

## The Latest from Quito

April 2015

Greetings from Quito! The last few months have been filled with transition and in the months to come, we anticipate many more changes. Since the start of the New Year, I've been transitioning out of working directly with the refugee project as the three new coordinators have now fully taken over their role. For me, this transition has caused mix feelings: sometimes feelings of loss, other times feelings of relief. As I continue to live in Quito and am aware of the tough situations that refugees face, it's been difficult to separate myself from the project, while still wanting to be present in a reality that has consumed me for several years and that I continue to feel passionate about. However, I recognize that it's time to start shifting gears. I've appreciated having a less stressful and demanding daily routine and I've also found positive ways to continue to support the refugee project and specific families without the pressure that comes with the coordinator position.

For example, each week I dedicate some time to going to the homes of refugee families in order to support them, encourage them and listen to them. Our conversations no longer revolve around what kind of support the project can provide for them, but rather how they're doing, what challenges they've faced and what positives things they've experienced. While it's difficult not to be able to meet material needs using the project's resources, it's also liberating not to carry the weight of making decisions about aid distribution. Through my years of work as coordinator, I discovered the value of providing moral and emotional support for refugees. As someone who knows the context that refugee live in, I feel that I can still provide important support and orientation for families by being present with them and helping them work through tough times.

During the last few weeks, Eliana, Kaleth and I have enjoyed doing several visits together to a family living in one of the refugee houses, where we've taught them how to make granola and banana bread. The act of cooking, learning, chatting and laughing together for several hours has proved to be quite therapeutic for the family, who struggles with depression, a sense of loss and feelings of hopelessness and loneliness. The family has also used their new skill of granola-making to sell granola and generate some income.

Besides my supporting role in working with refugees, I've spent time helping fellow MMN workers, Jerrell and Jane Ross Richer and their children adapt to life in the Amazon region of Ecuador as they begin their work accompanying and training indigenous communities. I've also been in contact with the highland Kichwa speaking congregation *Dioshuan Kallari Tucuri* in the *5 de junio* community that is seeking help in doing some renovations on their church building. I've also been planning our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual trauma training retreat which will take place in mid-April as a space for the Quito Mennonite Church work team to learn more about responding to the needs of people affected by violence and trauma. I am also planning the schedule and activities for another Youth Venture group that will be visiting Ecuador for three weeks in June. I continue to support the Quito Mennonite congregation through worship leading, playing music, participating in the liturgy team and the church council as treasurer.

As a family, we are doing well. We were able to embark on a wonderful journey to Colombia over Christmas where we spent time with Eliana's family. It was a very special time as it was Eliana's first visit to Colombia after 7 years of living in Ecuador and Kaleth's first ever visit to Colombia to meet many of his relatives. Currently, we are still in the midst of the US visa process for Eliana and Kaleth. At this stage, we are waiting for Eliana to have an interview in the US embassy in Ecuador. We hope to be able to travel to the states by July, but must be patient as we are at the mercy of the US immigration system. The transition of moving to the states feels overwhelming at times and continues to evoke many different emotions in us.

With gratitude for your continued support.....David, Eliana and Kaleth

### **Prayer requests:**

- We appreciate your continued prayers for our family as we wait for a response about Eliana and Kaleth's US visas. Please pray for patience and a sense of guidance as we plan to move from Ecuador to the US. May we be able to close this chapter of our lives in peace and open a new chapter with renewed energy.
- Please pray for the newly formed ICAME (Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Church of Ecuador) denomination as it moves forward navigating legal hoops and discerning important issues about its future.
- Please continue pray for peace and justice in Colombia and so many other parts of our fragile world that are plagued by violence, suffering, inequality, injustice, corruption and destruction.



Sharing a meal of delicious guinea pig in the Kichwa speaking *5 de junio* community



Speaking with leaders in the *Dioshuan Kallari Tucuri* congregation



A partnership delegation from Colombia and the US visiting a refugee family in Nov. 2014



Sharing a meal with the partnership delegation



Eliana helping children with homework in the after-school program called "Mennonite services"



Eliana reconnecting with her family in Colombia over Christmas time



Playing soccer at church after our Easter morning service



Spending time with the family who lives at one of the refugee houses, after having made granola.



Having lunch at our home with some good friends from church who are refugees, Eliana's aunt and another friend of ours.



Visiting a refugee couple from church in the room where they live and work recycling different materials



Kaleth fist bumping the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, before one of his weekly Saturday morning speeches that we attended.



Standing outside the public prosecutor's office alongside our sister Gladys during a ceremony marking the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her daughter's assassination by Ecuadorian police forces.