



FRIENDS OF ALALAY (SANTA CRUZ)

Registered charity no. 1123425

SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER

I have just returned from a month in Bolivia, working with Alalay and the street children – an unbelievably hectic but also very rewarding time. I have so much that I want to say that, for the first time in ten years, I am going to send nearly two pages of news!



It all started with a visit to Bolivia by legendary singer Joss Stone. Joss is currently on her "Total World Tour" where she plays one concert in every country in the World, does a musical collaboration with a local artist and visits one charity. And we were thrilled that she chose Alalay as her one Bolivian charity! When we first received an email from her tour organiser I couldn't quite believe it was real, so it was an absolute pleasure and delight to be able to welcome her to Alalay many weeks later (having somehow managed to keep the entire visit secret from the extremely intrusive Santa Cruz media).

Joss went out with our street worker to chat to kids still living on the streets and find out about their daily lives, and then came to visit our boys' welcome house. Our kids performed a traditional dance and afterwards we ate typical snacks together, danced and even had a surprise (very early) birthday cake for Joss! Joss and her team were lovely – happily chatting to even the most drugged kids on the streets and sharing stories with the Alalay children, and it was a fantastic opportunity for Alalay to build on its already strong reputation. After Joss' concert, Alalay was presented with a substantial cheque from the venue (the Hard Rock Café) and we are in the process of planning some more exciting collaborations with the Café soon.

I then spent time having many useful meetings - including with a local MP to discuss creating a new child protection law in Bolivia and with several Rotary Clubs, with whom we hope we can implement new projects. I also visited our supported students at their vocational training courses, went out to do street work and saw and discussed all of our current activities (including carpentry, bakery and tending cows).

The carpentry workshop continues to be a very successful project. Since our high quality furniture is sold at a profit, and is in great demand, we are about to invest in two new pieces of woodworking equipment and an additional helper. As an illustration of our self-sustaining principles in practice, whilst we were in Bolivia one of the bakery ovens broke and needed fixing. The necessary repair work was paid for using profit gained from carpentry sales – our philosophy in action!

And for the final two days in Santa Cruz we had some more exciting visitors in the shape of Ben and Laura (the very talented people behind Ashmole Photography) who lived with us, shared with the kids and took as many photos and video clips as they possibly could. We will soon have these to use as promotional material, free of charge. It was amazing of them to give up their time and having just seen the first film edit and beautiful images (for example, see the "dinner time" photo on the right), I am really looking forward to sharing more of their work with you.



In both the UK and Bolivia, it is all too easy to get caught up in the day-to-day: the meetings, the delays and frustrations, the emails and paperwork... However, having these visitors really did allow me to see Alalay with fresh eyes, and reminded me just how valuable is the work that the staff do every single day. They take children who have nothing and are invisible to society, with no real future and serious drugs'

problems; and offer these very same children an education, food, a home, psychological and social help, belongings and, most importantly, love and hope. Their work is truly incredible.

One of my favourite moments during my month in Bolivia was on a rare day off. It was Election Day (therefore no work or public transport!) and a group of Alalay alumni (who I first knew back in 2006) had decided to spend the day together and invited me to join them. The previous day we had been to the market, where the group split up with their separate shopping lists to buy the necessary groceries. They'd clearly worked out their budget beforehand, knew exactly what they needed, and were determined to get the best prices possible for their purchases. And then on Election Day itself we went to one of their flats and cooked together and ate a delicious meal of "Pique Macho" (a traditional dish consisting of beef, chorizo, potatoes, peppers, onions, tomatoes, rice and boiled eggs). As there was no transport running it would have been difficult for me to get home, and I was offered one of their beds (while they slept on a mattress on the floor). The next day they ordered me a taxi to make sure I got home safely.

In a way this event was such a small thing – a group of friends sharing a day off together, but for me it was so much more. The simple fact that these alumni were still so clearly operating as a supportive family to each other, the truly adult way that they had planned their budget and shopping list, and that they were now able to offer me a bed for the night, all made it such a special and momentous occasion. At the end of the festivities I offered to pay for my share of the food, and the group point-blank refused to accept my money, saying it was "their treat". When I first went in Alalay in 2006 I worked as a housemother to some of these girls, and now here they were showing me how mature and independent they could be – our roles had totally reversed! There really is no way that words could express how proud I am of this amazing group of young people.

As always, please do take a look at my website for the most up-to-date news, and also "like" and share my temporary Facebook page (www.facebook.com/friendsofalalay) to see some photos from my month away.



Annie having meal with Alalay alumni

Annie Syrett, Bristol – May 2015
www.alalay.co.uk