



COPA news

building caring Christian communities

June 2011

April saw an emotional farewell to Connie who has been our Project Director since 2001. These last nine years have seen a significant advance in the work of COPA in the DR. We thank her for her commitment to COPA and wish her well in her new role working with Haitian communities when she returns to the Dominican Republic after a well earned break at home in the USA.

Final Report: Well, it is hard to believe that after nine years and 108 monthly reports, I have come to my last one. Let me say that it has been an amazing experience and I want to thank Sebert, Doreen and the committees for the opportunity to serve COPA here in the Dominican Republic. I have been honored to be the director. Thank you for putting your trust and confidence in me and allowing me to learn as I lead. Thank you for supporting me and for encouraging me. I have met and worked with a lot of amazing volunteers over the last 9 years and have been enriched by each one of them. I have grown through the good times and even more through the hard times, but even through the hard times, I have seen God be faithful to our efforts here.

I will continue to support COPA and have been asked by Pastor Pedro and Pastor Cancú to serve on the Fundación which I am willing to do. I am very excited about the

possibility of the new Sordomudo school and will do all I can to see that COPA receives the teams it needs to see this school accomplished. I have expressed to Patrick that I will be here to support him in any way I can but will never interfere with his leadership.

You are also blessed with the team you have here. Ruber and Maribel are excellent. You have a strong faithful group of teachers, support staff, clinic personnel and supportive communities. There will always be bumps in the road, but you have very many faithful supporters here.



Connie at her farewell party with Maribel and Ruber, the Headteachers of Bombita and La Hoya schools

May God bless each one of you and may He continue blessing the wonderful work that COPA has done, is doing and will continue doing here in the Dominican Republic!

Affectionately yours, Rev. Connie DiLeo

In May we were pleased to welcome Patrick Howell as our Project Director together with his wife Amanda as one of our Education Advisors. We wish them well in their new roles and their first article for COPA News begins below. They are pictured here with their two dogs that have accompanied them to the Dominican Republic.



Our first impressions began when my wife, Amanda, and I began our application process with COPA. We had conversations with Don and Marlene Huggins in the US and Roger Tovey, Peter Gardner, and Sebert Lane in the UK. The passion and commitment that these individuals have to COPA was very apparent, and Amanda and I became more and more attracted to the possibility of working with COPA in the Dominican Republic. We have always shared the dream of living and working abroad together, and could not believe that our dream was just on the horizon! Here was an opportunity for us to both work for the same organization, improving the quality of life for underprivileged communities, and doing it all in the name of God! Our dream was coming true!.....

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Breaking News

In the Dominican Republic profoundly deaf and mute children are considered of no worth to society and the Dominican Government has not provided one school for them to go to! Their silent lives, frustrated by the inability to speak, are further plagued by contempt and they are often ignored. They can't earn a living, are ridiculed and they cannot speak for themselves.

Don't miss reading the enclosed letter from our Founders!

The Christmas Boxes arrive for the children

In the December edition of Copa News we reported on the hard work being done by members of the New Covenant United Methodist Church in Florida.

They aimed to fill boxes with toys, games, books, etc.— enough boxes for each child in La Hoya and Bombita to receive one. They achieved their aim and the boxes were flown to the Dominican Republic. The smiles on the children's faces show how well they were received! The COPA staff wrote the following letter of thanks to the Church.

Dear New Covenant UMC,

Thank you so much for all the hard work put into creating and sending the Christmas boxes to Bombita and La Hoya. They were greatly appreciated by the students and their families.

The entire operation was filled with Christmas cheer from being received at the mission plane, sorted between the two sites, and counted out by grade level and gender to being received by the kids as they celebrated with their classes. The process went smoothly thanks to the boxes being clearly labeled and well organized.

The children's faces were full of excitement as they opened their boxes and discovered the contents. There were shouts and cheers as students pulled one prize after another out of their boxes to show off to their classmates.

Students and parents alike commented that the boxes were the best



Christmas gifts COPA has ever given. Even weeks afterward, children continued to announce to us what they had received in their box.

This kind of happiness could not have been possible without your generous donations and significant efforts. Thank you for everything that went into making these Christmas gifts a reality for the children of La Hoya and Bombita.

In Partnership, the COPA Staff



It's not only in the UK that a census is held. In March the doctor and nurse closed the clinic for a week to do a census of each household in Bombita so that a map of the village could be made and the number of adults and children in the village and each house could be recorded.

Olivia writes, "La Hoya school received uniforms for the ladies handling the milk which is supplied by the government. The uniforms consist of aprons, caps, and masks, none of which the ladies really want to wear. I got a couple of pictures of them trying on their uniforms but I doubt we will see them looking like this in future. Nevertheless, La Hoya was glad the milk program started up again. We had not seen milk since before the Christmas holiday. They are also giving out bread again".



Picture and narrative taken from Amanda's Blog.

This is a group of students from the La Hoya school. They come in for the afternoon session from a small neighbouring town called Hato Viejo.

We have found them each day at our gate watching the dogs, waiting patiently for us to get home. They love saying our names, and practicing their English skills on us. They especially love it when we give them a ride home in the back of our truck! Normally they have to walk or wait to ride 4 deep on a motor bike. They are sure to say in English "thank you and God Bless you and goodbye!"

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Settling in..... by COPA's new Project Director

In March 2011, I came to the DR to visit La Hoya and Bombita, to meet some of the other volunteers, and to get a better sense of what our work and personal lives would be like here. I received a very warm welcome and Connie was a wonderful host! I also had the fortune to arrive at the same time as Chris Yerlig and his Project Troubadour group, and to attend many of their shows for the children in La Hoya, Bombita, and Habenero.

Everything was going very well and I began picturing my wife and I beginning a new chapter in our lives working for COPA. After visiting the schools, seeing the libraries, and seeing the smiles on the childrens' faces during the Troubadour performances, I was sold! I came back to the United States, showed Amanda the pictures and told her the stories, and we easily made the decision to move!

Two months later, we had arrived! As we drove through La Hoya, and pulled up to our new home, our two dogs had all the attention. They are large and well-trained, and garner a lot of attention in a place where most dogs are small, untrained, and often poorly cared for. We had a gathering of children and adults alike, and the gathering remained for the next couple of days. Throughout that weekend, we would wake up to 10-20 kids sitting along the wall, waiting for us to get up and let the dogs into the yard. We put on a show, pulling out all of the dogs' tricks and quickly began to get to know some of the youth in La Hoya. Because many kids wanted to enter the yard for a closer look, we had to warn them that "dogs will be dogs" and to be careful around them, as they can bite and they will protect the house if they sense any bad intentions. Now, most of the children in La Hoya know the dogs' names, and continue to line up in front of the house to catch a glimpse of the "perros grandes!"

When the first day of work came, we jumped right in! We arrived at the beginning of teacher evaluations, so Amanda and I took this opportunity to get to know the teachers, the head teachers, and to familiarize ourselves with the schools. We were both impressed with the school facilities, the professionalism of the head teachers, and the effort each teacher is putting in to improve the level education they are providing!

As evaluations continued for Amanda, I began to familiarize myself with what my duties and responsibilities will be as Project Director. Rachel was very thorough (and patient) with me as she showed me COPA's financials, introduced me to community members in Bombita, and was there to answer any of my questions, provide general support, and tell me



Amanda and Patrick, and the dogs, at their La Hoya home

everything I need to know. The more I get to know Rachel, Olivia, Amy, and the other volunteers, including the Project Trust girls and school and clinic staff, the more I am impressed with their own commitment and knowledge. I feel privileged to lead a team of such exceptional individuals. While my natural instinct is telling me to jump in head-first, and start "doing, doing, doing," I know that I still have much to learn and that it will take time. However, I am comfortable and confident in my position, and am looking forward to each day of work. I have met some outstanding people in the communities of La Hoya and Bombita, and believe that together we will be able to accomplish great things!

As far as personal lives go, Amanda and I are settling in nicely. We feel comfortable and safe in our home, and appreciate all the work COPA and other community members have done to prepare our home before our arrival.

Clearly, there are adjustments in our lifestyle, but we knew what we were getting ourselves into, and we welcome the adjustments. We already have a renewed appreciation for electricity, running water, and ceiling fans! We have enjoyed meeting locals through work and church activities and have begun exploring the region on the weekends. Amanda has received a Dominican cooking class from some local women, and we've already organized weekly sporting events with COPA volunteers, and villagers from La Hoya and Bombita. We have enjoyed spending a few days at the beach with community members, Saturdays in Barahona, and Sunday church services.

As with our work life, we still have a lot to learn and adjust to in our personal lives, but we can easily picture ourselves settling here, and living happy and healthy lives.

Patrick Howell
Project Director



Amanda has started writing a daily blog about life and work in the Dominican Republic. It contains some lovely photographs (a couple of which have been used in this newsletter). If you would like to keep up to date with the everyday happenings and get a flavour of life in La Hoya and Bombita the blog can be found by using this link.

<http://copa365.blogspot.com>



Settling in after the first shopping trip

News from the schools ...

As the IT teacher, I am totally satisfied with the work I am doing. It makes me happy to see how the students are able to carry out research by themselves and learn things they did not previously know.

The best moments for me are when the students help each other to carry out their tasks using the computer. The ultimate surprise in my workplace was when Manuel, the guard, told me he wanted to use the computer. I gave him a short lesson and today he is able to do several things on the computer.

With God's help, we will keep progressing day by day.

Mauricio Mateo Matos

Prof. Informática COPA, La Hoya



This Newsletter
can be viewed
in colour on
our website :
www.copa.org.uk



Pictured from the top: Students using the internet for research; Manuel learning how to use a computer; presentation to a student for Merits in IT



Please sir,
I know.....

Students eager to learn in Victor's classroom, La Hoya

The month of February was filled with celebrations of love, flag, and country. Processions were held through the village, with faces painted with flags; dramas and speeches were held in the central park — some boys managed to get a better view!



In La Hoya students Celebrated Book Day

which encourages children to read and enjoy books.

Posters were made and Presentations were given by each class on the Flora and Fauna of Hispaniola with focus on the Dominican Republic.



Kindergarten with Miriam and Daisy and (above) fifth grade

...in words and pictures from Bombita and La Hoya

PE Activities - a report by Prof. Wander Yonhaly Marrero Gomez

As P.E. teacher in Bombita School I carried out physical fitness tests on students from 3rd to 8th Grade as part of government requirements in the P.E. curriculum. The information and tests covered the following areas: age, sex, weight, speed, leg strength, abdominal strength and resistance.

All the students completed the test satisfactorily and had fun whilst doing it as shown in these pictures.



The highlight in March was a visit from the Troubadours, a group from Massachusetts, who came to the locality and performed at both schools. They consisted of Chris, the mimic and magician, Henry, the juggler, and Ezzell, the clown and Queen of Hearts.

Their performances were big events for both communities and the students thoroughly enjoyed themselves as can be seen from these pictures.



Teachers from La Hoya before they attended the Teacher Training given by professors from Unibe (Universidad Iberoamericana). The workshop was on The Science of Teaching Social Sciences and discussed the various aspects of teaching social sciences, including the destructive nature of prejudice, misinformation, and violence.

The young community health promoters

Amy (our Health Advisor in the DR) writes about the graduation of the young community health workers:

The class I have been giving with Rachel to youth (14-22 yrs old) to train them to be health promoters in their own community finally came to an end after several months of classes first once a week and then twice a week. I really enjoyed this group of youth. We chose the difficult teens in behavior and attitudes to try to channel their energy in a positive direction. We had many laughs and it amazed me how seriously they took the class. The most badly behaved and difficult guy when he was in our COPA school was the only one who never missed a class, paid the most attention, asked many questions and got one of the highest grades on the final test.

They had a final test for practice and then we had a graduation (pictured right). I was impressed to see all the eight young people come so formally dressed and invite their family or people that are special for them. Rachel and I organized the graduation and invited Connie. I made some certificates with each of their names on them. They were so excited and proud of their achievement. I realized how important it is to recognize their achievements since many people don't finish education or get recognition.

The youth had to prepare some speeches which impressed me. They were asking the community for support when they are going to give these health classes themselves to the community. They wrote a poem for Rachel and me which was so thoughtful and meaningful and then 3 guys, who had written a song and put music to it, sang. It was so moving. It talked about how ESCOJO has helped and they hope to help other youth and how thankful they are to Amy and Rachel for teaching them and showing them the way. It talked about making a difference to others.



What excites me is to see them so motivated and passionate about teaching this information to others in their community and wanting to change their community to be a better place. We will continue to support them and help them but now they are in charge of giving the classes. I'm so proud of them. They want to focus on dangers of teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STD's, drugs and alcohol, birth control.

They have learned about values and how to make decisions that affect their future which was something that nobody had ever taught them. They didn't even know what the word value meant. They are thinking now of consequences for certain decisions they take that would not be good for them. After a practice run with one of the older classes at school they presented their first talk to the community in April.

The Partnership Schools

At the Partnership schools, we took advantage of the holidays to finally put into motion our project to fix up the classrooms and play areas. We began with the primary school in Habanero. The paint was supplied and we provided the man-power. Since there are only two classrooms, we were able to finish it quickly. We then painted one preschool classroom, the first grade classroom which was in the worst shape.

Marina and the 4-year old group Habanero Preschool



Fourth grade in Hato Viejo with teacher Rosmeris



In Hato Viejo, once again the paint was provided. The official classroom colour is dark green on the bottom half and light green on top. However, there was not any of the light green, so we substituted with the light yellow/beige they use for outside. The rooms looked great, even better than the two-tone green as in Habanero. I could not wait until school was back in session to see the reactions of the teachers in particular. Teachers and students alike loved it. What a difference it made! Of course, we also repapered the murals, threw out all the old posters, and replaced them with new ones.

Olivia—Education Advisor



The Trade Training Rooms

In her report Rachel, our Administrator in the DR, tells us of the successes with the Trade Training Rooms. Infotep supply the teachers who come to train the students in the various subjects. Rachel is hoping to start sewing classes in the near future with the teacher being recruited locally from Bombita.



“The good news is that I finally got the certificates from Infotep for the last session of classes. This will made the students very happy and may generate a little more enthusiasm for Infotep courses. Also, there has been lots of excitement over the 3 day workshop on making yogurt and cheese which was held the second week of May. Pictured above, a proud graduate of the pastry class displays her certificate.

The electricity class has been going very well. The students are very pleased with the instructor and visa versa. They have been doing lots of practical application and even took a field trip to Palo Alto where the new secondary school is under construction. In the photos students work on models with a breaker switch (top right) and multiple switches (right).”



Church Services in La Hoya

Our talented Bombitian musicians, Diego and Josie, are still coming to La Hoya regularly on the weekends to play music for Saturday youth service and Sunday morning regular service. They stay for our Sunday bread and soup lunch and usually play a few games of dominoes before returning to Bombita. This is such a benefit for La Hoya since there are no musicians as such here.

I am happy to report that on Saturday evening, the church here is usually packed to the gills. Many non-believers, including most of La Hoya’s youth, attend. The youth leaders present Christian dramas which are very popular and of course, the La Hoya youth love the loud music whether Christian or not. That being said, I have been told that nowadays everyone seems to be playing a lot more Christian music in the village.

Not only youth, but also adults attend. In fact, there are even more members who attend the Saturday service rather than the Sunday service which is an interesting phenomenon.

The youth leaders try to keep the messages short and to the point and interspersed with the music. Occasionally, there will be a response to the altar call which is always gratifying.

Olivia Hill
Education Advisor

The students in La Hoya and Bombita are, thanks to COPA, able to go on educational visits to places away from their own villages, just as UK pupils are able to do. In May fifth and sixth grade went on an excursion to the capital along with their three teachers, several parents, and the PT girls. First stop was the Zoo; the students were surprised by the large variety of animals and the high calibre of their habitats as well as the overall layout and condition of the grounds. After the zoo a visit to the house where the founder of the nation, Juan Pablo Duarte, was born and lived most of his life (when he wasn't in exile). The house has been turned into a museum and is kept very well with lots of historical artefacts such as the various flags of the nation, weapons used in various wars and a lot of photographs, documents, and paintings. The gardens are well kept and several statues and plaques can be found which add to the overall beauty of the place. Afterwards there was a visit to the national Aquarium which was also very impressive.

Sadie, Catherine, Alice, and Josie - the Project Trust Volunteers



HAITI EARTHQUAKE PUTS PRESSURE ON BOMBITA SCHOOL

Lasts year's earthquake in Haiti has resulted in a 20% rise in the number of students attending the COPA School in Bombita. A significant number of displaced families and relatives of Bombitians have moved from Haiti into Bombita. This has resulted in the number of students on the roll of our school increasing by about 100 to an all time high.

Though we have no sponsors for these children they are of course admitted to the school and this means that at the present time our expenditure there is exceeding our sponsorship income. We are anxious to find new sponsors for these particularly disadvantaged children. If any organisation, school or Church to which you belong would welcome an inspiring multi-media presentation on the work COPA is undertaking there please email Sebert Lane-sebertlane@btinternet.com or Geoff Haslam - geoff@gandphaslam.plus.com



Provisional Date

Come and join us to celebrate COPA's 20th Anniversary



On Sunday, 9th October at 10.30am there will be a service of thanksgiving followed by the AGM, lunch and presentations on the work and future plans of COPA.

To be held at Lonsdale Church, Gloucester - more details in the next edition of COPA News

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 contact:

Mrs Margaret Keeling
Address as above

We now have some collecting tins which are available to help raise funds to assist in the work of COPA.

If you know of a place which might be willing to have a collecting tin on display or you would like to borrow them for a specific fund raising activity please contact Geoff Haslam -

geoff@gandphaslam.plus.com

Sponsorship Letters

The address for your letters and cards is:

Child's name and sponsorship number
Escuela de COPA (La Hoya or Bombita)
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. Thank you for your support.

Recruitment

COPA currently has vacancies for a Health Advisor (2 years) and an Educational Advisor (2 years). A local wage is paid and accommodation, a return flight and health insurance is covered by COPA.

A job description, person specification and application form can be found on the COPA website www.copa.org.uk

If you, or anyone you know, would like to be considered for either of these positions or would like to receive more details please contact John Youe (COPA Staffing and Recruitment Officer) at j.youe@btinternet.com

We are always interested in hearing from anyone who would like to work for COPA.



Connie and members of the schools' staff at her leaving party