

Simon & Becca Smucker

MCC Bolivia
Spring 2015



Dear Berkey family,

Greetings from Santa Cruz, Bolivia! We hope you are all well and enjoying the warm spring weather. In contrast, our days here are cooling down as we enter the winter season. We are excited to share with you a short update on our lives here in Bolivia and hope to send similar updates every few months.

We first would like to tell you a little bit about our MCC Bolivia team. Our current team consists of 22 international staff (from the US, Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Colombia) and six national (Bolivian) staff. Though the majority of our team is in Santa Cruz, we have five people located in Western Bolivia, two south of the city, and one east of the city. It is a fun and diverse team and we feel blessed to be part of such a wonderful group.

Becca has been working as a Connecting People Facilitator, supervising the one-year SALT (Serving and Learning Together) and YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) volunteers. There are currently six SALT/YAMENers who have been working since August of 2014 in daycares, children's homes, nutrition/school support centers, and a music school. Simon has been helping with this role as well as working as the office accountant. He is in charge of handling the finances for the Bolivia office and monthly reporting to MCC in the US.

We have spent Sunday mornings attending the two Mennonite churches within the city and have enjoyed starting some relationships there. It has been interesting for us to learn more about how the Mennonite church started here and ways that God continues to work within the church today.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for patience as we continue to learn Spanish
- Bolivian Mennonites who are applying to receive visas to attend Mennonite World Conference in July



(Above): Language study in Cochabamba in February

(Below): The MCC office



In order to give you a better understanding of what we do here, we would like to provide an overview of the programs of MCC Bolivia. They can be divided into four main areas:

PEACE & JUSTICE PROGAM:

- SALT/YAMEN/IVEP programs: one-year volunteer programs sending young adults from Canada and USA to Bolivia (SALT), from other countries to Bolivia (YAMEN), and Bolivian young adults to the US and Canada (IVEP)
- Seed program: two-year volunteer program; includes reflecting as a group on various topics throughout the year
- Learning Tours: groups of people who want to learn more about Bolivia
- South-South Exchanges: exchanges promoting understanding different perspectives and learning together
- Peace Platform: ecumenical group that MCC Bolivia is part of that seeks to be a voice of peace in Santa Cruz

URBAN PROGRAM:

MCC has partnerships with:

- Children's homes
- Daycares
- Nutrition centers
- Vocational training centers for women
- After-school homework help for children

These partner organizations often receive volunteers and/or funds from MCC.

RURAL PROGRAM:

- Water for Life Project: collaboration with indigenous Guarani communities and Low German Mennonites to build dry latrines and drill wells
- Sustainable agriculture projects

LOW GERMAN PROGRAM:

- Centro Menno: drop-in center for Low German Mennonites to pick-up newspapers, buy books, or rent library books
- Guía de Paz Rehabilitation Center: a partner organization of MCC that offers drug and alcohol rehabilitation services

On the following page we have included an article about one of MCC Bolivia's partner organizations, Guardería Samuelito. We hope to provide an informative article in every newsletter in order to give you a better understanding of the partners we work with.

We appreciate your prayers and support! We have been encouraged by the kind emails and cards we have received from many of you. We continue to be thankful for God's continued love and guidance through our transition.

Blessings,
Simon & Becca

*This article was written by Megan Siebert, a SALTer from Topeka, KS, who has been working with one of MCC Bolivia's partners this year.

Guardería Samuelito by Megan Siebert, SALT

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.—Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

Guardería Samuelito, a daycare in eastern Santa Cruz, primarily serves socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Approximately 80 children (ages 6 months to 5 years) walk through the gate every weekday to receive religious and academic education; social interaction; 2 meals and 2 snacks daily; and the opportunity to climb on the jungle gym in the courtyard. Additionally, approximately 25 students (ages 5-10) attend the new half-day Apoyo Escolar program, which includes lunch, tutoring, playtime, and a snack. In addition to parent volunteers, the staff includes eight teachers, a director, a cook, two groundskeeper/maintenance workers, and two social workers.

The social workers interview every family prior to enrollment to ensure that the guardería's limited resources are going to the families that need it most. Most of the constituents are single parents who need the daycare in order to be able to work, but other families are financially disadvantaged or have histories of abuse or violence. Once a month, the guardería plans and hosts obligatory workshops to help parents overcome their obstacles. This year the focuses of the workshops are negligence prevention, recognizing domestic violence, and improving self-esteem.



The Guardería began in 2006, after a survey showed that many children in the neighborhood were left home alone when parents went to work. At first, nine children attended the daycare located in Esmirna Mennonite Church. In the second year, 26 kids came. By year three, there were 56 children and not enough space. Undeterred, the Bolivian Mennonites found a nearby lot, and by 2010—with regular funds provided by MCC's Global Family and additional funds from churches in North America—converted it into a new facility exclusively for the daycare. That space still houses Samuelito and every year sees new improvements. In addition to the three rooms and kitchen for the daycare, it now has an Apoyo Escolar classroom, a room for events, a lobby and offices for the director and two social workers, and an infirmary where I, as the MCC volunteer and nurse for this year, spend part of my time.

Primarily, my role is as a classroom assistant, where I help teach letters, shapes, and other basics according to the week's theme. In the infants' room, the kids also learn how to sit up, eat, and eventually walk. But also as important here is teaching the children social skills and proper personal hygiene—brushing their teeth, bathing, and washing their hands. Because most children are here for 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, they get a majority of their pre-school education from the Samuelito staff.



It is a beautiful daycare with a wonderful staff and a worthy mission. I am proud to be here this year with MCC. I love these children, and I know that their experiences at Guardería Samuelito put them on the right path to lead better lives.