



# COPA news



**Building caring Christian communities**

The children, staff and volunteers at the COPA schools in La Hoya and Bombita, and also the committee members in the UK and Guernsey, wish you all a very happy Christmas and send best wishes for the New Year.



As 2011, another busy year for COPA, draws to a close we bring you up to date with some of the more significant developments which have been happening.

Read on page 2 an article from Sebert about the disappointment COPA has had with the Sordomudos School project.

Also you can read of some changes in personnel in the DR, education and health related features, our Project Trust volunteers and the need for school dinners.

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

December 2011

## COPA DISMAYED OVER THE SORDOMUDOS PROJECT

It has been a huge disappointment that after all the work undertaken by so many people the construction of the school for Deaf/Mute children in Barahona cannot go ahead as planned.

Though the Dominican Sordomudos Assn had written enthusiastically about the proposal and offered to donate all the land required to build the school and to work in partnership with COPA to provide this much needed facility, sadly this has not happened.

Acting in good faith, initial drawings had been prepared and our fundraising was in full swing. Indeed such was the response to our appeal that already COPA had funds in hand to construct a significant part of the school. To our consternation the Dominican Association unexpectedly had other plans. Our school which was a single storey building set in attractive landscaped gardens with generous recreation areas was not at all acceptable. COPA received a contract which we could not possibly sign, requiring a three storey building which would be governed solely by the Sordomudos Assn in Santo Domingo, a hundred miles away! We are of the opinion that children that can neither hear nor speak need to be able to enjoy what they can see outside, and to appreciate shady out door teaching areas particularly in a Caribbean climate. To be enclosed on the third floor with so much space available seemed totally inappropriate – particularly in an earthquake zone!

COPA had another problem in that if sponsors are meeting the cost of running the school we have a duty to monitor how their money is spent. Our interest in providing the best possible education is paramount. This school had therefore to be run in partnership and COPA was going to provide a special education advisor for the school.

Our Project Director and others went to great pains on many occasions to explain our position in an attempt to reach an agreement with the Association which did not seem to be putting the interests of the children first. Seemingly endless negotiations took place but the demands of the Assn became even more unacceptable. Sadly it appears that the affairs of the Sordomudos Association are controlled by its very elderly founder who has become very unpredictable.

Eventually, in spite of all COPA's efforts and those of others in the Dominican Republic we had to face the hard facts that an agreement could not be reached at this time. Consideration was given to various alternatives. Perhaps we could build a special unit on to our La Hoya school but the cost of transporting the children would have been significant. Furthermore, the land in Barahona had been donated to the Sordomudos Assn for a school some years ago and if that were developed for the same children in the future, the unit in La Hoya would become redundant. We are still greatly concerned for the welfare of these handicapped and neglected children and have made a suggestion that they may be accommodated in a school in Barahona which is currently vacant in the afternoons.

COPA has now had to withdraw our grant applications and is in the process of

returning donations to the many friends and sponsors who responded to our appeal. We are very sincerely grateful for all the support received. Perhaps it has not all been in vain. At least we feel that we have focussed the attention of people in the local community on the needs of these children and pray that a solution will be found.

Despite this setback and with the financial support of some 700 UK sponsors, COPA continues to operate its schools, vocational training rooms and clinics in La Hoya and Bombita and is always seeking ways to improve the opportunities for families of these and neighbouring communities.

*Sebert Lane*

## News from the Trade Training Rooms in Bombita



Eusabio has continued to teach sewing three afternoons a week. Students also come in to work on their projects other afternoons, providing there is electricity. Eusabio has been great with working at different knowledge levels and encouraging students to be responsible for the space, cleaning it regularly etc. Some students have progressed to learning how to make trousers.

Our pictures show students working on the sewing machines and displaying finished skirts from the first unit of the class.



Rachel began the small business class this month and writes: 'It has taken over more time than I imagined as I had to split the class into two sessions to accommodate different schedules. However, working with smaller groups has been an advantage as the participants have a huge range of levels of education and comprehension. They have shown a lot of enthusiasm even as we cover more theoretical concepts so I am looking forward to moving on to more practical applications.'

## Report on the COPA UK AGM

2011 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of COPA and the occasion was celebrated with a Service of Thanksgiving at Lonsdale Methodist Church in Gloucester where two decades ago a Commissioning Service was held.

The service was led by Peter Gardner, our longest serving committee member, and traced the development of our work in the Dominican Republic and involved several committee members past and present. Plans had been made to have a live video connection with our team in the DR but the technology let us down, ironically because of a poor connection here in the UK.

The service was followed by our 2011 Annual General Meeting. As the work and development of COPA in the DR had been reported during the service the Chairman, Roger Tovey, outlined the work that the COPA committee here in the UK was responsible for. This included: promoting the work of COPA through talks and presentations, maintaining sponsorship records and communicating with individual sponsors as the children move on, maintaining and developing data bases, developing and maintaining the COPA website, production and distribution of the regular newsletter, staffing and HR matters relating to the volunteer positions in the DR, arranging flights and insurances for our volunteers and workgroups, and budgeting, accounting, currency and banking matters.

He then thanked all those both committee members and others who make this possible. Roger confirmed his decision to stand down as Chairman but of his willingness to continue as a member of the committee. Seberty thanked Roger for the work he has done over many years and presented him with a token of COPA's appreciation.

The elections then followed with Geoff Haslam appointed Chairman, Peter Gardner as Vice Chairman and all other officers and members being re-elected. David Wilson (a former COPA Chairman) offered and was elected to serve but has since found it necessary to withdraw from the committee. Steve Guy, who was elected to the post of Secretary, has resigned from this position due to work commitments but, at the first meeting of the committee, Paul Samways offered to take on this role and this offer was gratefully accepted.

The meeting was concluded and after lunch, prepared by Pam and her helpers, a presentation relating to the Sordomudos project was delivered by Seberty Lane and Geoff Haslam. It had already been announced that our proposal to build and develop a school with the Sordomudos (Deaf) Association were unlikely to proceed but that we were considering ways of providing an education for the profoundly deaf children in the Barahona area of the DR. Regrettably, as you will have read on page 2 of this newsletter, the whole project has had to be abandoned.

## Guernsey News

Following the resignation of Jenny Benjamin as Chair last year, our new Chair, Gill Syvret-Berboda was elected. Unfortunately since this time both Gill and our Membership Secretary, Margaret Keeling have both been seriously ill. A further Committee member June has had to resign through ill health, and Margaret Penney sadly passed away after a long illness. In spite of these setbacks I am pleased to report that Guernsey Branch is still actively fundraising and had raised some £1,300 towards the Sordomudos Project. In addition Guernsey branch continues to fund the Partnership Schools administration costs and sponsors the Health Advisor. However in view of our current problems we have not held our annual flag day, and our AGM has had to be deferred until the New Year.

*Peter Keeling on behalf of the Guernsey Committee*

## Comings and goings in the DR

Over the last few months there have been some changes in personnel working for COPA in the DR. Olivia, one of the Education Advisors, left in October after 2 years. She had primarily been involved in taking the Partnership Schools project forward and we thank her for all the hard work she has put into her role. We hope to have a new Education Advisor in place early in the new year. Stephanie Pepen has been offered the role and will shortly be visiting COPA before finally accepting the role.

Amanda has returned to the USA on maternity leave, her baby is due early January, and Patrick will be returning to the USA for a couple of months from late December. We wish them both well for the birth of their baby. With both Patrick and Amanda away for some time this would have left us very short staffed but we were lucky enough to find that Verona, a recent past Education Advisor, was back in the area and was happy to resume the role as a temporary measure for three days a week. Connie is also back in La Hoya and will be acting as Project Director for the time Patrick is away. What good fortune for COPA that they were both available.

New staff arriving shortly will be Kate Godkin who will replace Rachel, our Administrator, and Riko Kimoto who will be the Health Advisor replacing Amy who will be leaving in the Spring.

Pictured right: Some of the children they will be working with.



Some photos and text from Amanda's blog

With grateful thanks to Amanda, our Education Advisor, for the use of these photos and captions.

Take a look at day to day news from COPA in La Hoya and Bombita <http://copa365.blogspot.com>



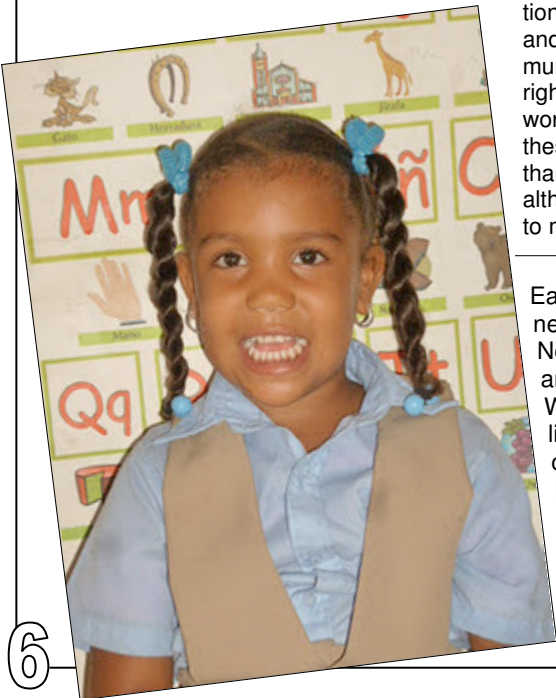
The people in Bombita have a very hard way of life, but they are the most welcoming, and "smiliest" people you could meet.



After it rains in La Hoya the kids come out to play bottle cap races. They each have a bottle cap and they float it down the gutter. It is really fun to see them playing such a fun and simple game.



September 21<sup>st</sup> was the international day of peace. Katherine and Emma made a beautiful mural for the day, pictured above right, and all the students and staff wore white. In dappled sunlight, these third graders were more than happy to pose for a picture although I did have to teach them to make the peace sign!



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Each year photographs are taken of the new children who have joined the schools. Not being used to cameras the children are often shy and unsure how to react. We worked really hard to teach this willing little girl, Liz Missel, to smile, but she just couldn't quite get there! She just didn't know how to smile on command, but she watched our mouths as we showed her, and felt her lips as she tried, it was just adorable to see. I'm sure she will have it worked out by the time we take pictures next year!

Wascar is a little boy in La Hoya reception class. We had to teach most of these little ones how to smile on command, but Wascar didn't even hesitate! He is a joyful little boy with some learning and development problems, but he comes from a great family, and his teachers have really got him off to a great start this school year. He takes a little longer than his classmates on most tasks, but with the support of his teachers, he is learning to write letters and numbers along with the rest of the class.



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## First Impressions

Each year we are lucky enough to have Project Trust volunteers work with COPA during their Gap year. Their stories and thoughts of their first few weeks reminds us of the huge difference there is between life in the UK and the DR, especially when you are eighteen. Amanda writes: 'The Project Trust girls have continued to do well in the classroom, and Katherine has even taken on the added responsibility of teaching a French class to 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This is going to be such a great help to these students, as most of them will take French in high school, and many of our current high school students struggle with the language. The kids love it, and they have begun striking up conversations with me in French, to which I just reply "Oui?" Outside of school the girls are thriving in the community. They have a good group of friends, participate in church activities, and teach English for a group of adults once a week.' Printed below is a montage of the first impressions of Emma and Katherine in La Hoya and India and Carla who are in Bombita .

A palm Tree swaying in front of a Sunset... not bad for a first night or maybe it was the second it feels so long now. I have been a part of the La Hoya community for over a month now and everyday gets that little bit easier. Walking to the Colmado on my own is no longer daunting and the thought of teaching a class to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade no longer scares me (as much!). Who'd of thought a city girl would be ok with the fact that her Blackberry hasn't worked in a month or that her Facebook has been lacking in statuses of what her dog chewed today but that's just it, there is so much more to life in the tiny village of La Hoya than there ever was in the hustle and bustle of Edinburgh.

When we first arrived we were taken on a tour of Bombita and so many people wanted to introduce themselves to us and invited us to sit in their houses. At the time the village was a sea of strangers' faces, but after only a few short weeks I can take a walk to the colmado (village shop) or church and see a friendly face on every corner.

The fact that I no longer scream at a cockroach and spend half an hour psyching myself up to killing it shows exactly how settled I am (lets not talk about spiders though!).

We started teaching after we had been here for a couple of weeks, and although the break gave us time to settle in, I don't think anything could have quite prepared me for my first lesson. The children were incredibly noisy and boisterous, and although it was a shock at first, I quite enjoy the challenge of channeling their energy into learning English. Many of the children are incredibly enthusiastic, which makes teaching a much more rewarding experience.

Apart from the challenges presented by moving to a new country, getting a new job, trying to make myself new friends the language barrier, the new food, the climate, missing my family and trying to deal with all the nasty creepy-crawlies, the most difficult thing about being here is becoming self-sufficient. By the end of my time here, if I have improved only one thing about myself, I hope it is that.

We have had a lot of support from COPA – I cannot imagine working in another project. I feel truly blessed to be have been given this opportunity and to have been welcomed so readily into the wonderful community makes the change of lifestyle so much easier. I don't know when I realised it but for the first time in a long time I'm truly happy where I am and I give full credit to the beauty of La Hoya and Bombita and their wonderful people.

## Focus on Education

- Rosalba, a previous student from the COPA schools who has gained a University degree in Psychology, continues to do valuable work with the group of children with learning difficulties. She works with them in one-to-one sessions and then returns them to their class to continue with their lessons.
- The government is now requiring all children in school to have paperwork (birth certificate, etc.) and a group is working on documenting children without papers who are attending the COPA schools. This is an ongoing process and part of the difficulty is that Haitians are considered to be "in transit" while living in the DR, even if they stay their whole lives. This is a legal loop hole to dissuade Haitians from coming to the DR but conditions are still better here even if they are bad. One Haitian cane worker told Connie that a day's wage could be 80 or 100 pesos (about £1.50) whereas in Haiti there is no work at all.
- The Education Advisors and the Head Teachers met recently to discuss a contract for our sponsored university students. They felt that these students have a responsibility to give back to the communities and the COPA schools. The contract simply states that the students are required to commit two hours a week in the schools, churches, clinics, etc..., maintain passing grades, and stay in contact with COPA staff about any issues or problems they may be having. After liaising with the Head Teachers and students eight of the twelve students will volunteer in the school, two will work with Amy on health related projects, and two others will continue work in their respective churches. The service requirement has been waived for students attending university in the capital of which there are now 4 from Bombita.
- The Education Advisors have been running teacher training workshops on various topics. The main focus has been on how to deal with aggressive student behaviour in the classroom.



*The children in the 2nd grade in Bombita come in all sizes as you can see from the pictures here. Shown with them is David, their teacher.*

## Health Matters

Amy continues to be busy with health promotion, education and clinic work in both La Hoya and Bombita but sometimes she is asked to share her knowledge with other communities in the Dominican Republic. Recently she was invited to give her hygiene classes, together with EgeHaina (a foreign electricity company that has just opened a wind turbine park in that area), to villages in the Enriquillo region about one and a half hours drive away from Barahona. Here she writes about the classes:

'On November 2nd I took Nairobi and Silvia (one of my health promoters) to help me give a class in the villages of Juacho and Los Cocos on general hygiene, dental hygiene, latrine maintenance and use, washing of hands, diarrhea, how germs are spread, etc. In Juacho the class was given in a discotheque-bar. There were 134 people, 76 were children between ages 2-7 and 58 adults! I didn't expect this many children since I had the impression that the classes were for stay at home moms. I decided to do the "Germ" story with pictures and the picture books with different hygiene practices for both adults and children. Then we gave them some lemonade and sent the children home so I could focus on the adults. We had some real microscope pictures of different bacteria such as cholera, e-coli, salmonella and staph and laminated them. The people liked looking at real pictures of what they can't see.

A favourite part is the acting out how a bacteria, like cholera gets passed from one person to another starting by a man who poops in a cane field, then a pig comes and steps in the poop or puts its snout in it and then goes to the owner's house where it goes inside and a young child plays on the floor with the pig. The child cries, the mother comes to comfort and hug him and then she prepares lunch for the family and serves the food to the family and then they all have diarrhea. Then they had to figure out at what points the cholera spread could have been prevented. They laughed at the volunteers acting it out. In Los Cocos there were 58 people mostly adults and it was done in front of someone's house, outside. A blackboard was nailed between 2 chairs and there was a nice breeze.

What impressed me about these communities is that they were hungry for this information, paid attention, participated and actually expressed what they didn't know and what they had learned to change at home.'



Pictured above, the community of Los Cocos in someone's front patio with everyone holding up their free toothpaste and toothbrush donated by Ege Haina.

## Health cont.

### TRASH CLEAN UP COMMITTEE DEALING WITH PROBLEM IN BOMBITA

On Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, the whole day was a clean up day organized by Arky (a young man in Bombita studying law and helped Amy with the latrine project), where 50 volunteers from the community helped with trash clean up, cutting back bushes and trees that were invading the road making it hard to drive into the village. This was such important work that the local District Council donated food so all the volunteers could eat lunch. Their efforts were amazing and impressive. Our plan is to do this clean up day one day a month until it sinks into the community that this is necessary and until it becomes a habit!

### HYGIENE AND DENTAL CLASSES IN BOMBITA

Amy gave this class to kinder, preschool, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders in both morning and afternoon sessions with an enlarged picture book about germs, a booklet with pictures of correct and incorrect hygiene practices, tooth brushing demonstration with big teeth and brush and giving out free toothbrushes. The children like the books and booklet and demonstration and enjoy participating in the class. The talk was given to a total of 11 classes! Pictured right: Amy and Nairobi show how to clean teeth properly



**THE ESCOJO GROUP**, our young community health workers, renewed their momentum in November and gave their presentation on family planning and contraception to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the Bombita school. They did a great job presenting the information and answering the students' questions. They gave the class on birth control, family planning and condom use in La Hoya to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders which were very successful and well received and have also given the talk to two local high schools.

### ANTI-PARASITE MEDICATION

Representatives of the pharmaceutical company Bayer came to visit the Bombita school and clinic in September and this was quite an event. Every child in attendance that day received a bottle of anti-parasite medication which they had to drink down in one go, followed by a sweet muffin and a packet of juice. One of the Bayer representatives gave a brief talk on parasites, telling the children what they needed to do to avoid them. They also left about six cases of medicine for the clinic and they have promised to return to fumigate Bombita. They will return to pay Bombita a visit at Christmas time to give out presents for the school children. This is a wonderful programme and very helpful to Bombita. Bayer has since visited La Hoya and provided the children with anti-parasite medication.

## Contact names and addresses for COPA UK:

### **Treasurer:**

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

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### **Treasurer: COPA Guernsey**

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### **Guernsey Sponsorship Secretary:**

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Registered Charity No. 1027117

## The COPA Christmas Fund



Sadly it is still quite unreliable to send presents to the children in La Hoya and Bombita although Christmas cards do seem to arrive safely. As a result, we would like to suggest that sending a donation to our Christmas Fund is still the easiest and safest way to give the children a treat this Christmas. Money donated will be used towards their Christmas party and any left over will, this year, be used towards the provision of regular school meals for the children of Bombita.



The economic conditions and deprivation, particularly in Bombita, means that many families have little or no money to buy food and the adults and children frequently go hungry. The government of the DR provide milk powder and rolls for a snack for each child but this is not enough to feed growing children properly for the day. COPA's aim is to provide meals for them on the five days a week they are at school.

If you would like to make a contribution, please could you send your gift to the treasurer of COPA UK, David Rush or the treasurer of the Guernsey Branch, Peter Keeling. Both their addresses appear on the left of this page.



## 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.