



## COLOMBIA '21



In the last 15 months we have had only one Appeal so our income was down by 13% last year and 12.5% so far this year. The fact that it isn't worse is due to the faithfulness of our supporters, for which we're very grateful. We have had to reduce the amount of money we send to Colombia each month by 30%, but this was not just due to the reduced income; it has been done with an eye to the future because we don't know what the fund-raising situation is going to be like later this year. We do have a few Appeals planned for the Autumn, and we hope these will be able to go ahead: but this is far from certain. If they don't, we shall definitely have a problem. In the meanwhile, the Trustees have thought it prudent to reduce the monthly transfers to Colombia in order to make the money we have stretch as far as possible. So, at the moment we're operating at a reduced level and should be able to maintain this for the rest of this year using the money we have in hand at the moment. The crunch will come later this year when our funds have been depleted and we need to resume our full work in Colombia.

Over in Colombia, our partner-charity Fundación ;Vivan Los Niños! (or Funvini for short) normally cares for several hundred children. During the pandemic there have been repeated lengthy lockdowns in the city and many severe protocols have been put in place, and *Casa Walsingham* has had to remain closed for most of the last 15 months. All this has caused great hardship to our children because most of their parents normally work in the street. There is no unemployment benefit in Colombia, so if the parents can't work, the families have no income. However, last year we managed to provide food-parcels to sustain 1,200 people who might otherwise have been in real danger of starvation. We have also kept our small school, for older boys from the street and girls who are teenage mothers, running so that they can complete their education and gain the High School Certificate that is an essential preliminary for obtaining a decent job or further qualifications. *Cor Videns*, our choir, has also kept going. Please use this link <https://we.tl/t-KTaxDSPEzS> to download a video of a little song they recorded virtually from their respective homes.

The authorities are now allowing us to attend small groups of children six days a week at *Casa Walsingham*. The schools are not open yet, so the children are still having to do their lessons on line, but their only access to these is via the small screen of a parent's cellphone; and the internet signal in the poor barrios where they live is only intermittent. (We thought about providing them with tablets, but decided that the risk of their being pawned or stolen was too great.) Also, in many cases the parents lack the time and either the interest or the ability to help the children with their school work, so many of them are falling badly behind, or even dropping out of school altogether.

At *Casa Walsingham* our children can access the internet on proper computers, and they have the support of our specialist teachers. Those who are found to be experiencing the greatest difficulties are invited to receive a couple of weeks of intensive support in residence at *Casa Bannatyne*. We pay for them all to have a Covid test on the day before they arrive, so the house is treated as a large bubble where masks and social distancing are not necessary, and the children can play with their friends as usual. All of our staff have monthly tests as well, and as these cost £50 a time, they are a heavy additional cost.



Although our staff are in touch with as many of our children as is possible under the restrictions we don't know yet what problems are going to surface when all our children return to us and when our staff are permitted to go into the shanty-towns again. We suspect that we shall find that our children are in need of extra support, and that more children than ever will be asking for our help. It is very frustrating to be unable to plan properly because the authorities have still not published a road-map of the way back to normal life, and the regulations are constantly changing. The vaccination programme has at last got underway, and it seems to be going well, but nothing is certain. The situation has been made worse by an orchestrated campaign of violent social unrest in advance of next year's Presidential and Congressional elections. Fr Peter writes that:

**“the disturbances are still continuing. In Medellín, the start and end point of these disturbances is often in a park between Casa Walsingham and San Esteban—the parish to which Fr Peter is attached. The riots are being coordinated, and Martín Corrales—-one of our staff—-who lives in that area, has seen large groups of young men coming down from the barrios to join in. When the police intervene to break up the crowds, the rioters run into Moravia—a shanty-town built on a rubbish dump—-which is a warren of narrow streets. They commit acts of vandalism there, and the police pursue them, firing tear-gas indiscriminately, and the gas gets trapped in the narrow streets and seeps into the houses. Some of the canisters land on the roofs of the houses, and the gas gets in under the tiles. This is very unpleasant and frightening for the people who live there, who are trapped between the rioters and the police. The tear gas burns the children's eyes, and we are trying to obtain medical advice about how they can protect themselves. The violence is driving some of the families to move further up the mountain. Some of the people who rent rooms to the Venezuelan refugees are exploiting them by doubling their charges, and this is forcing them to move further out, too. This means that it is harder for them to spare the time to bring their children to Casa Walsingham, or to come to collect them again, so this is making the attendance of some of the most needy children sporadic. Although they have to work hard catching up on their school-work when they come to Casa Bannatyne, they love to come because it provides a very welcome break for them, with plenty of good food and fun; and they often don't want to go home when their two weeks in residence ends”.**

We are grateful for all your previous donations and for anything that you are able to send us in the future.



With our warmest good wishes,  
Pauline Allan  
Administrator

**To donate with your mobile please text 'Donate Vivant 8' to 88802. After a few minutes you should receive a link to take you to our donation site with Enthuse. Many thanks!**

