



**Name:** Sharon Wilcox

**Location:** Ecuador

**My call:** To show God's love in action to people with learning disabilities

**My role:** To teach life skills that enable people to become independent, valued members of their community

**Dear friends,**

Greetings from Ecuador at this the beginning of 2018. I hope that you had the opportunity to enjoy some good company over the Christmas and New Year period, as well as the chance to reflect over the past year.

As I was reflecting, I realised that on 12 March this year I will have been working with adults with special needs for 40 years! It does not seem possible. I was 14 when I felt God calling me to do this work, but had no idea when I started four years later that it would be for this length of time. It has been a privilege and, for most of the time, a real blessing. Not sure if I will celebrate it, but everyone here loves an excuse to eat cake and drink cola! So perhaps we will do that.

I find myself thanking God for all that he has done here in Santo Domingo over the past few months. When I returned at the end of September things appeared to be the same and

the Life Skills programme continued with its three students. I have to say that I was grateful as I had a couple of irritating health issues to deal with (including parasites), which sapped my energy for a few weeks.

We had always planned to have an open day in December, so we got busy making things to show/sell. We made chocolates to give to everyone as a treat for coming. This was a very popular activity for the youngsters, as you always break some which then need eating up!

A few days before the event, a mother came to see me asking if we had a place for her son. I said "yes". He is 32. They returned to Ecuador in May, after living for 18 years in Maryland in USA. Her son, Javier, speaks English as well as Spanish. He prefers to speak English, which is fine with me,



*Top: Javier preparing the rice*

*Above: Chocolate making with the Life in Abundance Trust*





*Top left: Cristian demonstrating how to decorate jars at the open day*

*Top right: Shop ready with sweets for Christmas*



though he is a man of few words. His mother only speaks a few words of English, so is pleased that he can continue to speak English with me, as he has nieces in Maryland with whom he chats on Skype. I have an agreement with the rest of the group, that if we speak English I will translate it into Spanish for them.

The open day was a great success. As well as people being able to see what we do, they were very generous. We raised \$200 (most items cost between \$1-2 each). Each of the group received a share for their efforts, and were immediately planning what to spend it on. For Cristian it was a plate of papipollo (chicken and chips) and a football. He still had plenty for other things too.

As Christmas approached, we invited the Life Skills group from the Life in Abundance Foundation to come over. We made chocolates and some pretty boxes to put them in. They all really enjoyed their time together. We aim to get together

every couple of months if we can.

A few days before we broke up for the holidays, we offered the youngsters the option of a day out somewhere or cooking a turkey dinner. They chose the latter. So on 22 December we cooked turkey, rice and salad.

For children and young people in Ecuador, Christmas presents can often be few and far between. Some receive Samaritan's Purse boxes, but all receive bags of sweets and biscuits. These are usually donated by charities, churches and schools, or families will make up bags. I received two myself this Christmas – one from Camila and one from Gloria. Many of the shops fill their shelves in December with sacks of sweets and biscuits so that people can buy as many pounds (lbs) as they need.

We took a week off for Christmas and New Year. I was invited to spend Christmas Eve with Petita and her family, for their celebrations, along with Mark and Lydia Trezise (CMS short termers). We had a lovely evening. We finished eating just before 11pm! The next morning I woke at 4.30am so that I

could skype call my church in Thatcham. It was great to be able to share a part of Christmas with them, even if I was half asleep.

At 3pm, we Brits met up with our friend Claire (from Cambridge), along with her Ecuadorian husband and two girls, for a traditional British Christmas lunch. That was followed by a film, which the girls and Lydia really enjoyed. That week I was able to have three days in Baños to enjoy the waterfalls and the thermal waters, before returning to Santo Domingo to celebrate New Year. The music in the street outside my flat went on until 9am on New Year's Day!

We started back at work on Tuesday 2 January, and the following week had a visit from the parents of Marlon, who was one of my students at the Foundation. They explained that he was unhappy with many of the changes made, and was missing being able to do practical life skills every day. He did not like it when his group had to share activities and classes with small children, and had started to refuse to attend except on Thursdays and Fridays when he

## PRAISE AND PRAYER

### Please give thanks for:

- The donations received
- The increased number of students
- A wonderful Christmas time
- Gloria's improved health.

### Please pray for:

- More students as God wishes
- Another volunteer for us if the group grows
- Bless the learning of Cristian, Camila, Paul, Javier and Marlon
- Me in my role in the church ministry team
- The plans for the church anniversary and guidance
- Wisdom when spending the money donated
- Strength and health to do God's work.

### You can give online to Sharon at:

[churchmissionsociety.org/wilcox](http://churchmissionsociety.org/wilcox)

### Contact details:

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Above: Marlon and Paul doing battle with the basketball

did practical things with Petita. His parents just wanted him to be happy, and asked if he could join us. We suggested he join after his school year finishes, but when they talked to him he wanted to come straight away. So we now have five students, ranging in age from 13-32.

This year, the First Baptist Church has asked if I would be part of their fellowship ministry team. After much prayerful consideration, I have said yes. It will involve visits to people who are sick, housebound, lonely, in prison etc., as well as linking with other groups that are associated

with the church. I will have specific responsibility for coordinating links with the Baptist Church School, to ensure that their activities are in line with God's will and do not go against the testimony of the church. We will

also work out how the church can continue to support the school. I realise that I have a very responsible role, and seek God's help in fulfilling it.

One of our other responsibilities is to organise the Church's 50th anniversary celebrations. We want to do something a bit different from other years, and have until August to come up with something, although we may need to work it out sooner if we need to raise funds for it.

Over recent weeks my project has received a couple of donations from the UK. We now have a small fridge, a bigger table, and hope to purchase a laptop soon. Thank you (you know who you are).

As you can tell, 2018 is going to be a busy one for me, and I would really appreciate your continued prayers.

Every blessing,

*Sharon*

Left: Another photo of the open day

