



VIVANT!

Issue 19

The Newsletter of

LET THE CHILDREN LIVE!

Autumn 2011

Empty Larder Days

In the musical *Oliver!* the gang of young pickpockets sing:

*If it should chance to be
We should see
Some harder days,
empty larder days,
why grouse?*

The children who live or work in the streets in Colombia experience conditions very similar to those known by the Artful Dodger and his friends—except, of course, that Colombian cities like Medellín are much more violent than nineteenth-century London was.

The recession and the fall in the value of the pound have now brought “empty larder days” both to **Let The Children Live!** and to many of the boys and girls who rely on the charity’s help. But we are all trying to meet this challenge with the Dodger’s positive spirit.

We certainly cannot grouse about the generosity of our supporters. They have managed to sustain the level of donations in pounds remarkably well. The real problem has been with the weakness of Sterling.

In July 2006 £1 was worth C\$5,030 (Colombian pesos): but by July 2011 its value was only C\$2,782. This 45% fall has decreased the purchasing power of the donations we send to Colombia by about £250,000 a year; and the impact of this has been made even worse by the effects of inflation.



Let The Children Live! provides food for malnourished children

All this has forced **Funvini**, the Colombian offshoot of **Let The Children Live!**, to make deep cuts to its budget, to the size of its staff, and to the number of children for whom it cares. Fortunately, the arrival of two substantial legacies has enabled this to be done in a managed way.

The kindness of these two benefactors prevented a set-back from becoming a disaster. Future bequests may play a similarly vital role; and in these trying times it is only such bequests that are likely to make it possible for the charity to expand again, to buy land, and

to fulfil the dream of building a special school for its children.

The work of **Funvini** has now been restructured to make the best possible use of its limited resources. And although the number of children in its various

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programmes in 2011 has had to be reduced from about 500 to just over 300, each case has been assessed individually to try to ensure that those at greatest risk have not been left unprotected.

Nonetheless, because **Funvini** is an organisation of last resort, *all* of the children for whom it cares are vulnerable. It is only the degree of vulnerability that varies; and in a city as volatile as Medellín, this can deteriorate very suddenly. The boys and girls whom the charity can no longer manage to help on a regular basis are therefore still being invited to occasional events, so that an eye can be kept on them. And the children know that if a crisis develops, the doors of *Casa Walsingham*, **Funvini**'s day-centre, will not be closed to them.

At present, however, visitors to Medellín may wonder why surprisingly few children are now to be seen actually sleeping on the pavement in the city centre. The reason for this is that the municipal authorities have placed many of the street-children in a special secure unit in the city's mental hospital. And those who are determined not to end up there naturally try to keep out of sight.

Fr Peter Walters, the charity's Founder and Director, was very concerned by the children's disappearance. He therefore sent Martín Rosendo, **Funvini**'s chief street-educator, "under cover" to the mental hospital to find out what was going on. But when Martín arrived there his cover was blown because some 60 of the children came rushing up to greet him!

Martín was relieved to find that the children were being well cared for. They seemed to be happy, and

most of them had put on weight. However, it is not yet clear what will happen to them when they come out. If funding for the unit is ended when a new Mayor takes over in 2012, the danger is that the children will soon end up back in the street again.

In the meanwhile, Martín and his team of street-educators will continue to reach out to the boys and girls who have managed to avoid being rounded up.

In addition to providing care for the children who live or work in the street, the funds raised by **Let The Children Live!** are still being used to finance a wide range of other groups and activities. These include:

- The *Casa Walsingham* Programme for children at high social risk;
- The Special Needs Programme for children with behavioural and learning difficulties;
- The Choir;
- The Young Mums' Programme for teen-age girls and their babies;
- *Casa Bannatyne* — **Funvini**'s residential home.



Let The Children... have fun!



*Johan Fernando Moreno
1995-2010*

Tragically, since the publication of the last issue of *Vivant!* the levels of violence in the shanty-towns of Medellín have risen again as rival gangs have fought to win control of extortion, prostitution and the sale of drugs. According to the local press, the gangs have been recruiting and arming children as young as 10.

Amongst those killed in 2010 was Johan Fernando Moreno, aged 14, who was being prepared by the catechists at *Casa Walsingham* to make his First Communion.

In the first seven months of 2011 children were being killed in the city at a rate of about two every three days; and the total number of murder victims under the age of 18 had risen to 134. One of these was Jhon Alexander Ceballos, a 16-year-old who belonged to **Funvini**'s Street Programme.

In such circumstances it is more urgent than ever to provide care and alternatives for youngsters who may easily get sucked into this violence as its victims, its perpetrators—or as both. Although **Funvini** is experiencing "empty larder days", with the support of **Let The Children Live!** it is still fulfilling its mission to keep children alive, and to make their lives worth living.

The Seeing Heart Choir



Cor Videns outside Casa Walsingham with Fr Peter

“**T**he Christian’s programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”

These words from Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (31,b) were the inspiration of the name that has been chosen for **Funvini’s** Choir: *Cor Videns - the Seeing Heart Choir*.

The Choir enables children from the poorer areas of Medellín to develop their musical talents in ways that their families would otherwise have been unable to afford. It certainly meets a need in this respect: some 8,000 children competed for 10 places when auditions were held in 2009.

But although the Choir aims to give the young singers a sound musical education, and aspires to enable them to sing the praises of God to the highest standards, these are not its only objectives. The Choir exists also to provide a voice

for all children whose voices are never normally heard, but whose lives are endangered by abortion, abuse, poverty and violence.

The Choir is **Funvini’s** main means of raising awareness of these issues—and much-needed funds for its work—in Colombia. It seeks to help its hearers to develop a “heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly”, so that children may have life and have it to the full.



The cover of the Cor Videns CD

It is for all these reasons that—so far—*Cor Videns* has managed to survive all the restructuring

that the weakness of the pound has forced **Funvini** to undertake. Of course, the Choir has had to bear its share of the cuts; but to destroy it altogether for motives of economy would be like eating the seed-corn in time of famine. Once the seeds have been consumed, there is nothing to plant for a future harvest; and if the Choir is closed down, the work of **Funvini** will have to continue to depend almost entirely on the support of **Let The Children Live!**

The Choir, therefore, is not a luxury. It is a key part of **Funvini’s** plans to be able, eventually, to raise a significant part of its own income. When it has reached the necessary standard, and funds permit, it hopes to go on tour in Colombia and—one day—even to come to Britain. And to those who attend their performances in Medellín, or who listen to the CD they are now making, these young singers hope to show that they are not just another singing group. They are *Cor Videns: the Seeing Heart Choir*.

Eternal Spring



Choristers in the recording studio

The control room of the recording studio is tiny - about the size of a bath room - and the vocal booth in which the children's voices are recorded is not much bigger than a bath. Only four children can fit in it at once, and then the heat there soon becomes intense. The walls are lined with egg boxes to provide sound-insulation, and the children wear earphones to receive instructions from María Adelaida, their Director, at whom they peer out through a small window rather like fish in an over-crowded aquarium.

It is in these modest facilities that children from **Funvini's** Choir have been recording a CD. The process has taken the better part of a year and has proved to be more complicated than was originally expected. The first recording sessions took place in the Chapel at *Casa Walsingham*, and involved the full Choir. But the equipment available did not allow each child's voice to be recorded individually, so if one of them made a serious mistake, the whole section had to be recorded again.

After repeated takes the children began to get bored and frustrated. A different approach was needed, and it was decided that the recording of some songs would take place in the studio. Small groups of children were then taken there to record their parts. Finally, the tracks were combined to produce the completed version of each song.

The recording process was repeatedly interrupted by concerts and holidays, and the membership of the Choir changed considerably during it. The voices of some of the leading singers started to break, and some of the older boys who had provided the Choir with tenors and baritones had to leave because the charity no longer had the funds to train them. On the other hand, some of the younger children gained in confidence and expertise; and some of the girls developed into soloists.

This experience provides good illustration of the way in which a children's choir lives in a sort of permanent Springtime, with young

voices constantly budding and blossoming, and then moving on before they reach the Summer of their maturity. This suggested the title that has been chosen for the CD: *Eterna Primavera—Eternal Spring*. Medellín's pleasant climate has caused it to become known as the "City of the Eternal Spring", and since the CD is a tribute to the talents of its children, this title is doubly appropriate.

The CD contains some Colombian folk songs in Spanish, together with some classical pieces in Latin and English which have been given a Colombian flavour. It may also feature what is believed to be the first recording of the Welsh composer Robert Arwyn's new arrangement of his setting of the *Benedictus*.

The recording was made possible by a special donation from one of the generous and loyal benefactors of **Let The Children Live!** so the cost has not had to be deducted from the charity's operating budget. However, the cuts in the length and frequency of its classes have slowed the Choir's development, and have prevented its performance on the CD from reaching the standard to which it had originally aspired. Due allowance must therefore be made for this. Nevertheless, **Let The Children Live!** and **Funvini** are proud of what the children have already managed to achieve.

We hope that *Eternal Spring* will be available before Christmas, **but the confirmed date of its release will be announced on our web site**. The CD will normally cost £5.50 (plus £1.50 postage and packing). However, two copies may be ordered from the charity for the special discount price of £10 (plus £3.00 postage and packing).

El Ludoteca

Pauline Allan writes about Funvini's work with children who have special needs



Pauline in El Ludoteca

When I was a child, the front room of my best friend's house had been made into a playroom where she and her friends could enjoy endless hours of fun, whatever the weather. And we did! So it was a real joy for me to open *El Ludoteca*—a similar playroom—at *Casa Walsingham*.

The room is delightfully decorated with pictures and coloured scenes on the walls and there is a small but well-used selection of toys, games and books. Memories came

flooding back as I watched our children happily playing in small groups or sitting on a rug with their heads buried in a book—things they would never be able to do in their homes in the shanty-towns!

Many of the children who come to *Casa Walsingham* have special needs and behavioural problems with which the ordinary schools are unable to cope. If they are not to be condemned to life in the streets, they require the specialised, individual attention they are given in *El Ludoteca*.

Funvini is one of the few organisations in Medellín to make provision for these children. **Let The Children Live!** currently funds two special-needs teachers, who have succeeded in creating an excellent relationship with these children. At *Casa Walsingham* they enjoy a safe, happy environment where they can eat, learn, play, sing, pray and experience the things that a good home provides.

Unfortunately, when the contract of one of these teachers ends in November it is unlikely that the

charity will be able to afford to renew it. More money must be saved somehow, and since all of the other programmes have already had to bear their share of the cuts this time it will be the turn of the special needs department.

Unless an additional £8,500 can be raised in the next few weeks, **Funvini** will probably lose an exceptional member of staff, and the children a much-loved teacher.

As a former teacher myself, I appeal especially to schools to help us to bridge this gap. It will certainly be a severe blow to the work of *El Ludoteca* if one of these specialist teachers has to go.



Let The Children... learn!

La Sala Farleigh



Fr Peter is given a computer lesson in La Sala Farleigh

To the children at *Casa Walsingham*, the most famous school in England is not one of the great Public Schools but Farleigh School in Hampshire.

Farleigh is a leading Catholic prep school for boys and girls between the ages of 3 and 13. Thanks to the encouragement of Fr Simon Everson, the Headmaster, the school has become a major supporter of **Let The Children Live!**

The enthusiasm and generosity of the school's children, parents and staff have made it possible to equip a computer room at *Casa Walsingham*, and this has been named *La Sala Farleigh* in their honour. Under the close supervision of **Funvini's** staff, five Macintosh computers are used there by the children to do research

for their home-work, to develop their computer skills, and to play games. Their families would not be able to afford to provide the children with computers or internet-access at home, so *La Sala Farleigh* meets a very real need, and its facilities are in constant demand.

Fr Peter said, "We hope that Farleigh's splendid example will encourage other schools to help **Let The Children Live!** to provide equipment or services which children in countries like Britain tend to take for granted, but which are only available to the fortunate few in Colombia."

Congratulations, Leidy Yurany!

On 17th June 2011 Leidy Yurany Zapata graduated as an Industrial Engineer. This was a proud day not only for Leidy but also for **Funvini**, because the charity had helped to make it possible for her to fulfil her dream.

Leidy's family has very limited means, and it seemed unlikely that she would have the chance to go to university. Fortunately, however, as a child she was a regular Mass-goer at the church where Fr Peter serves as an honorary curate. He was impressed by her intelligence, and was concerned that her ability would be wasted when she had to start work as a sweet-seller in order to boost her family's income.



Leidy Yurany celebrating her graduation

Leidy managed to win a scholarship to cover her university tuition fees,

but this did not include the cost of her transport and food. Fr Peter therefore arranged for **Funvini** to fill this gap, and with this extra support Leidy was able to take up her university place. She then became the first of the charity's students to obtain a Degree.

A small amount of carefully targeted help has given Leidy the chance to build a successful future for herself and her family. Although Fr Peter hopes that other youngsters—and especially other girls—will be inspired by Leidy's example, he is sad that **Funvini** will not be able to offer them similar support until the charity's financial situation improves.

¿Cuánto cuesta?

We are often asked how much things cost in Colombia. Compared to some developing countries, many prices there are very high. The weakness of the pound has made matters worse.

At an exchange rate of £1= Col.\$2,900, it costs **Funvini** £1.69 per day to provide a child at Casa Walsingham with lunch and a nutritious snack, including food and labour costs. This works out at £8.45 per five-day working week. A basic primary school pack of pens, pencils and exercise-books costs £7.84; and a secondary pack is £8.93.

The state medical system is so overloaded that the charity frequently has to pay for private care for the children. At the special rates **Funvini** has been able to negotiate, a dental check up costs £6.21; an appointment with a General Practitioner costs

£6.90; to see a Paediatrician costs £20.69; and a consultation with a Child Psychiatrist costs £22.76. An influenza vaccination costs £6.55 this year.



Anderson Acevedo receives his school pack

Charity Ball

A Charity Ball with solo vocalist Glen Cooper is to be held in aid of **Let The Children Live!** at the Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Norwich, on 24th March 2012. For details and tickets please call 01603-412520.

Gift Aid

In 2010 the children whom **Let The Children Live!** helps in Colombia benefited from an extra **£60,314.89** which the charity had been able to reclaim from HM Revenue and Customs under the Gift Aid scheme. This made a very significant boost to the charity's income at no additional cost to the donors. It is therefore very important for us to continue to take full advantage of this scheme, but we can only do this if the donor has signed the necessary form.

Recently a number of people who use internet banking have started making regular donations to **Let The Children Live!** Unfortunately,

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since these are anonymous, we are unable to claim Gift Aid on any of them; nor do we know if it will be safe for us to rely on them as part of the charity's regular income. We therefore request all those who have set up internet standing

orders—or who intend to do so—to contact us so that Gift Aid may be claimed whenever possible.

In the 2011 Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Gift Aid scheme is to be simplified and extended, and that

individuals will be encouraged to leave 10% of their money to charity in exchange for an equal reduction in Inheritance Tax. Please bear this in mind if you are making or revising your Will. A Form of Bequest is available on request, or it may be downloaded from the charity's web site.

To Tea with the Queen

Congratulations to Mr George McAleenan who was put forward by the Diocese of Motherwell for an invitation to attend a Garden Party at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the Queen's official residence in Edinburgh.

This was the second time that George and Mary Rose, his wife, had been to tea with Her Majesty. On this occasion they were chosen for this honour in recognition of



George working in Medellín

George's services to the Catholic Men's Society and to **Let The Children Live!**

George is the charity's principal organiser in Scotland. Since becoming involved with the charity in 1998, he has been instrumental in helping to raise about £1,000,000 for the children in Colombia, so it was very good to see his work being marked in this way.

Keeping in Touch

The supporters of **Let The Children Live!** often ask for news. To meet this need Pauline Allan, our Administrator,—with voluntary technical support from Martyn Shanks in Britain and Brian Coogan in Australia—has done a splendid job in updating the charity's web site at www.letthechildrenlive.org

Pauline posts information on the *Latest News* page quite frequently, so looking at this is now really the best way for people to find out what has been happening.

Of course, not all of our supporters have access to the internet, so for them the continued publication of paper editions of *Vivant!* is a vital way of keeping in touch. However, the printing and the postage of each issue is a major expense which we would like to reduce. It would therefore be a great help

if all our readers who have e-mail would kindly send us their e-mail addresses so that in future they may receive both *Vivant!* and receipts for their donations in electronic pdf format, and thus enable the charity to keep its printing and postage costs as low as possible. Naturally, the Trustees guarantee that the charity will not sell or otherwise divulge the contents of its mailing list to third parties, except when specifically required to do so by law.

The charity's database was put together over the years in different ways by different people, and the lack of consistency has made it very difficult to identify each of our supporters individually. Duplications are especially likely to occur when people change their addresses; or in the cases of couples when sometimes it is the husband who communicates with us, whilst at others it is the wife; or in the cases of people who

sometimes deal with the charity in an official capacity - for example, as the Treasurer or Secretary of an organisation - and at others as private individuals. And, of course, in some cases our supporters' writing is not very clear; and, inevitably, we sometimes make typing mistakes when entering details into the charity's computer. So, one way and another, there is considerable room for error.

Although a great deal of time and effort has now been expended on trying to purge the charity's database of multiple entries, and to prevent duplications from occurring in future, it is still possible that some of our supporters may receive more than one copy of each mailing. We know how irritating this can be, and we certainly do not do it on purpose. If that should happen to you—or if you change your name or address—please let us know so that we can put things right.

Important New Numbers

Several years ago we explained in *Vivant!* that the Trustees had begun the process of incorporating the charity in order to enable it to respond to our children's needs more flexibly. We hope that this process is at last nearing completion.

Although the name of **Let The Children Live!** will remain the same, it will be assigned a new registered number by the Charity Commission. This will also mean that the charity will have to be given a new bank account number.

Once the new account is active, everyone who makes donations to the charity directly through their banks—by Standing Order, for example—will be asked to notify their banks of the changes in the charity's details.

This will be very important, because our existing account will have to be closed at some stage, and no further donations will then be accepted into it.

We must also ask anyone who has mentioned the charity in their Will

to ensure that it has been so worded that the charity will eventually receive the intended legacy *even if its registered number has changed since the Will was drawn up.*

In most cases, we have no idea who is intending to help the children in this way, so we cannot contact them individually to check that the necessary wording has been used. A Form of Bequest has therefore been enclosed in this mailing of *Vivant!* Copies may also be requested from our office or downloaded from our web-site.

Where The Money Went

With some 300 children still relying on our help, we have to make the best possible use of the donations that we receive. Because *Vivant!* did not appear in 2010 in the interests of transparency in this issue we will show how this was done both in 2009 and 2010.

Of every pound the charity expended in 2009, the sum of 95.7 pence was spent on charitable purposes; and in 2010 the sum of 95.3 was spent in this way. In each year this was split between:

- donations to **Funvini** and our field-work in Colombia (87.7 pence in 2009; 87.0 pence in 2010);

- development education in schools in Britain (0.9 pence in 2009; and 0.8 pence in 2010); and
- support costs (7.1 pence in 2009; and 7.4 pence in 2010).

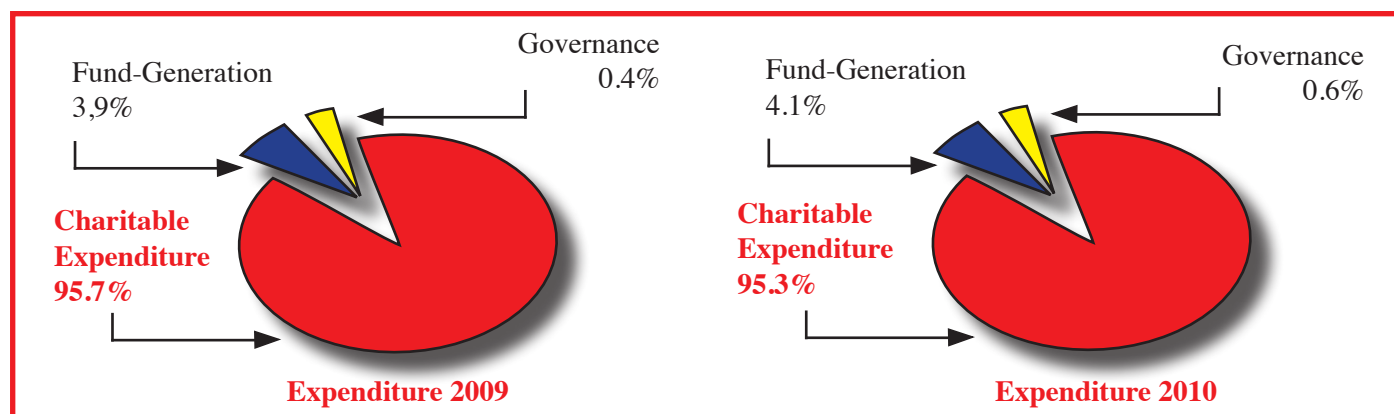
Less than 1 penny of each pound spent was used for governance each year; and only 3.9 pence (2009) and 4.1 pence (2010) for fund-generation.

In the last five years, fund-generation has never taken up more than 5.1 pence of each pound our charity has expended.

Of course, we will always aim to

do still better, but this is a record of which **Let The Children Live!** can be justly proud.

Although it is increasingly difficult for a small charity like ours to compete against organisations that spend large sums on advertising, publicity materials and frequent mailings to their supporters, we are opposed to this on principle. We consider it our duty to spend as high a proportion as possible of the funds we are able to raise in the way that our supporters really intend: supporting the work of **Funvini** with the children in Colombia.



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