

Grace in return



Two people with a shared passion write about their work in the Dominican Republic

Jeanne Bergin shares her experiences of working with Community Partners

A FEW YEARS AGO I accepted an invitation to join a work group to go to the Dominican Republic to work with Community Partners (COPA) during my summer holidays. I was supported by my chapel and

school. Here I met Rosalba for the first time. We worked and played with the children and we decorated classrooms. At the end of the two weeks I knew I would go back. My heart had been warmed by the communities and I felt I had skills I could use.

Two years later I went back as an Education Advisor. Working as part of the COPA team was rewarding, inspiring, enjoyable and hard work.

Education in the DR is not fun for most children. It is 'talk and chalk' in dull classrooms. I worked closely with the staff from the two COPA schools, organising hands on training sessions to improve their understanding and knowledge of education, making education fun. Their expressions, squeals and willingness to be involved when learning new ways of teaching were rewarding. They needed to experience things for themselves before they could pass on new experiences to their students. One of the heads and the reception class teacher confidently shared

The Dominicans taught me how happy you can be with very little.

what they had learned with teachers in the local area who liked hearing of new ideas that were being put into practice. There was an awareness that these COPA teachers were better trained.

Since coming home I have shared my experiences with groups within churches and education. There are many people in the world today who are happy to leave their families and give up home comforts of running water and constant electricity to help the less fortunate. Our love for God makes it easier for us to do this. The Dominicans taught me how happy you can be with very little.

COPA in Spanish means 'cup'

COPA has vacancies for an Education Advisor and a Health Administrator. For more information see www.copa.org.uk

AMY ENDELSTEIN



Two years later I went back as an Education Advisor



The Dominican Republic is the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola (shared with Haiti). Hispaniola lies between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. An island of rugged highlands and mountains with fertile valleys interspersed, it lies in the middle of the hurricane belt and is subject to severe storms from June to October with occasional flooding and periodic droughts.



Rosalba Perez Perez writes about her education in the Dominican Republic

BORN IN LA HOYA, a small village near Barahona in the south-west of the Dominican Republic, my early years at school were a disaster. There was no proper school in my village, just a bare room with no books and a teacher who often didn't come. There was no order or organisation and by the age of eight I had only completed the first grade.

In 1992 everything changed for me. Community Partners (COPA) arrived in La Hoya and worked with the community to build a beautiful new school. Whereas previously 40 children came to school now there were 400. I studied in the school from the day it opened until I reached the eighth grade. I loved it. Those were the best years of my education. I couldn't believe that a school like this was possible in our poor community.

Later I went to the high school in Barahona where I studied four more years before going to university. Those years in high school came as a shock to me as it was a public high school directed by the government. It wasn't very well organised and was very different from a COPA school. However I was blessed again and I gained a place in university.

As I saw how God had used Community Partners to bless my community I desired to study for a career in which God could use me to help others. I decided to study psychology. It was very different being separated from my family, friends and church in La Hoya but God had promised to be with me wherever I went. To get my degree I needed to make a great effort, be brave and fight for my dream to

In my heart I knew I could use my gifts in my own village...



AMY ENDELSTEIN

become a psychologist. Finally in 2007 I graduated with the highest honours. God had helped me to achieve that goal, but I wondered how I could be of service. What was I going to do after university? How was God going to use me and what I had learned?

Throughout my training I prayed for guidance about my future. I realised it was God's will for me to return to my own community in the village of La Hoya. When I was offered a post as Educational Psychologist by COPA in their school in nearby Bombita I knew this was confirmation that I was wanted back with my own people. I had a gift and a passion to work with children and young adults.

My family and friends couldn't understand how I could leave the capital Santo Domingo, where I had so many better prospects and return to a village where there were no opportunities. In my heart I knew I could use my gifts in my own village even if it contradicted what everyone else believed.

I started working in the school in Bombita as a psychologist helping the children with their problems. Out of school the activity I am most passionate about is my volunteer work with the young adults in my



I couldn't believe that a school like this was possible in our poor community.

home village. We share God's word and at the same time talk about social issues that affect each of them in their daily lives. I am happy that I can see the fruit in those youth groups and see how God is blessing their lives. Today, some of these young adults have come to know Christ and believe in him. Their lives have been turned around. We have built our own church and some of them are even helping other churches with their young people!

COPA's gift has been a channel of blessings in my life. I have come to see God's love for the needy and it has been a motivator in my own life. May I give grace in return for all the grace that I have received!

Translated by Amy Endlestein, COPA Health Administrator