

Happy Chapi



Two of the Children Cottages – May 8, 2011

“Llaqtakunaq atipayninwan, teqrimuyuta kuyuchisunchis. Con el poder de los pueblo’s moveremos el mundo. When the villages work together, we will turn this world around.”

A Quechua proverb

By **Mike Safley**

CASA CHAPI IS RISING on a terraced Andean hillside in the Colca valley like a giant Condor soaring from its rocky nest on the nearby canyon walls. Alejandro Tejeda, Quechua Benefit’s project manager, is leading our team of ten labourers from nearby Chivay who are laying brick, slinging stucco and crafting rock into cottages, a community health centre, a kitchen dining room and a bibliotheca. One mile of water line is complete along with 11 retaining walls, the garage and the shop. There is four hundred and two feet of 10 foot high brick and rock security fence joined at the Incan style front gate. A central spire of black rock stairs forms the spine of the children’s village. Next the soccer field, gardens, and plaza will be built not far from the greenhouses. The first phase of the complex will be finished by November 2011.

The completion of construction is really just

the beginning of the project. The progress has not been without bumps in the road, detours and frustrating adjustments. If anyone tells you that building a large complex in a remote area of a foreign country is easy I would caution that a small slice of scepticism should be added to your mental file on the information. And rest assured that the Quechua Benefit Board of Directors also realizes that operating the village will not be problem free. There is much to learn and hopefully many friends from whom we will learn it.

The complex has changed as Quechua Benefit’s seven member board focused on its future. Ursula Munro spoke with other children’s home operators and women’s rights advocates working for the Peruvian health agency. They focused on the subject of family violence and alcohol abuse by the potential



Alejandro Tejeda in front of Central Stairway

resident's families. A recent tour of the Milton Hershey School, which was founded in 1906 and is home to 1700 disadvantaged kids, was arranged by our newest board member, Monica Kline. The board learned that a maximum of 12 children should form the family units that inhabit the cottages. This provides the optimum opportunity for a nurturing atmosphere. Each cottage will be supervised by two house parents who play an important role in guiding and supporting the children living in the cottage. This is the same model used by the Milton Hershey School. The results of these investigations required a redesign of the four dormitories into eight family style cottages.

The board recently appointed Ursula to be the director in charge of managing Casa Chapi. Her experience as a Registered Nurse and programme manager will come in handy as she begins assembling job descriptions, conducting interviews, hiring staff and qualifying the children who will live at the facility. Sandra Carbajal, Quechua Benefits executive secretary, in the Arequipa office, is working with Ursula on this task. During

the planning stages the Quechua Benefit board always referred to the complex as an orphanage. This implies that each resident will be parentless. This is not exactly the case. There will be three categories of children living in the village: 1) children of alpaca breeders whose families live in areas so remote it prohibits them from attending school 2) children who are from families or single mothers who lack the resources and support to provide adequate care in a safe environment and 3) children who do not have a living parent.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

As the village begins to function and the children take residence the Quechua Benefit BOD realizes that we have the same primary responsibilities as biological parents. First and foremost we must see to it that the children are safe. Then they must be well nourished, become educated and learn the life lessons that will better prepare them for the future. Each one of you who have supported this project is in effect a godparent for the children living there. This is a weighty responsibility

and we need each of you to continue supporting the endeavour.

In addition to the social aspects of the project Quechua Benefit is required by Peruvian law to obtain a permit for the facility. The authorities will have inspection and audit rights over the operations. The community surrounding Casa Chapi must be engaged and it is the obligation of the projects management to inspire confidence in the local pastors and community workers.

Many of the residents will need remedial tutoring and some, the native Quechua speakers, will need to learn Spanish in order to succeed at school. We also plan to have vocational classes at the complex's shop and garage buildings. We will build green houses and create small animal husbandry projects to raise rabbits, chickens and cuy for the dining room table. There will be no shortage of chores for the kids as Casa Chapi aspires to become self-sufficient.

I remember back when Quechua Benefit was first conceived by a request from Don Julio Barreda for help in his village of Macusani. He told me the Bible said that it was the obligation of the more fortunate among us to take care of society's orphans. For many years he supplied alpaca meat to the Musqa Runa house where 30 young girls lived; all of them separated from their families. I recently came across the following quote in the book of James (ASV) chapter one: "27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.," I think this is the verse that Don Julio had in mind.

Thanks to each of you the dream that gave rise to the children's village we call Casa Chapi is rapidly becoming reality. Much hard work is in front of us and each of you is vital to our success. We welcome your help, donations and expertise please visit our website www.quechuabenefit.org, or our office in Arequipa Peru: Calle Santa Catalina 115 Oficina No. 10, 3er Piso Cercado, Arequipa, Peru or call or email one of our board members. ●



The Author crawling up the scaffolding inside a cottage



The Casa Chapi team at the November 2010 dedication