



COPA news

Building caring Christian communities

A quote from one of the Explorer Scouts who has recently returned from a workgroup to the COPA project in the DR:

"I'm missing the DR and doing lots with nothing then coming back here and doing nothing with lots".

Come and find out what makes the COPA project so special and how the lives of the people in Bombita and La Hoya are being improved.

You are invited to;

the **AGM and Speaker Evening of the Guernsey Branch** of COPA which will be held **on Wednesday 12th September at 7:00pm** in the Harry Bound Room, Les Cotils. Full details on page 3 of this Newsletter

Also

the **AGM of COPA UK** which will be held at Cricklade United Church on **Saturday, 6th October**. Full details and invitation enclosed.

Following a short AGM there will be presentations by this summer's COPA UK Work Groups to the DR.

Afternoon Tea will be served after the presentations.

We look forward to seeing you at either (or both) of these occasions.



Visit the COPA website: www.copa.org.uk

September 2012

A sponsor goes to the DR

In the early hours of June 18th. the enthusiastic, if somewhat bleary-eyed , members of a Cricklade based work party set off for the COPA schools in La Hoya & Bombita. Some would be returning to renew old COPA associations and see how things had developed. For some, including these writers, it would be the first opportunity to actually see the people and locations read about in the pages of COPA News or viewed in photographs at COPA presentations. For others it would be the first insight to the work of COPA.

Each of us had volunteered as members of a "painting & decorating" team or to provide craft activities for the children in holiday club sessions. As volunteers for the latter group, and for whom " No hablo espanol" was almost the limit of our Spanish vocabulary, our initial apprehension about the language barrier proved unfounded. Thanks to the presence of ex-COPA college students and the volunteers our instructions were successfully translated to the children who proudly displayed their finished products. In return, their enthusiasm and affection were expressed in smiles and gestures that didn't need words.

The times spent with our 10 year-old sponsor student, and the visit to his home with the welcome from his family were a personal highlight of our D.R. experience. Having walked around the villages, we found it remarkable that students living in such circumstances arrived so clean and tidily dressed in their school uniforms.

Furthermore, we had never fully realised the area of the sites occupied by the schools and the extent of the facilities that have been developed to provide these mini-campus units. What a tribute to the vision & practical skill of Sebert, Doreen and all those who have subsequently worked for COPA with such dedication.

Our photographs provide reminders of many other special moments that are too numerous to mention here. As individuals with varying ages, backgrounds and personalities we have each returned with our own memories & highlights from the visit, but the fact that we gelled as a group that enjoyed working, playing & relaxing together made it a memorable experience for us all.

Our thanks to Geoff Haslam and all the COPA staff who worked together to make that possible.

Brian and Marilyn Chunn



Brian Chunn introducing himself to the children in La Hoya

Guernsey News

As Peter Keeling reported in the last newsletter the last eighteen months, due to illness and the death of our dear committee member Margaret Penney, have been a particularly difficult time for the Guernsey Committee. We would like to re-emphasize how grateful we are for the support and understanding of our Guernsey sponsors and friends and also the UK Committee. You have all been remarkable.

I am really happy to report that the Guernsey Committee are now on a mission, we all feel so strongly about the wonderful work of COPA and want to drive awareness here in Guernsey. We're also hoping we might encourage others to join us.

We are delighted to confirm our **Speaker Evening & AGM on Wednesday 12th September at 7:00 PM** in the Harry Bound Room, Les Cotils.

John Youe from the UK Committee will be joining us to give what I am sure will be a fascinating presentation and update on the work of COPA. John has recently returned from his second workgroup experience in the Dominican Republic. The first being when he led the first visit of the Cricklade Explorer Scouts to our projects three years ago. We are sure that John's presentation will be of great interest to both COPA Supporters and members of the Scouting movement too!

The plan for the evening is to keep the formal side of business to a minimum to allow plenty of time for John's presentation and on the back of the success of our last speaker evening we are once again inviting guests (if they wish) to join us for supper after the presentation. This previously proved

popular and gave everyone an opportunity to meet other sponsors and committee members informally. (There will be a nominal charge of £10 for supper).

We really hope you will join us for what I'm sure will be an interesting and enjoyable evening, for further details please contact Gill Tel: 200481 or e-mail CopaGuernsey@hotmail.co.uk

Kind Regards
Gill Syvret-Berboda



Members of COPA UK committee who were in the DR this summer: Geoff Haslam, John Youe, Paul Samways and Sandra Samways

Experiences as a member of a COPA workgroup

David Johns is a friend of one of the COPA sponsors. On hearing of the workgroup from Cricklade going to work in the DR this summer he volunteered to join them and agreed

to write an article for the Newsletter. What follows is such an emotive report you will almost be able to smell, hear and feel life in the villages of Bombita and La Hoya.

“When I was asked to write my impressions of the COPA Cricklade Work Group to the Dominican Republic (DR), I struggled. It took me a long time to find a starting point. In a single short report how could I merge the witnessing of extreme opulence with that of dirt-poor poverty?

How do you begin to compare the spectacle of overly well-fed tourists - us included - staying at a five-star beach-front leisure complex, with that of skinny half-naked village children playing near a stinking, scum-filled ditch just three hundred miles away?

So let's get to the nitty gritty.

Once we had left the decorative, lush lawns, fountains, restaurants and swimming pools of our overnight airport hotel, to travel to Barahona and, then to the villages of La Hoya and Bombita, the picture changed dramatically.

The nearer we got to Barahona so the towns and villages became markedly poorer. Many homes were windowless shacks, basic, dark, unlovely, put together with wood, corrugated iron and bamboo.



It's a hard life for those villagers. A scratched existence. A large number make their living as street vendors. Squatting all day by the roadside at strategic points where traffic has to stop, they sell crabs, fish, water, oranges, bananas and all manner of vegetables. The children are bare-footed and wear few clothes.

It was a picture repeated throughout the journey - until we reached the village of Bombita, when it became worse. It is the poorest place I have ever seen. The school and village is near a dusty road alongside which runs a wide ditch of sluggish, scummy, blue-grey water. Beyond that is a large reservoir in which villagers swim and wash.

At times, under the hot sun, we got the strong, hot, combined smells of cow dung, sewage and stagnation.

Naturally, because of the proximity of so much water, mosquitoes were abundant and determined, as many of us discovered, when they bit us even through our clothing.

So, we have a village of people with poor clothes, poor shoes, poor homes - even the soil is too poor to grow anything of use. They live in gloomy, weath-erworn, often ramshackle places which many might describe as hovels.

Yet to say they live in squalor would be wrong. It would be an insult. Under the circumstances and having to live in this unfriendly environment, the villagers somehow manage to keep themselves, and their possessions, bewilderingly clean. **(continued over page)**



Washing the few items they have is a constant occupation evident in the endless lines of clothes draped on lines between posts, over walls and hung on barbed wire fences.

And while the half-naked children run free in their playground of dusty roads and swim in the reservoir, once schooldays arrive there is a remarkable change in them.

In their neat school uniform children seem to radiate a pride and confidence. The girls' hair is intricately plaited into numerous pigtails, each decorated with bright combinations of blue, white, yellow and red beads. The little boys seem suddenly to take on a more serious air - well, as serious as little boys can possibly get - because their school uniform means something special. It was a pleasure to meet these cheerful, happy, friendly youngsters and their parents.

It's unimaginable to gauge how their lives would be without the help of COPA and its resources, health and education programmes.



Members of the workgroup doing some much needed paint-work at the clinic in Bombita

To me, as a COPA virgin, the feat of previous volunteers building two schools and two clinics in the space of 20 years is extraordinary.

In our short visits to the two villages we managed to spend sixty hours decorating one of the clinics, and painting classrooms, walls, gates and planters, while other volunteers worked in the classrooms with the children. But it wasn't all work. After all, we were "on holiday"!

On Sunday we went to Connie's church to take part in an enthusiastic and, for me, slightly mad and mesmerising morning service, which comprised of a cacophony of drumming, organ playing, clapping, and singing both in Spanish and English. Still, when in Rome...

On other days we went to the beach, visited a Larimar mine workings, reminiscent of a wild west goldrush settlement, and took part in a rainforest jungle trek to visit a waterfall.

Returning to our Bavaro airport hotel complex, and after the dust, heat, mosquitoes and experiencing La Hoya and Bombita village life, I experienced once again the feeling of living in parallel worlds. I felt a shameful pleasure being surrounded by such wealth, where people have so much.

We all know we live in an unequal and unfair world and it is only luck that we were born in the UK, USA, or any modern country. The people of DR have no choice.

Considering the scale of their problems, the contribution of our Work Group was miniscule. But it made me realise the only hope is that, little by little - and they are very tiny steps - with the help of organisations like COPA, successive generations of La Hoya and Bombita families will be better educated, enjoy a higher level of hygiene and health, and gradually improve their personal lives and the conditions under which they are presently forced to live."



The members of the Cricklade workgroup

The Sampson Explorer Scouts return to the DR

Cricklade, were keen to go back and spend more time with COPA and the communities. After much fundraising the Explorer Scouts left for the DR on the 22nd July and returned to the UK on 6th August. The Group comprised four leaders and nine Explorer Scouts, ages ranging from 16 to slightly older than 40. Only one person in the Workgroup was relatively fluent in Spanish with a few others having basic GCSE level skills. Altogether 5 people had previously visited COPA in the DR. A buddy system had been put in place where each of the Explorer Scouts was teamed with two locals young people

Many projects had been planned for work to be completed in and around the Bombita school and also in the community.

On the first day design and painting of murals in the Kindergarten took place. Some ideas for the designs were presented by the Scouts and then added to by Stephanie and the buddies. The team worked really well together and produced some great work. The atmosphere during the day was relaxed and the group enjoyed working to some mellow Dominican music.

Next came the painting and re-painting of murals on the school pavements. A number of the murals were already present but had faded. The group working on the murals worked fast and many of them were completed on the first day. Most of the paint was also used!

The painting of the basketball court was started on the workgroup's second day in Bombita. Due to the exposed nature of the court, hot weather and lack of shade the group took turns to work on the

After their previous expedition to the COPA schools in the DR the members of the Samson Explorer Sout Unit, based in



painting project. The lines were all marked out and painted in accordance with regulation markings. The end zones were painted red, white and blue and a large COPA logo was expertly drawn and painted in the centre circle by Pancho and the Scouts.



Due to the coat of paint being the first applied to the court it was very 'thirsty' and a few additional pots were required to complete the work. This was impacted by the buddies ability to use as much paint on the rollers as they could hold!



The 'trash project' was conceived to create an area where rubbish could be stored and burnt to avoid it being blown around the school field. There was

already a structure in place which had previously been used as an incinerator which seemed a logical place to start the project. This saved on materials and also the effort required to dig additional foundations. It is hoped that this will improve the condition of the field and also reduce the animals that come to forage in the rubbish. During a visit from a representative from an organisation representing the sugar plantation he was very keen to see this project with the intention of providing something similar in other batey villages locally.

(continued over page)

The Explorer Scouts also worked in several homes laying concrete floors. The previous floors were just compacted mud, which when swept just got lower and lower making them more susceptible to flooding. The house pictured, home to Jumbo and family, also received a new roof, as it was the only occupied home in Bombita with a



palm-leaf thatched roof. It was great to complete the roofing project and Jumbo was very proud of his new floor and roof and was very grateful to COPA.

It was agreed by everyone in the workgroup that the trip was very worthwhile. It gave the young people a great opportunity to experience an environment far removed from their usual lives at home. As one Explorer Scout wrote on Facebook: "Spent an amazing AMAZING two weeks in the Dominican Republic with Sampson ESU and the people of Bombita, laying concrete floors and breeze



blocks in the midday sun, trekking in the rainforest, and attempting to get 20 people up the side of a mountain in a pick up truck, among many other highlights! Not missing the mosquitos or the deet, but already want to go back!"

The 'roads' in the village of Bombita

Patrick, our Project Director in the DR, writes:

"I used this picture to take to the Governor of the Barahona Province to convince him of the importance of paving the streets in Bombita. This was after several months of promising the residents of Bombita that all their streets would be paved, and then the work crews passing Bombita to go to other villages.

Unfortunately, frustrated by the delays, some residents eventually held a "huelga" (protest/riot) on the highway, and an innocent bystander was shot by police. He died several days later from internal bleeding. Several Bombita residents and I were able to plead our case with President Leonel Fernandez when he visited Barahona, and by the end of May, Bombita had the entrance road and the main road in town paved, but the others (including the one in the picture) remain unpaved."



❖ ❖ ❖

A new Head Teacher for Bombita School

Maribel, who has been Head Teacher at Bombita since the COPA school was built retired at the end of the school year. The COPA team celebrated Maribel's 15 years of service to COPA and the community of Bombita. They held a dinner and invited the Bombita school staff, the members of the Fundacion, former COPA volunteers and her family. Stephanie, one of our Education Advisors, had a plaque made commemorating her service which the teachers presented to her. All those in attendance wrote a few words in a commemorative book on how she has positively impacted their lives and quality of work and this was also presented to her. Pastro Pedro, Patrick, Connie, Amanda and Stephanie, Ruber (Head Teacher of La Hoya School) and many of the teachers directed some special words to her. Maribel appreciated the gesture and everyone enjoyed the occasion. We hope to have a photo of the occasion for the next edition of the Newsletter and also news of how the new Head Teacher, Moises, is set-

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

❖ ❖ Change of address ❖ ❖

Sebert and Doreen Lane have recently moved house. Their new address is:
1 Marina Court,
Douglas Avenue,
Exmouth,
Devon EX8 2BY
Tel: 01395 488729

If you are moving house please could you let our Sponsorship Secretary know?

We thank all the people who support the work of COPA with their regular payments for sponsorship of the children in the COPA schools.

Several years ago the amount asked of new sponsors was raised to £72 per annum. At the time many original sponsors raised their payments to match this figure but some were unable to do so. If you are still paying the original sponsorship amount, would you consider raising this to £72?

If you are able to do this and are paying by standing order please contact your bank to increase the amount otherwise could you contact our Treasurer, David Rush, address at the top left of this page. Thank you.

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.