

Teafund Voluntary Media Officer, Pembrokeshire.

Teafund Traveller Is Content With Less

Teafund Traveller Is Content With Less by Sharron Hardwick

Sophie Merrix, 25, recently left her job as deputy manager of a local supermarket, applying to the UK Government funded *International Citizens Service Programme*; hoping to visit Bolivia with Christian Relief and Development agency, *Teafund*.

Pleased to be accepted on the programme, Sophie's desire to work helping others was fulfilled. Joining *Teafund Partner Mosoj Yan*, set up and run by local Bolivians, Sophie looked forward to the challenge of working with homeless street vending girls.

Sophie, with six others, received a warm welcome, saying:

"Cochabamba, forth largest city in Bolivia with 700,000 people, has retained its traditional settings. Despite being obviously poor, struck by poverty and homelessness; people appeared less stressed and happier than lots of us in the UK. They have little regard for possessions and great regard for community and family. It's a relationship based community. We went to serve them, but found it was them serving us with their kind welcome!"

Sophie explained how *Mosoj Yan* serves the community in 3 main areas:

Due to many families facing homelessness and poverty, most children are not able to attend school. *Mosoj Yan* take classes in the city center and across the city, teaching a variety of relevant, academic, Bible and life lessons. *Mosoj Yan* offer shelter to 20 residents. They find homeless girls on the street, or from broken, dangerous backgrounds; obtaining court orders which allow them to live at there center, until circumstances improve or they are ready to live independently. The local staff teach basic life skills, give counselling, offer education and Bible studies.

Mosoj's third area of supporting the community is its Motivation Center. In the poorer south of the city they offer basic washing facilities, children's rooms, psychologist sessions, teaching craft making to promote local trade opportunities. This opens three times a week. Staff also visit the streets bringing people in. There is continual rehabilitation and alternative venues for those who need it.

Sophie worked in the center for working girls; assisted in lessons, played with children and helped with home work. She also under took some deep cleaning and gardening; setting up a project to make Christmas cards which she brought home, sold and sent funds back.

When asked what impacted her most Sophie said:

"Every Saturday the international Church go to Main Square to wash people's hair and clothes – we'd be there for 1-2 hours doing this. You get some really dirty children who are living rough. They go away all clean but then you see them in their little corners on the street, hanging around. This was challenging"

Sophie commented on the darker side of the city, where some children are forced to defend themselves with weapons as they are threatened with constant danger, even from the authorities. Despite this: "People were lovely.

They seemed so happy and content. There's no avid desire for bigger, better possessions, like in this country. People have nothing and they accept that. I highly recommend others join Tearfund on a trip like this one, it can be life changing, and definitely made me re-think the way I live."

Thrilled to see what God has been teaching her, Rob James, Sophie's pastor said: 'It's so good to have her back safe and well. We prayed for her constantly. We can learn so much from those at the cutting edge of mission; God wants us to show His love as much here as anywhere else in His world. I'm sure it will impact our ministry in the coming months. We've been encouraged by Sophie's faith in giving up her job to do His will and look forward to seeing what He has planned for her next. I wish more young people would see that far from being boring the Christian faith shows us how to experience life to the full"

Sophie is holding a Bolivia evening 4th February, 7-9 PM Westgate Evangelical Chapel, Pembroke. Tea and coffee are available.

