



BUILDING COMMUNITY IN PERU'S SHANTY TOWNS

By Jenny Pope

COLLIQUE, Peru — On the outskirts of Lima, Peru live some of society's most marginalized people. Many have escaped extreme conditions – guerilla warfare, drug cartels and unending poverty – in hopes of finding employment and a better life in “shanty towns.” But what they really find is more despair.

“Their living conditions are really terrible,” said Dr. Luis Campos, a Houston-based cardiologist who first started visiting the desert shanty town Collique during a medical mission trip in 2000. Buckner had given Campos and his team shoes to distribute to children in need.

“When we went into Collique, we thought it would be very quick and easy,” he said. “We had already identified all the shoe sizes for each child. They had told us there were 60 children, but when we got there more than 120 were waiting for us. We had to take the identified children inside and close the door to the rest of the crying children. It was extremely painful.”

Once inside, Campos and his team noted more devastation: dirt floors, straw mats and cardboard walls. “It was the poorest part of Peru we had seen,” he said. “Not coming back was not an option. God was calling us to make a lasting impact in Collique.”

Campos, who was born in Peru, felt called to start a ministry called Operación San Andrés to serve the nearly 100,000 people living in Collique. They purchased land and

built a house and sports complex in which to serve children and families in need through meals, education and after-school care. Medical teams would visit throughout the year to provide medical and dental work at the nearby community center.

In 2007, the ministry became even more organized with the addition of Christopher and Jessica Rose, a full-time missionary couple.

And Buckner became even more invested in the project by employing a full-time social worker for the center, in addition to the current director, program assistant and psychologist.

“These children have little moral, physical or spiritual support,” Campos said. “They’ve been raised by single mothers, they’ve been abandoned by family, they’ve been abused by stepparents... anger is one of the few emotions they express freely.

“We have to teach them the basic things – to wash, clean their teeth, be polite. We now see their health improving, we see them growing and learning new things, like how to sing.”

The Buckner social worker will help to identify the needs of families in the community, connecting them with critical government resources and support. One of the most common needs for many children in Collique is a legal birth certificate. Without one, they cannot receive any help from government agencies.

Plans are underway to begin teaching high school students career skills and to provide further education on pre-natal care to a nearby hospital, in addition to medical supplies already shipped each year.

For more information about Operación San Andrés, visit www.operacionsanandres.org. ■



TOP: The children of Collique patiently wait for Vacation Bible School to begin at Operacion San Andres. **BELOW:** Rebecca Wilburn, dental hygienist, cleans the teeth of Nataly during a medical mission trip in 2005. Shortly after this visit, the team arranged for this little girl to receive critical orthopedic surgery from a doctor in Houston which helped her to walk for the first time. (photos courtesy of Vince Smith)

