

Mission Bolivia



Isaac and Anali Butcher and their 2 girls moved to Bolivia in 2021. They are building a mission centre to help children and families experiencing various forms of poverty. They are still raising funds to complete the centre with help from their sending church in the U.K, Relational Mission, Feed the Hungry and family and friends and they have already started to conduct a mixture of missional activities as listed below. Learn more about those they help and how you can get involved on the final page.

- Street mission serving kids as young as 6 years old, mothers with new-born babies, teenagers, young adults and even elderly folk. Often drug, substance abuse, self-harm and gang violence are obvious occurrences. Providing there are no political protests blocking the roads into the city they are able to serve food, drinks and often give out bags of fruit and bread. They also set-up a speaker and sing worship songs, give a short message and pray for people. Sometimes they also have to be a first-aider to the wounded and sick.
- Local community mission serving impoverished single parents and their children, connecting with local churches and running life skills events, providing food and fun activities for the kids.
- Connecting with rural communities they are helping address poverty, health and nutrition problems.
- Working with local Christians they do 'Church in the street' – taking music, faith and prayer to the town markets and the streets of Bolivia.

Mission Bolivia's long-term vision is to be family for abandoned kids and a mission centre where missionaries live, work and help parent children together as well as building a church community and pursuing mission and outreach across Bolivia. Isaac Butcher who is leading the mission is already working hard on outreach, missions, team building, and sustainability plans utilising food production. *Picture is front of the centre in 2023.*



The centre is a garden of life, it has been called exactly that '**Jardin de Vida**'. It has waterfalls, fruit trees, chickens, sheep, honey and vegetables growing. Isaac is developing products such as artisanal jams and plans to also plant coffee to help provide a multi-pronged approach to sustainability. *A group from Relational Mission and Cornerstone City Church recently visited and got hands-on with mission, sustainability and trekking into the jungle.*

As the centre build progresses forward, they hope more global opportunities can launch including affordable sabbaticals and retreats for church staff that provide much needed recuperation and at the same time bring in money that supports the mission and operational costs.

Bolivia statistics and information

Population: 12 million (2023 est.)

Below the Poverty Line: 36%, with 11% living with extreme poverty (2023 est.)

Life Expectancy: 64 years (2023 est.)

Literacy Rate: 95.6% (2023 est.)

Human Development Index: 118/191 (2021)

Global Climate Risk Index: 10 (2021)

Religion

~65% Catholic, of which only 35% is active. (Catholicism is often interweaved with worship of 'Pachamama', the mother earth goddess of the Incas.)

~15% Evangelical.

~The remaining percentage is made up of other religions or non-religious groups.

About the Children

Under the Age of 14: 32.4% (2023 est.)

Children under 5 Underweight: 16% (2022 est.)

Average Years of Schooling: 9 years (2023 est.) Rural areas are likely to be half that.

ECED Number: We have fed an estimated total of 1600 kids and young adults. (Apr 2023)

Feeding Frequency: 1-2x a week whilst establishing and building mission centre. Once the centre is open this will update to daily as we welcome children into the centre.



Poverty

4 out of 10 women live in poverty, more men are employed but often leave their families, wives and children to find work. Many people are barely surviving on around 12 dollars per day and <2 million Bolivians earn less than \$140 dollars a month. Most individuals would struggle to eat let alone live for less than \$150, this was evident at the end of 2021 with 26 percent of households not being able to afford basic sustenance.

Rural areas account for the majority of the poverty rates.

80% in mountainous rural areas live below the poverty line

16% of children under 5 are chronically malnourished, in rural areas this is closer to 23%.

<60% of children suffer with anaemia.

<27% of children are stunted (too short for their age), this persists into adulthood.

<800,000 kids every year are living on the streets, vulnerable or neglected and at risk.



Infant mortality is 25 per 1000 born, the UK is around 4! Nearly half of all child deaths under 5 years is due to malnutrition. **Poor diets** have contributed to disease, malnourishment, and death. **According to the UN World Food Programme:** 2/3 of rural households don't earn enough to buy a minimum supply of food for healthy living.

Sanitation. <73% can't access basic handwashing facilities that include soap and water. ~47% don't have safely managed sanitation services. ~10% can't access standard drinking water.

Violence and exploitation



In 2017 Bolivia was reported to have the highest rates of sexual violence in South America with 1 in every 3 women experiencing sexual abuse before they are 18 years old, often by family members. Less than 5% of all sex crimes result in convictions.

~15% of children between the age of 7 and 14 are working, some in dangerous jobs including mining, working with explosives and agriculture work involving dangerous chemicals. Some are also subject to commercial sexual exploitation because of human trafficking, others work as a form of slavery "such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict" (antislavery.org).

Children that are rescued from the worst forms of child labour are not all referred to social services due to a lack of available care homes and shelters. Those that are referred are often cast out of their shelters due to fixed timelines rather than an assessment of need. Better shelters and homes exist but are often understaffed or underfunded. They suffer from abuse and bullying within their walls, and some appear as more correctional institutions rather than therapeutic homes that regard and treat residents as family.



Mission at work– by Isaac and Anali

The first family we helped also helped us. We were praying for a builder and unbeknown to us at the same time a builder (Gustavo) was being kicked out of his home with his wife (Silvia), their kids and a few clothes. They managed to stay with an Auntie for a few days, but she couldn't support them either and they had to leave. They were surviving on a few pieces of bread a day and praying for work.

One of Gustavo's friends received a phone call needing a builder for one day's work... it was the company we asked to install our solar system! Because Gustavo's friend couldn't work Gustavo got that opportunity and later that day met us. We were able to employ Gustavo for several months and he also asked if his family could live with us on-site for a short time until they could get back on their feet. So, we spent about 4 weeks all together and during this time Anali helped Silvia with their kids, teaching them and she also cooked with Silvia and explained about how to cook and eat healthily.



At the time we were living in tents and a makeshift shack, washing clothes in the river and showering in our stream – often next to wildlife, on one occasion a snake was bathing next to us! We cooked outside on gas stoves and sometimes also on fire, we carried buckets of water from the river to cook and wash food and plates. The weather was awful for a while and we couldn't dry wet clothes for over a week. It was a deep baptism into what life is like on a daily basis for many poor Bolivians living in rural areas.

Silvia had a bad gastrological problem that she was told she needed surgery for. She was taking medication for this every day. We prayed with her and within days Silvia was able to stop her medication and was pain-free. This is amazing, we want to be a healing centre and when people stay with us with any illness we believe God can heal them. Gustav worked with us for several more months before he was able to find stability again. He now works driving buses in the city.



ON THE STREETS in the city when we meet the homeless we offer them a way out. We can't wait to open our own doors to help them, especially the kids and women that have run-away from centres because of abuse and bullying, these issues and the stories we listen to break our hearts. When you build trust with these fragile hearts and minds it's hard to persuade them to go with you to a centre where you don't work or live. It's also difficult dropping them off at another centre as you feel personally responsible for seeing them through and most centres won't allow contact for the first month or two.



All that being said, we do work with and have good relationships with other centres that can provide options to those that are serious about getting off the street. We have found a really good centre for adults which we often refer to and is much needed as our centre is for children.



Johan is one lad we helped...

His mum died when he was young, his dad was violent and he ran away from home when he was about 11 years old. The day we met him he cried as he explained how his friends died in his arms just the previous week. One died because of tuberculosis, the other was hit by a passing car. He sobbed as he told us "Nobody helped my friends, they treat us like dogs". We sat with Johan and his friends for maybe 1 hour. We prayed with them all and gave out food and drink. Ages in this group ranged from 12yrs to 40yrs. Most being on the street since they were kids, perhaps the youngest since he was 5. We offered them all an opportunity to leave street life.

1 week later we found Johan in another area on his own. He had been attacked the previous night and had his trainers stolen, he was in a bad way. Again, we sat with him and finally he decided he wanted to get off the street. We took him to buy new clothes, have a shower and eat. We bought him soap, a towel, a pillow and a few other items needed to get him set-up in a centre on the other side of the city. He stayed around 3 weeks at the centre – not long enough to finish their course or to know if he will go back to the streets, but when he left, he walked out with permission, he didn't escape and he said he wanted to fix things with his dad and find a job. Although we thought we saw him on one occasion washing car windows as we drove through the city, we've not met him on the street since this time. We pray that our help was enough for him to persevere with his intentions and leave the past behind for good.

Since we began our street work we have met kids as young as 6yrs old, mothers with new-born babies and a lot of teenagers. Most of them are sniffing glue and drinking alcohol, sometimes drinking 70% alcohol sanitiser – which is very available and super cheap since covid-19.



RURAL BOLIVIA is a huge area spread out across mountains and through forests and jungles. We regularly visit rural communities close to the centre and occasionally those further afield. Typically, they have indigenous roots and often speak another language such as Quechua or Guarani.



Many are poor and surviving one day to the next. One village we visit is called Monte Verde and another is Quebrada Leon, both are within 1 hours drive from the centre and we are helping several families that live in stick and mud huts. Without windows and with plenty of gaps around the roof and walls these families are at high risk for weather conditions, insects, snakes, bats etc to enter the home. The winter here sees temperatures often dropping to 4 degrees C and sometimes lower.



They often cook on a mud stove outside, which means if it rains, they can't cook. It also limits them to 'one-pot' cooking and the smoke often affects eyesight and health. We are working to firstly replace mud stoves with gas powered twin-top stoves. This is a big help and will enable them to cook under cover when it rains.

We also deliver dry food parcels, oil, vegetables and donated clothing. In the future we plan to help in other ways such as locally led business initiatives that can provide employment and raise money for the community.

- **Has God put South America on your heart?**
- **Do you love working with kids and helping the poor?**
- **Do you have a skillset that could help us on mission, building, agriculture, teaching, life skills, entrepreneurship and more?**
- **Please get in touch with us to learn more and help us to raise funds for future development of Mission In Bolivia.**