

Step report Colombia

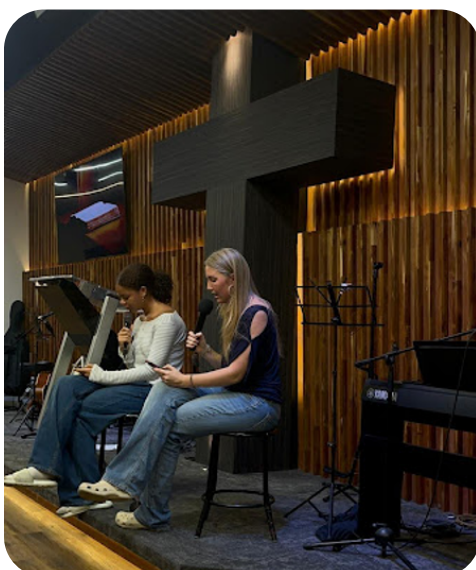
First days in Medellín:

We are now in Medellín and have completed our first day and orientation here! Over the next four weeks we will be working with Fundación Ciudad Refugio. The foundation started 15 years ago and runs some incredible programmes and ministries.

The Bakery: Men from the rehabilitation programme work in the bakery. The bakery supports the foundation financially allowing more men to be funded through the rehab process. It sells pastries, coffees and lunches at good prices and has some nice tables and sofas to relax on whilst you eat.

Rehabilitation programme: The programme is usually a year long, after which they are offered a three month extension as a transition period so it is not such an extreme integration back into a normal job in society. The foundation is very strict in order to combat the three main issues that the men struggle with: women, money and food. One of their aims is to keep the men busy both physically and mentally, so that their minds are always occupied and there is a lower possibility of them falling into temptation. They are also very conscious about women's clothing for the same reason, to respect the journey the men are on and support them in it.

During their time in the programme, the men are required to stay inside the foundation unless on planned outings. For the first few weeks they stay in a solitary room with a small window that lets sun and air in, and they slowly progress to rooms with larger windows and more of a street view to gradually have more exposure with the outside world when they are less likely to fall into temptation and are preparing to reintegrate with the rest of society. All the men play football twice a week to break the cycle of being confined to the building, to be able to release some emotions and also to exercise and be healthy.



Women's programme: Sadly, the foundation isn't able to run a women's programme at the moment as there aren't enough female volunteers who are able to stay and accompany the women full time, but they hope to be able to run one in the future.

It is also more difficult to run a women's programme as women tend to share more of their emotions. They require more volunteers to spread the burden out, so one volunteer isn't too overwhelmed with a lot of emotional baggage.

The building itself: The building has been designed cleverly and with purpose in everything. For example, the floor for the women's programme has direct access to the street so that they don't have to walk through the mens programme to get to their floor. Also, to be economic, they have solar panels on the roof which cover almost the entire energy needs of the building. They also have a church on the lowest floor of the building that all the men of the foundation can use for prayer and reflection and it also has regular services on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings with a youth service on Saturday evenings as well.



The work we have been doing

Our team has been helping in the day to day functioning of the place and the community here. Each morning two people clean five floors of stairs to keep the building fresh and clean. We have four people in the kitchen daily, to peel, chop and prepare vegetables for breakfast, lunch and dinner for the volunteers and the men on the programme here. Twice a week the boys help Gustavo (one of the volunteers for the foundation) to load the truck with lots of vegetables at a big market in Medellín to feed everyone at the foundation and to be sold in a small shop next the bakery to provide some extra money to support the foundation. We also have two people helping in the bakery at different times throughout the day.

Our day off



On our day off, Monday, we went to Comuna Trece (13) and learnt a lot about the interesting but extremely sad history of the district from a local tour guide. He has lived in Comuna 13 for the past 20 years after the guerillas came to his home town on the coast (a strategic location for drug trafficking) and gave the family the three options they are notorious for: 1) Join the guerillas 2) Leave your house and everything behind or 3) Be killed. So he is one of many who moved to Comuna 13 to illegally settle, because they were internally displaced.

However, in the 1980s and 90s, before he came to Comuna 13, it was actually controlled by the guerillas who he was escaping. Why did the guerillas come to Comuna Trece? First of all, because of the way it was constructed. It is really easy to hide from the government in all the alleyways of the barrio (neighbourhood). Secondly, the people were very vulnerable due to them being displaced and living illegally which made it easier to control them as the government wouldn't be there to protect them.

Please keep praying for the team, thank you!



Wholehearted mission

Our verse of the year is from Colossians 3:23, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..."* Our 'whatever' can only happen because of your support. Please consider donating to help keep us serving: www.latinlink.org.uk/donate