page 5:

**Chynah:** I absolutely love it from the motorbikes, cockerels and colmados (shops) all the way down to the screaming children. It's become home and I've only been here for a few months. I enjoy how slow and relaxed life is here; most things are done 'ahorita' meaning sometime between later and never at times. It can be very unorganised but you learn to work around it! When it comes to school, sometimes I come home from a long day and want to give up but then I sleep it off and invariably the next day is amazing and it makes me realise how much I love teaching the children. The majority of the chil-



An incredible Dominican sunset,  
photographed by Alisha Ekers

dren are so keen to learn English and speak English to me at every opportunity. Overall it has been a wonderful experience so far; I have been to so many places, met so many unforgettable people and improved my Spanish immensely. I am extremely thankful that I have been able to have such an amazing opportunity.

**Alisha:** The Dominican Republic surprises me every day. It's just so beautiful. The relaxed culture is so different to home but so refreshing. Although the heat was difficult to get used to at first, I now relish the fact that the sun shines almost every day and I get to wake up to the most incredible views. Although I have only been here 3 months, Dom Rep is really starting to feel like home. From the food to the language and the many incredible people I have befriended so far. As for the teaching, every day is a mystery. You have good days and bad days, but the good days make everything worthwhile. The kids are fantastic and their individual personalities always manage to put a smile on my face.

**Rebecca:** Now that I've been here 3 months, I'm adjusting well and already know that Bombita is my home away from home, and will always have a place in my heart. I've made lots of lasting friendships already in this short time and am looking forward to making more before I leave in August. I don't think I'll ever get used to the crazy driving, the constant shouts of 'americana' or how hot it is, but I'm sure that I'm going to miss all of it when I come home.



## A DAY IN THE LIFE

### **Bombita art teacher KIRSTY MacRAE writes about a typical day for Project Trust volunteers in**

3.30am: My good friends the cockerel and the donkey decide it's about time everyone was up, so begin their morning chorus.

7.15am: The animals decide to shut up, just as I give up any more hope of sleep and get myself out of bed.

7.20-40am: We speedily down some oats and yoghurt, jump into the cold shower, layer up with mosquito repellent, and throw on a t-shirt and jeans (proud moment when we realised we were adjusted enough to the heat to wear jeans like a true Dominican).

8.00am: All the kids line up for fila, a few words are spoken, and the national anthem is belted out with great gusto as the flag is raised.

8.15am: Classes begin and chaos ensues! Although challenging, teaching gets easier and easier by the week. The kids are just so full of joy and fun, it isn't possible to go through class without a smile (even if that is a smile of pain as you watch your freshly tidied classroom being enthusiastically coated in a layer of paint, glue, and tissue paper...). After almost three months of teaching I can definitely say that children are the same all over the world – entirely insane, but completely unprejudiced and affectionate.

1.00pm: Lunch time! School dinner tends to consist of rice and beans.

2.00pm: Afternoon classes start again.

3.45pm: School's out! The following couple of hours are used to get laundry done, clean the house, organise tomorrow's classes, cook tea, and go for a walk around the metro (a super tranquil reservoir on the edge of Bombita, which makes a nice change from the constant noise and bustle of the village).

5.30pm onwards: Generally speaking, we always have a mountain of things to do of an evening. Whether that's going to youth group, visiting friends in the village for a chat, team meal in Barahona, a sleep over in La Hoya, helping at the nutrition centre, or simply catching up on work, time just flies by.

10.30pm: We fall into bed after a quick shower, and are out for the count immediately.

This is what I would describe as a typical day, if such a thing exists here. Life never gets the chance to become boring as the last thing you expect to happen, happens daily. Days never go entirely as planned, but this is part of what I love so much about this beautiful crazy country.

## EDUCATION AND HEALTH UPDATES FROM TERESSA

On Sunday 4th October Salud Publica came and fumigated **Bombita** to help rid us of the Dengue virus. On Monday 5th, they returned to do a house-to-house education campaign. They are pictured here with some of the older boys from COPA school who accompanied them into the community. This was the successful outcome of a



commission on Thursday 1st October and Barry's first assignment. There was a national Dengue warning and confirmed cases of Dengue in surrounding communities. We are hoping for an equally successful outcome to our request that the bridge, built by COPA and destroyed by government workers, will be rebuilt and the drainage ditch that runs beneath it improved.



Children from COPA **La Hoya** have been helping to clean up the streets in their village in order to reduce the risk of Dengue fever as part of 'Dengue Awareness Day' following the national warning. This is an example of how COPA students directly help the communities in which they live.

Kinder had their first health talk in **Bombita** this week from Grene. He did a good job of keeping their attention for the 10 minutes with his giant model mouth! All the students in Kinder received a toothbrush and some toothpaste. More talks are planned for all year groups.





## A SHOW AND TELL SPECIAL

**VERONA SMITH, previous education advisor and current UK committee member, writes about some very special lessons in Bombita**

There was much excitement in October as the students in the two Kinder (Nursery) classes in Bombita gave their parents a real surprise. Using a themed based curriculum Siri's class studied the school and Yulis-sa's, plants. Both teachers organised a special presentation which saw the children sharing the knowledge they had gained this term.

Over half of their parents watched the presentations enthusiastically and later congratulated their children and teachers

on their achievement. They were very proud of their children and delighted with COPA's work. This pride was also felt and expressed by our Education Advisor, Teresa Cornish as she saw positive results of her hard efforts to develop the quality of education in Bombita.

Teresa said *'There isn't a big culture here of parents actively supporting the education of their younger children and celebrating their successes, so it was fantastic to see our teachers engaging in such a direct way with parents. It can be easy to forget about the hard work that the teachers of Kinder do in preparing our students emotionally for their school life, teaching them basic concepts and nipping health concerns or behaviour issues in the bud. So it's great to see them taking the lead and getting the recognition they deserve.'*

Another fantastic example of the positive impact COPA continues to have on the community thanks to you, our sponsors and supporters.



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# BARN DANCE

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## **In October COPA held a very successful Barn Dance in Cricklade. SANDRA**

Cricklade Town Hall was the place to be on the evening of October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015 when COPA hosted its second Barn Dance. Around sixty to seventy dancers participated in a variety of dances, following instructions from the professional Caller. The music was again provided by The Bees Knees group.

A delicious ploughman's supper was

organised by Paul Arthur's family and friends. Thank you for all the hard work you put in. Thirsty dancers could slake their thirst at the bar with a variety of alcoholic and soft drinks. The bar was efficiently run by John and Andy Youé Thank you for that. Sorry you didn't get to dance!

The raffle was supplied with a wide range of prizes, all of which had been donated. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the raffle. We made a handsome profit of £92. All those who came said that they had had a thoroughly enjoyable time. The overall profit of just over £200 will also make the Treasurer happy!

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# CHRISTMAS APPEAL

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This Christmas, COPA is raising funds for Christmas parties to be held in the COPA schools in La Hoya and Bombita. Sadly it is still quite unreliable to send presents to the children in La Hoya and Bombita, although Christmas cards seem to arrive



Students enjoying the 2013 Christmas Party

safely. As a result we would like to suggest that sending a donation to our Christmas Fund is the easiest and safest way to give the children a treat at Christmas. Money donated will be used towards their Christmas party. These occasions are a highlight of the school year for children and a chance to celebrate the hard work of students, staff and volunteers. Any funds left over will, this year, be used towards educational resources and the medical fund. If you would like to make a contribution, please could you send your gift to the Treasurer of COPA UK, David Rush (address on back page).

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# DEAR SPONSORS

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**COPA students love to receive cards and letters from their sponsors. TERESSA CORNISH has some top tips on how to write a great letter that**

Dear Sponsors,

This is a quick note to say a big thank you to those of you who have written to your students this year. The students in Bombita and La Hoya love – but LOVE – receiving letters from you. Quite apart from the fact that it makes them feel special and loved, the act of receiving a letter here is a huge novelty. If you saw how excited the grown up volunteers get about receiving mail, you'd understand! It means a lot to the children to know that someone 'out there' is thinking of them.

Here are my top tips for a successful letter:

1. Think about the age group you are writing to. Students in Kinder and Preschool are only just learning to write their name, so a single sentence is enough detail for them! Students

from 1st to 3rd grade will be interested in photos of you, in pictures of near where you live and in your family. For 4th grade and above you can write in a little more detail about your job, your house, where you went on holiday, what hobbies you enjoy etc. It is important to remember that you are writing to children and keep to subjects they can relate to.

2. Include something encouraging. Please write something encouraging about the importance of school, of studying, of treating people kindly and fairly, or perhaps something about your faith and the love that God has for them. These are formative years for our students and wise words from you will stick in their minds.

3. Include a little extra. Give your letter the wow factor! This doesn't have to be anything expensive. In particular, our students love to receive stickers, photos and pictures, colouring pencils or crayons and basic stationery. It's not a great idea to send chewing gum or sweets, as these often melt and ruin your lovely card.

4. Send an email. I know that sending a letter can be a big effort. Why not send us an email? Simply put your child's name and number in the subject and drop them a line at [copadr2002@gmail.com](mailto:copadr2002@gmail.com) We'll translate it as usual and print it out for them. So easy!

## EASY FUNDRAISING

Did you know that you could be raising free donations for COPA every time you shop online with easyfundraising?

It's really simple - all you need to do is register at:

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/copa/>

Every time you shop online, the retailer makes a donation to COPA. There are nearly 3,000 retailers like Amazon, John Lewis, thetrainline and Sainsbury's on board, so funds can be raised on everything from weekly shops to annual holidays and it doesn't cost you a single penny extra to use.

Happy fundraising!

## 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 write your name and address on the reverse of the envelope. This will help the volunteers when they are delivering the letters and cards.

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