



Sharon Wilcox

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Location: Ecuador



What I do: Working with people with learning disabilities, teaching them life skills and seeking to enable them to become independent.



Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus with people unconnected to church

Dear friends,

Hello and welcome to my latest newsletter. It is therapeutic to sit and reflect every three or four months on all that the Lord has been doing in and through me here in Ecuador. As the finish line approaches it is more poignant each time.

I recently saw Cristian (the young man who was shot in August) walking along the road with his father. He has put on weight, and is back playing football, though not as often as he would like. I found myself lost in the emotion of remembering this skinny 12-year-old boy who was sitting on the street corner nine years ago with nothing to do and nowhere to go. His grandmother stopping me and asking if I could do anything to help him. He became the first student of the Orchid Project. The way God has guided and nurtured him over those years and made him into the pleasant young man he has become, will never be lost on me. Please pray with me for him to find real purpose in his life as he continues to process what happened in August.

After Christmas, the project in Santo Domingo continued with the planned activities until the end of February when we stopped for our end-of-year holidays. During the first week I met with the volunteers to discuss some changes to the classes when the new year starts, and to announce that from 7 April, Mary would be taking on the role of coordinator of the project, while I offer support from a distance.

Then in the middle of March my sister came to visit. We spent 10 days together in the Andes mountains visiting as many of the tourist attractions as we could fit in, including the Equator line north of Quito. She does not enjoy hot and humid climates, so she did not get to see Santo Domingo. We had a lovely time and were blessed with unusually clear skies each day. We travelled by taxi from Quito to Mindo to see butterflies and hummingbirds among other things. The taxi was much cheaper than doing an organised tour, and was ours for the whole day, meaning we could choose where we went. Our driver, Edison, is the father of Marlon who used to be in the Orchid in Santo Domingo and transferred to the project in Quito. It turned out Edison had never been to Mindo, so it was a treat for him too. Marlon is in his mid-twenties now and has cerebral palsy. Unfortunately, his health has deteriorated recently, and he now needs support when walking.

Mary is enjoying her new role as the coordinator, although she needed quite a lot of help as she was busy with her job and church activities in April. We had a full training day with all the volunteers at the end of April,



Our taxi driver Edison at Mindo

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



looking at different types of disability. This was important as we have a new group of reserve volunteers, set up by Mary, who have not yet been needed and have not worked with people with learning disabilities before. Pastor William's aunt Elsa has joined us as a volunteer on Wednesdays.

Charlotte is continuing with her one-to-one sessions and has been helping the youngsters with writing their personal data as well as recognising colours and understanding numbers.

The project in Quito now works on a different, specific theme for two months at a time. The theme for March and April was "succulent plants". Everything they did, including daily devotionals and cooking, related to the theme in some way.

In the middle of May, Andrew Johnson from the CMS Oxford office came to visit for three days. Unfortunately, the Quito Project was closed for the week due to a church conference, and Pastor William was away in the USA. So I was pleased to take Andrew to the Orchid Project in Santo Domingo, as well as to the Life in Abundance Trust, so he could see what I do and the new extension to the church, built for the trust with a donation from the Life in Abundance (Ecuador) Trust in England. We travelled to Quito the day before Andrew left and the following morning we took an open-top bus tour of Quito. Thankfully the weather was kind to us. The following day I met up with Demetrio and Katia for coffee. Demetrio is the pastor who was responsible for the Quito Orchid Project at the beginning. That was my first official goodbye to the people I have worked with. This couple have an eight-year-old son with Down syndrome and are so grateful that there will hopefully be somewhere for him to go when he leaves school, if they decide to stay in Ecuador. Please pray for the continuation of the project for years to come. The pastor is Spanish and they spoke of the possibility of returning to Spain once their daughter finishes university. If they do, I have an open invitation to visit them.

I now have less than five months left in Ecuador. Soon I will be planning my church visits for the end of the year and the beginning of 2027, when I hope to see many of you before retiring in April.

Thank you for continuing to support me in so many ways. I am always encouraged by your prayers and generosity.

Every blessing,

Sharon



Photos from top to bottom: Mary, who has now taken on the role of coordinator; Charlotte, a volunteer, with Javier, one of our students; understanding succulents; saying goodbye to Demetrio and Katia



Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus

It's so encouraging to hear news from other CMS partners sharing the hope of Jesus with people not yet connected to churches. In Honduras, mission partners are providing mentoring for children who are likely to drop out of school, or not receive any education. They are introducing them to education and to the love of Jesus. Read more and get inspired by other stories of hope at churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope

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