

Report on the SALCET trip to El Salvador and Colombia, November 18th to December 9th 2013

SALCET team members Chris and Maggie Jagger, Steve Snelling and Patsy Walker returned to El Salvador for a week in November 2013 to visit and encourage their Salvadorian friends at the projects in San Carlos and Estancia, to give medical assistance where necessary and to evaluate any ongoing needs. Chris and Maggie also spent a joyous afternoon with the children they sponsor in El Salvador through the children's charity, Compassion. Adan, Chris's sponsored 'child', is 15 years old now and wants to become a doctor, which is wonderful and hopefully achievable!

During the 6 months prior to our visit SALCET had been financing an ophthalmological project at San Carlos in conjunction with ASAPROSAR, (Asociacion Salvadorena Pro-Salud Rural), a Salvadorian charity, who, amongst other things, offers an ophthalmology service for needy communities in El Salvador. (www.asaprosar.org). From July 2013, once a month, a medical specialist and his team held an eye clinic in the Community House at San Carlos, issued corrective spectacles where necessary and referred patients for eye surgery e.g. cataracts, pterygium removal, if needed, to ASAPROSAR headquarters in Santa Ana, a 2 hour journey from San Carlos. The 2nd day of our visit to San Carlos in November coincided with the monthly ASAPROSAR clinic, so we were able to witness the work at firsthand, and work alongside the team. 5 children and 27 adults received corrective spectacles that day and 7 adults were referred to Santa Ana for surgery or laser treatment.



ASAPROSAR at work at San Carlos

In the afternoon the SALCET team travelled to Santa Ana to ASAPROSAR headquarters. We were very impressed with the facilities, the operating theatres, equipment, accommodation and general ethos of the organisation and had the privilege of meeting the founder, Dr Vicky Guzman – a truly inspirational and pioneering lady.



Dr Vicky Guzman beside the mural of her pioneering days

The 6 month project is drawing to a close now. The visual health of the San Carlos community has improved dramatically – 83 pairs of corrective spectacles have been purchased and 14 people have benefitted from ASAPROSAR treatment at Santa Ana – a significant achievement.

A factor that made our trip less stressful this time was that our SALCET worker in El Salvador, Ruth Cruz, discovered a local pharmaceutical outlet where we could buy medicines at cost price, so we placed an order through her, and were thus spared the hassle of bringing medicines through customs at San Salvador airport. We were able to hold a general medical clinic at San Carlos, giving the children a medical check-up, treating any minor illnesses, infections and skin complaints and providing steroid injections for the arthritic joints of elderly patients. It was a great joy to renew friendships with people whom we have been treating for the last 12 years.



A grateful recipient of a ‘teddy for tragedy’

The latter part of the week was spent at Caipes clinic in Estancia (a 4 hour drive from San Salvador, in the mountains in the north-east of the country). The remoteness and beauty of the area struck us afresh, as the rainy season had just finished. The grass was lush, the wild flowers profuse and the butterflies magnificent! As at San Carlos, we held general medical clinics, and tested eyes for reading glasses. The literacy rate here is very low so a pictorial chart had to be used which caused lots of amusement! The local CDH (Asociacion Campesina para el Desarrollo Humano) committee work valiantly to run the clinic and other local projects/ facilities with no government help, so it was good to visit and encourage them, particularly Juan Carlos, the doctor, who grew up locally and has come back after qualifying, to serve his own community for very little remuneration. Two American Peace Corps volunteers were working locally too, and acted as our translators – the local dialect is very difficult to understand!



Clinic at Estancia

Our week in El Salvador passed very quickly and we flew on to Cali in Colombia to meet up with Dan Eley (CEO of The Dan Eley Foundation, DEF, based in Godalming) and his team. Will Johnson, our gap-year student, from Brighton Road in Godalming, had been working for DEF and SALCET in Cali for 2 months at this point, and was enjoying every minute. He was a great help to us and, at the time of writing, is just completing his 6 month placement; a life-changing experience!

Cali is very different from El Salvador. It is a cosmopolitan city, the centre for salsa dancing and cosmetic surgery, extremely vibrant and very much a 'young person's' city! There is a high degree of poverty centred in certain areas, but some very wealthy parts too. The SALCET team were there to offer medical assistance to children in Compassion projects in Cali, a high proportion of whom were Afro-Colombian in origin. We ran all but one of our clinics at a 'safe' Compassion project location, and the children were bussed in to us. During the fortnight we ministered to 11 different projects, seeing 324 patients, 254 of whom were children and 48 of whom needed referral for further investigation. Dan and his team acted as our translators. It was wonderful this year that Dan was able to travel in our minibus (hoisted from his wheelchair onto the bench in the bus by his intrepid friends!) and the banter en route was hilarious! Colombia has not been introduced to 'health and safety'!



Will, Dan and Steve in minibus



Compassion clinic

We also spent time, and held clinics at FEDUT (Fundacion Educacion para Todos), the Colombian partner project to DEF which has been caring for and educating poor children for the last 18 years, and is run by amazing people. We worked very hard, but also had great fun and relaxation with all these lovely people. Christmas comes early in Cali, and on our last night, it was The Festival of Light, when all the Christmas lights were switched on in the city. It was a wonderful fiesta!



Many Afro- Colombian children

The other project we visited and took some physiotherapy equipment to was Esperanza Vivir – a project which takes in the elderly who are living on the streets, provides them with food and clothing, and runs a farm in the countryside where many of them can live and work. It was a privilege to be able to give medical help to them, and they loved receiving reading glasses!

We would like to thank everyone for your financial and prayer support which made this trip possible, and ask for your ongoing prayer as we discern God's plans for SALCET in the future.



Thank you!