

Latin Link On Location

June 2017 – transcript

George: Hi, I'm George Luke and welcome to Latin Link On Location. This is a podcast that takes you right into the heart of what Latin Link members are doing both in Latin America and around the world. We hope you find this podcast informative and inspiring.

On this podcast we will go on location to Guatemala and Colombia, and also to Belfast where the annual Inspire! Ireland conference recently took place.

This is Latin Link on location and we are on location in Colombia. Abi Figueroa is the Short Term Coordinator for Colombia. Her husband Pipe is currently on a Stride placement. One of the areas they are working in is mobilising Colombians for mission. This includes organising short-term trips for Colombians so that they get a feel and heart for mission. Just before Christmas Abi and Pipe organised a small team of Colombians and Striders to go to the north coast of Colombia to an area hugely affected by Hurricane Matthew last October. They tell us what happened.

Pipe: This December we took a team of eight up to the Caribbean coast of Colombia to a town called Pueblo Viejo, to work with a community affected by the Hurricane Matthew in October.

Abi: It was so badly hit that some house have actually disappeared they didn't even get destroyed and were left in ruins, they actually disappeared. It is a community which is already very poor and there is a lot of need – social need, physical need, emotional need and now with the impact of the hurricane it is even worse. Coming up to Christmas, we felt we really wanted to do something with some Colombian young people who are in their Christmas holidays to go and bless the community.

Pipe: We are working alongside a Compassion Church, which works with over 300 children from the area.

George: You heard Abi mention the team, now let's meet them.

Hello my name is Vandina. I am so excited to be in this mission trip because I am going to Pueblo Viejo this coming Friday and also we are superexcited to be with those kids and play games with them and just share cool moments with them.

Hi my name is Levi.

Hi my name is Ryan Chaugorz. Don't worry, be happy!

Hi I am Ava and I am from Switzerland

Hello I am Juan Paulo, and I am from Bogota and I am excited to go on this trip.

George: Once the team arrived they were able to see the devastation for themselves. Here's Pipe.

Pipe: As soon as we arrived we set off to meet some of the families who had lost their homes. The conditions were quite shocking.

Abi: One family showed us the wall remaining from their house which is now surrounded by sand. Other than the wall it is really hard to believe that there were houses here before. They also showed us the house where they are living now, and there are five families living in this house at the moment, each family in a double bed.

Here's the sea. It looks like it's just a gorgeous sea but here you can see how close everyone's living to the beach. Here are all the fishing boats lined up to go out. You can see here the remains of some of the houses. You can see here where these trunks are, for example, that's the

poles of people's houses. So there is no houses there now.

George: *Abi and Pipe talked to some of the locals to find out about their situations.*

Abi: This is Patricia and her nephew Adrian and Luis Karine and her newborn baby Salome Sofia and her daughter Nalice Juliet.

They were living in this house over here which is now just a wall, and now they have had to move to Patricia's house, which is this house over here. This part here was destroyed. And in this house here there are five families living because of the hurricane which came and destroyed all this area here which is behind them, all of this area here was houses. Here we can see how close we are to the sea, which came right in and totally covered all of this area.

Luis Karine was pregnant with this gorgeous little baby at the time of the hurricane.

George: *The team came to do practical work but soon found out what people wanted most. Here's Pipe again.*

Pipe: We were surprised by how open everyone was and how grateful they were to be able to share their experience. We overheard one mother say to another, they came here from really far away to be able to hear our stories. The most humbling thing was realising out what everyone wanted most was our love and friendship.

Abi: We spent a significant amount of time helping out with the end-of-term activities for the Compassion project, and in particular the Christmas party, which was crazy but a lot of fun.

All of the children in the project received a Christmas present through compassion, which meant that we were able to focus all the money you gave us on helping the community. We spent a long time talking to the project leaders and hearing their needs. In the end, we decided to split the money into two areas. Firstly, we spent about a third of the money on food parcels for 20 families we had met and talked to so they had enough to get them through the Christmas period.

Pipe: The second area needs explaining. The community sits between two huge bodies of water, the sea and the lake. The whole area is therefore water saturated and building is very difficult. Areas where they were able to build were filled with damp, which damages the wall and makes cement flaky and rough. The only way to avoid this is tiling. Almost all the floors in the project were damp, rough cement. This was one of the main concerns of the project staff as there were children running around on this all day. It generates a lot of dust and when they fall they cut themselves badly. After making food

parcels we had just enough money to buy tiles for the floor in the main area, the office and the classrooms and pay for some local workers to lay the tiles. This was also very significant as the only source of employment in the area is fishing, which doesn't pay well.

George: *Abi was able to wrap Christmas presents with the locals.*

Abi: I personally wrapped presents alongside a mum who shared her story with me of how through her daughter in the Compassion programme she had become a Christian and left her alcoholic lifestyle.

Many of the children in these programme are the ones who've lost their homes. It was really impossible to know how to help each family but we hope that by improving conditions of the project that their lives as a whole will also be affected positively.

Thank you so much to all of you who gave and prayed and supported us on this mission. The most exciting thing is that we've made a connection with the team there and we've started talking with them already about how we can continue to support this work.

We will keep you updated. Thank you very much!

George: *Abi and Pipe have a number of areas that they would like us to pray for.*

First to pray for the coastal communities that lost so much through the events of Hurricane Matthew. Pray for the ongoing relief efforts.

Second, pray for the Compassion programme in Pueblo Viejo as it seeks to reach out to hundreds of children and disciple them into a strong faith in Jesus. Pray especially for the 300 or so kids who you just heard being so expressive. Pray that as each of these children grow up they will continue to love and serve the Lord enthusiastically and expressively.

Finally, pray for Abi and Pipe and the Latin Link Colombia team as they partner with other mission organisations in Colombia to mobilise Colombians for mission. Pray that many Colombians will understand the place and importance of mission within church life and particularly the need to reach out across their nation and to the nations beyond.

George: *This is Latin Link On Location and today we are on location in Northern Ireland. It's the 2017 Latin Link Inspire! Ireland conference. Let's go and meet some of the people who are here.*

My names Trevor Long. I am from a church called Rosemary Presbyterian and we got involved many years ago because of Rosie

Gibson, who was a worker in our church, and a member of our congregation before she went out to Peru. I think the lasting impression from me this year, and I've been to many of these conferences, is that there is a really good number of people, a greater enthusiasm, younger people. The fruitfulness is coming already just in the way we have got together today. It's very encouraging seeing all the people here, hearing all the stories but there's a new enthusiasm.

My names Rose Wade and I am going to Guatemala. I thought today was really useful to hear what others' experiences are but also to share with others and to pray together was really beneficial.

I'm Wilma Davies and I work with Incoming Mission. One of the things I will remember is Kat's powerful video and music on The Window. Kat's video was about the human trafficking of young girls and how those girls are being used in the sex trade in Brazil, and she used the story of an eight-year-old girl to show how horrendous this situation is – a girl at the window.

Hi I am Daniel. I am from Northern Ireland here. I thought it was a really good day, really good to hear all these different stories. As a person who's going on Stride I can relate with a lot of people. I was really struck by a lot of the stories, especially the story of Kat and Ricardo in Brazil working with the girls who are abused. So it just struck home with me.

My name is Anne Cole. I live near Belfast, we have been involved with Latin Link for many years now. It is really encouraging to get together with the wider Latin Link community here and just hear what God is doing through and with the mission and the missionaries and it's just really encouraging.

My name's Katelin Fiddis and I'm 19 and I'm going to Brazil on Stride, I'm not sure what city yet. One thing I've taken away from today is that I'm just going to continue to pray that God will break my heart for what breaks his in everything that I do here and when I go to Brazil.

Hi I'm Kerry, I'm 20 and I study Spanish and Portuguese at Queens in Belfast. Hopefully in February 2018 I'm going to Brazil with Latin Link. One thing I took away from today would probably be that I need to pray for more passion for the injustices in our world. I can't turn a blind eye now that I know loads of the things that are going on, I can't pretend not to.

George: *What's the most important thing the Church in Ireland and the rest of Britain can learn from the church in Latin America? This was a question that I asked a retired Stay member Winifred Clayton.*

That's a big, big question! I think maybe

something of our enthusiasm of the gospel and that we are willing and able and expectant to see people converted and really saved and churches growing, and we expect that through the Lord's grace and power in our lives and we go for that goal.

My name's Jonathon Sloan, and I am the minister of OC Presbyterian Church in Randalstown. I came here nine months ago as the new minister and didn't know an awful lot about Latin Link. I knew a bit about them but I suppose because Ruth McKee is a member of the congregation here and the McKee family that has brought it home to me and I've got more interested in their work and I'm following it closely. It is a real delight to host a conference here today for us.

I am Heather Law. I am the regional coordinator for Latin Link in Ireland. We have had our Inspire day, which has been great. It's been really good to see different people here from Latin America as well as Northern Ireland, the south of Ireland and from England as well. We have had people feeding back, from Stay members like Ruth McKee who works in Peru. It's great to hear her because I went to visit her and to see updates of the children who she's working with who I met, so that's been lovely. Inspiring – lots of hard issues which we will continue to pray for. As somebody said – we haven't solved the problems we are just part of what God's doing bigger, and his kingdom building. It's been great to hear about lives being changed. This afternoon we had a lot of people who are new applicants – Striders who are preparing to go to Brazil, to Guatemala, to Chile and possibly to Colombia. There is lots of questions, there is lots of things to come into place for them to go but we've continually seen God provide for young people. Just to have that youth of the next generation coming into mission has been really encouraging to see especially in the last nine months here in Northern Ireland and to see even how conversations which happened two years ago are continuing to bear fruit of people going forward to mission, especially from the Latin American context. It's been great to have Jax McCallum here who's one of our Incoming Missions. I would love to see that increase and more placements open up within the context of Ireland for incoming mission.

George: *This is Latin Link On Location and today we are on location in Guatemala. We are here with Kate Fisher, who has just finished two years on a Stride placement and has now returned to Guatemala on the Stay programme.*

Kate: For my Stride placement I have been working as a social worker at Oasis, which is a home for girls who have been sexually abused.

I have been doing a variety of things on the

social work team at Oasis; accompanying girls to court hearings, visiting their family members at home, supervising the contact time with family. I have also looking into the policies and procedures. I have recently been trying to do some analysis around the girls' cases and the outcomes that we are seeing so we can have a more focused approach on how the girls and their families are supported.

But the real focus and mission of Oasis is to seek justice for girls who have suffered unspeakably horrific crimes in a society that struggles to recognise abuse as a violation of human rights and struggles to assign sufficient resources to seek justice and challenge that cycle of abuse that perpetuates society.

The girls arrive from very broken homes. At Oasis, we as a team of social workers, psychologists, teachers, house mums aim to give the girls a really holistic education. The girls will go to school, sometimes for the first time. For most girls that's at a local school but for those who need specialist attention there is a school on site too. For all there is tutoring available during homework time and it is something we put a real emphasis on - preparing the girls for later life.

Part of the holistic education that Oasis offers is teaching well-being and how the girls can take care of themselves. That they deserve care and attention. But boundaries need to be put in place too. Discipline is important but that discipline must also be kind. One way that the girls learn to manage their emotions, especially in the context of these new boundaries, is through play. So it is important that they learn how to be children again.

Oasis has a football pitch, a basketball court, an adventure play area – so it is the perfect environment for letting off steam. I've had an incredible opportunity during my Stride placement to bring my understanding and skills in case management and liaison to the social work team at Oasis, as well as interpersonal skills as I have been walking alongside the girls during really challenging times in their lives. That's been a challenge and a real privilege.

I've learnt a huge deal about God's heart for justice. We've seen his goodness and blessing in abundance at Oasis. But also hearing first-hand about the extent of the suffering and abuse is really tough and over the last two years God has been equipping me with what I need to not get tired of doing what is good, as we hear in Galatians.

The Oasis home for girls is a battleground, and we really need your prayers, so thank you for praying, they are really felt.

I have two main prayer requests today. At the moment we are expanding the house for child

mothers, so that's for girls who have fallen pregnant through rape. We need more staff to care for the girls. That would be staff not only to care for the girls but also how to teach them to be mums when they are still children themselves. It's a really tough job so it's really important we get the right people for those posts.

Please could you also be praying for our family reunification programme. At Oasis wherever possible we aim to reunite the girls with their biological family. But the problems from which the abuse arose are entrenched in the whole family system. So that presents a real challenge for us, and the social work team works tirelessly to build relationships with the girl's family, often driving long geographical distances across the country to make visits to the girls' families and make relationships and really invest in the girl in a holistic way in the girl through her family. So if you could be praying for those two things that would be great.

Thank you very much.

George: *The issue of child abuse and state run children's homes in Guatemala made world news in March when 40 girls died in a fire at a government-run children's home on the outskirts of Guatemala City. Several of the survivors of this fire were subsequently moved to the Oasis centre. Pray that these girls and the additional survivors will recover from the additional trauma resulting from the fire. Pray also that this event will act as a catalyst that causes society and the government in Guatemala to face up to the issue of child abuse and to radically change how the nation deals with it.*

That's all for this addition of Latin Link On Location. Our thanks to Abi and Pipe and to Kate for taking time to talk to us, as well as everyone that's at the Inspire! Ireland conference. If you would like to know anything more about what you've heard on this podcast there are several ways you can get in touch with us – you can find us on Latin Link's Facebook page, or you can follow us on Twitter. If you are listening to this via the Latin Link App then you can contact us through that or you can just visit the Latin Link website at www.latinlink.org.uk. Once again, thanks for listening and do join us next time at Latin Link On Location.



Latin Link
COMMUNITY WITH A CALLING

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