



# FRIENDS OF ALALAY (SANTA CRUZ)

Registered charity no. 1123425

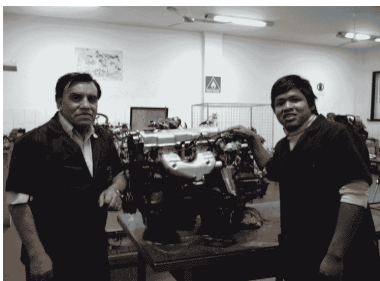
## SUMMER 2012 NEWSLETTER

I have just returned from a very rewarding time with the street children in Bolivia and have seen first-hand the great progress that is being made at Alalay, and of course many of the difficulties and some of the failures! We took with us vast quantities of toys, medical and dental items, soaps and so on, and I am very grateful to those many generous individuals and groups in the UK who donated goods. There is so much that I would like to tell you that I'm going to make a slight change this time, still producing my one page newsletter but adding a second page that tells the stories of five ex-street kids, who I first met when I started my work back in 2006.



The medical centre continues to care for both kids and adults – two young British doctors were with me on this trip and worked tirelessly alongside our Bolivian volunteer doctor. Around 120 children had their eyes tested during the visit (for the first time ever), seven were found to have sight problems and have now been fitted with spectacles. The work of the medical centre, coupled with great improvements in diet, has led to a marked change in the health of the kids – many of whom were previously very anemic.

The chickens now live a free-range life, there is a small herd of five cows providing fresh creamy milk, which is also sold locally, and the bakery continues to produce good quality bread and other baked treats. Furthermore, we spent time discussing some very innovative and potentially highly profitable new proposals for maintaining a flock of quail and selling the eggs (a Bolivian snack delicacy) to hotels and markets.



I visited one of the classes and watched the dedicated Bolivian teacher as she taught the English language to the kids, and also met with several of the eight adolescents that we now support through vocational training. In one instance, we visited a local college to talk with the professor of the department in which one ex-street child studies car mechanics. We were thrilled to hear that he was the top student and that, if his progress continues, the college will give him a scholarship to go on to university.

During my visit there were a total of nine volunteers (three British, one Greek, two Germans, one Dane, one Puerto Rican, and one Ecuadorean) at the centre, living in the volunteers' cabin that we set up and all of them with the one aim of offering their skills to help the street kids to help themselves. It was great to see such a vibrant mini "united nations" working so well together!

Looking forward, our very exciting further plans now include: continuing to support existing projects and setting up a carpentry workshop to make furniture and building items for use at the centre and for sale, and in which the kids can learn new skills.



I'm now in Georgia (ex-USSR) for the remainder of the year, working amongst internally displaced people, but will continue to run things from there. Please do help me by looking at my website for the most up-to-date news about the street kids and fundraising events.

Annie Syrett, Zugdidi, Georgia - August 2012

[www.alalay.co.uk](http://www.alalay.co.uk)

## SO WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN WHEN THEY LEAVE ALALAY?

This is a question that I'm often asked back in Britain. Alalay operates as a family and children are encouraged to stay in touch, visit and so on, much as in any normal family. There are often problems with the way that this works in practice (a bit like in conventional families!) but, none-the-less, it is the objective.

Whilst in Santa Cruz, I organized a reunion in a restaurant for a number of the ex-street kids with whom I first worked six years ago – which proved to be a happy, moving and very encouraging experience. Briefly, here are just five of their stories.

**Isabel** first came to Alalay as a nine year-old with her younger brother, from a convent orphanage. Her mother died when she was very young, her father sells brooms in local villages but spends any earnings on alcohol, with the result that he is often very drunk and they have little contact with him. I was her house mother when I first worked at Alalay in 2006 and I soon grew very fond of her. She left the Alalay programme at age 18, worked for several years to save enough money to study and then embarked on a five-year law course at university, plus one year for a dissertation. Isabel has completed the first year, covering politics and civil law, and hopes to specialize in the latter.



In Bolivia it is possible to “dip in and out” of university courses at the end of each year and she is currently working in a shop to earn enough money to support herself for the second year. Isabel is determined to succeed and pointed out that an increasing number of judges in Bolivia are now women!



Her brother **Pedro** came to Alalay aged seven and left when he was conscripted into the Bolivian army. Some of his army work (such as clearing fields of coca leaves which would have been made into cocaine) was particularly dangerous and he thus received extra pay - which he saved. He managed to get a job in a bank on leaving the army and continued to work there for a couple of years whilst doing a financial management course at university in his spare time.

He came to the conclusion that, if banks could make a profit, so could he. He started loaning money in a small way, using peoples' refrigerators or other household equipment as security, and in the meantime took a very serious interest in the world money markets. He invested in a Broadband connection in his one rented room and began (in a very small way) to buy and sell US dollars, euros and yen through a syndicated organization dealing in foreign currencies. He says that he's made some mistakes and lost some money – however he also says that his mistakes have taught him valuable lessons and that he now earns considerably more than he did with the bank. His closing well-known words were “without risk there is no profit!”.

**Maria** came from a very large family, who lived in a small hut in the countryside and were too poor to feed their children. She became good friends with **Rodrigo** towards the end of their time at Alalay and on leaving they decided to move in together. Rodrigo worked hard on his Alalay-funded car mechanic's course and now has a full-time job in a garage. They have two small children and live together as a strong family unit in a tiny apartment. Rodrigo was thrilled to say that he has been saving money for a small car, which he hopes to buy next year so he can take his family on day trips. His ambition is to one day have his own workshop!



The last person **Jorge**, has a different but equally successful story. He was often beaten at home by his stepfather and escaped from his family as a young child to live on the streets. He slept on a garage roof, sniffed glue and cleaned car windscreens for a few pence a day. Jorge was always a very athletic boy at Alalay and when he left decided to become a professional boxer. He trains seven days a week at a local academy and has won a number of fights. He recently took part in a lightweight boxing contest in Argentina and just might fulfill his dream of becoming an international champion. In the evenings Jorge works in a fast-food restaurant to pay his rent, and also helps his mother pay for his youngest sister's school books when he can.