

## Anglia Region International Trip to Peru July 2012

### Trip Report

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July- and the day had finally arrived. I was at the airport with a full rucksack and 7 freshly-printed hoodies, after a process which started when I was first invited to attend an international selection weekend for Anglia Region at Pax Lodge by my county. At the time, I was just excited to be staying in London, in one of the four world centres, but now, after months of wondering, planning, emailing, fundraising and packing, I was much more excited to be heading off to darkest Peru!

The other leader and five girls arrived shortly after me and after the obligatory photos at check-in we began the mammoth journey, firstly to Madrid (which was about the longest flight I'd ever taken before) and then on to Lima (another 12 hours) where we met the in-country Kiya representative Aisha before taking an internal flight to Cusco and travelling on by minibus to Urubamba, our final destination (translation: the valley of the spiders!) Aisha was to stay with us throughout our time in Peru, in Urubamba, Cusco and Peru, and her help as a tour guide and translator was invaluable- definitely making our job as leaders so much easier. Very much travel-worn after a delayed local flight, we finally arrived at our 'volunteer house' in Urubamba staying with Delfina and her husband Julio, who cooked for us and generally pampered us throughout our stay with her- though in rural Peru the creature comforts were not quite what would be expected of home (toilet paper could not be flushed away, and it was quite usual for the water to be cut off for long periods during the day, as it had not rained for around 3 months when we arrived). Peru, especially away from the traffic and bustle of the city, was very different from the UK, with women in traditional dress selling fresh produce and spit-roasted guinea pig in the streets, fresh juice blends available to buy in plastic bags in the markets, packs of wild dogs roaming around and the view of mountains always in the background.

It was the next day before we arrived at the Rainbow Centre, a school for children with special needs run by Kiya Survivors, met the children and staff, and got stuck into our project there- creating a 'sensory garden'. The needs of the children we met were different and wide-ranging, and made me appreciate much more the provision we have for children with special needs in the UK. Simply because they were deaf and had never had access to hearing aids or little in the way of sign language, several of the children had poor speech and had been excluded from mainstream education as they were unable to participate in lessons. Without Kiya, they would have been unable to participate in education at all. Other children had autism which prevented them from being schooled in the mainstream system, or physical disabilities ranging from paraplegia to Downs' syndrome to troublesome drooling. One little girl had just learnt to walk at the age of 8, with great determination and intensive physiotherapy. It seems that in Peru, children with special needs are poorly understood and are consequently vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Some of the children's families were extremely supportive and children ran eagerly to and from the Kiya minibus each day, while other children had more challenging home situations, some now needing to live in the 'Rainbow House' orphanage where Kiya maintains a large, comfortable house and employs guardians, and which we visited during our time there.

Whatever their situation, all of the children were happy and eager to play with us as well as participate in their lessons which included practical subjects such as farming techniques as well as more familiar educational tasks. The school was brightly coloured, friendly and frequently buzzing with music and laughter, especially on our last day at the school when we painted faces, blew

bubbles and had a party! This was also the day when we showed all of the children and staff at the school the final results of the task we had been engaged in during our days working there- our sensory garden. Initially it seemed a daunting task: we were presented with a patch of ground at the back of the school which seemed to be largely rock, dirt and dust. The team worked hard, and what we created by the end of our time shifting rocks, digging, painting, planting, and decorating was something that one of the children, arriving onsite at the head of a wide-eyed crocodile, described as 'magical' and 'like Christmas'. I was proud of our girls, who despite the language barriers, played happily with the schoolchildren and worked steadily and well in our little group throughout.



All too soon, it was time to leave our volunteer house, the school and the children. The next part of our journey was to take us in the footsteps of the Incas, to Machu Picchu. This was as spectacular as promised, although it did involve a painfully early morning which started at 3am, and a gruelling trek up the steps hewn into the side of the mountain from which we finally arrived at the summit dripping in sweat, but still all together! For me, too, it was a very special 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, especially when back at base in a restaurant where we stopped for lunch, the rest of my group had arranged a Happy Birthday serenade from a Peruvian band and a cake for everyone to share.

Sadly, our trip was also coming to an end at this point, but not before a chance to explore Cusco and Lima, the capital city of Peru. We visited a park in Lima dedicated to love, and enjoyed a meal out all together on our last day, cementing friendships made throughout the trip. We all spent the remainder of our Peruvian currency haggling in the markets in Lima, and a large collection of alpaca wool blankets and clothing, panpipes, llama toys, colourful trousers and artisan crafts finally joined us on our flight back to England. Despite an incident in Lima in which we nearly missed our flight to

Madrid due to over-zealous visa-checking and a last minute sprint through the terminal, we all made it back to England safe and well, with plenty of new friends, memories, and stories to share with all who had supported us!

It felt amazing to have been part of such a fantastic project and to have been able to give our young people the opportunity to experience such a different culture and to grow in confidence and maturity as a result.

