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UNiViDA

Bringing life, hope and opportunity to children

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Sun, Sea and Slums

a closer look at the city of Fortaleza >>>

The north-east coast of Brazil is a beautiful sun-drenched region, just 3 degrees below the equator. It is also the location of Brazil's 4th largest city of Fortaleza, with 2.5 million people and 550 slums.

Fortaleza is most certainly a city of contrasts. The sea front boasts granite fronted apartments, luxury hotels and restaurants but a quick walk along the promenade will soon reveal that this wealth does not extend very far.

Street children, covered in dust young girls dressed up to sell their bodies and rubbish pickers with improvised carts can be seen mixed up among the tourists and wealthy business people.

Towards the outskirts of the city are the slums, these are defined by the UN as "a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security."

These communities are improvised and lacking in basic services which make life for their residents difficult and dangerous.

There are no sewage systems, no drains to take away monsoon rain water, no paved roads, precarious electricity supplies and unstable buildings.

Skin diseases, infections, tiredness, malnutrition and depression are just a few of

the consequences of the physical squalor of life in a slum community.

Unfortunately, this is just the beginning. Add to these conditions, un-reliable schools, clinics and transport systems and you begin to arrive at a fuller picture of the situation in which children of Fortaleza's slums are growing up.

To make matters worse, dwellers must also contend with violence, unemployment, alcoholism and drug related gang warfare.



Visit our website to watch a short video about Fortaleza.



Street children sleeping in cash point booths on Fortaleza's sea front.



A child makes her way to school through streets filled with sewage rubbish and disease.

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You might think that with all of this against them, happiness and enthusiasm would be in short supply. It is true that for many teenagers and *adults*, exhaustion and depression has a firm grip. However, in the lives of children who have known nothing else, there is optimism and energy for another day.

UNIVIDA's challenge is to harness and develop this youthful joy into real hope and *character* that will persevere and persist as the children grow and face the huge challenges ahead of them in the slums.

What does success look like?

Our older students and graduates who have found work, able to improve their homes and support others are symbols of success. More importantly they are role models because they show younger children the value of education and determination, even when the situations appear to be hopeless.

Young people with a heart to change their community >>>

The real development workers in the slums

On the streets of Brazil, these young people look like ordinary citizens but in their communities they are steadily bringing peace, raising income levels and hopes for a better future.

This is no ordinary group of young people. Calling themselves Jovens com o Visão de Cristo (Youth with the vision of Christ), these teenagers have grown up at The University of Life and excelled in their commitment to study and serve.

Today there are over 60 students in the group which ranges in age from 14 to 27. Through regular commitment to prayer and worship, they have grown together with a common passion, to see their families and community transformed by the gospel of Jesus.

Every Monday night the team meets together for a service of worship, teaching and prayer. As many of our visitors to Brazil comment, these times are very intense, as we celebrate God's love but also cry out desperately to God for situations where friends and family members are at risk from violence, poverty or disease. It is also a time of refreshment for teenagers as they can enjoy a safe environment and the support of UNIVIDA staff to talk about issues affecting them. As a group, teenagers also find essential support from each other, clubbing together to buy food or pay a medical bill for someone in need.

Growing up and finishing their studies together, we have seen many of our students find employment in the city. Several local employers have taken on more than one student at the same company because of the skills and commitment that they have demonstrated.

If you would like to pray for these young people, please pray...

- For safety and protection as they live, work and minister in the slums.
- For continued unity, new leaders and resources for their work.
- For our staff members Aurenir and Oseias who lead the group.



The rains are here again

Each day this spring, 350 students will be making their way to and from the University of Life, through the flooded streets. During this season there is a high risk of Dengue Fever, Flu and other diseases.

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No Ordinary Team

It's an early start each day for each of our 16 staff members who live in Fortaleza. For some, the bus journey takes 90 minutes but there is always a warm welcome and a cup of coffee available in the kitchen when they arrive.

With 175 children arriving at 8am, everybody has to quickly assume their responsibilities whether its in the class-room, office or kitchen. There is a strong sense of camaraderie as the team work together to create dynamic learning environments. Unfortunately, the team are currently working with limited materials and resources which are desperately needed to support the children's learning.

Thank you for helping us build this team.



Classes run for 4 hours in the morning including a short break for the children to eat. At lunchtime the children go home and head to their state schools for the afternoon. Meanwhile at the project the staff enjoy a cooked lunch and a short rest before another 175 children who have been to state school in the morning, arrive for another 4 hours of lessons in the afternoon.

Silvia, second from the right on the front row, has been a member of staff for 14 years and is as enthusiastic about the project now as she was when she began. *"I love my first year class because the children get so excited when they realize that they are learning and making progress. The staff here are like my family."*

The team is made up of ten teachers, a cook, two administrators, a pastoral worker, a mission co-ordinator and Marc Marques, the Director. We also have a family living on the site of the project who act as caretakers.

You can help us buy desperately needed teaching materials this spring by becoming a Dreambuilder or making a special donation.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our staff team.

It makes a difference for me

Over the course of a year, how does UNIVIDA make a difference in the life of a child?

Rachel's story >>>

Rachel is now 9 years old. She has been a student at The University of Life for two years and is just beginning her third year. Rachel lives with her mother and two sisters in small shack next to the sewage canal in the slums. Her mother makes a living picking recyclable materials from rubbish left on the streets.

Rachel is a tall but very thin young girl. She struggles with sickness which effects her ability to concentrate. She is a very shy girl but is very polite and well behaved. During her first year, we saw her gradually learning to make friends with other students and find the confidence to express herself. She has always been very co-operative and willing to try, however, Rachel learning speed was at a much slower pace than other students in her class.

When teachers realized the particularly difficult situation Rachel was facing in her home environment, we were able to offer further support in the form of food parcels for the family. Her mother also needed to be re-assured that even though Rachel was facing challenges, we were committed to supporting her. Rachel continued into her second year in the same year group and has steadily progressed to the point where she can now read and write.

We cannot express enough how much of a joy it is to work alongside children like Rachel, helping them to realize their potential and celebrate their learning achievements.



Spring into Fundraising Action

Vehicle Fundraising

In our last issue we told you about our plans to buy a new fuel efficient Kombi van to run essential errands, transport students and bring supplies into the project.



So far £3,000 has been raised in Brazil, but we need your support to reach our overall goal of £18,000.

We are appealing to schools, churches and individuals who can organize any kind of special event or campaign to help.

GREAT NEWS

If you are planning an event there is a good chance that Marc and Ruth Marques who will be visiting the UK in May and June 2011, will be able to help you with your event.

Please contact the office if you are interested in taking part or need any ideas or support with your Fundraising.

Don't Forget

If you would like Marc and Ruth to visit your workplace, church or organisation during their UK trip in May and June, please contact the office on 01777 7160 614.

Your help is needed in arranging accommodation, and providing transport during their trip.

You may be interested in...

Learn more about Brazil by watching the film Waste Land, released in the UK on 25th February 2011. This film follows the work of Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, who has spent 2 years, making artwork with the help of rubbish pickers who live in slums on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

His work was sold in London and has been featured in several art exhibitions. Google 'Waste Land Film' for more info.



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I would like to give £ ____ please make cheque payable to UNIVIDA

I would like to set up a monthly standing order for £ _____

Please contact me about...

- Church Partnerships Including UNIVIDA in my will
 School Partnerships Holding a fundraising event

THANK YOU: We would like to keep you informed about how your donation is **making a difference**. However, if you would prefer not to hear from us please tick this box.

Gift Aid Declaration

giftaid it

Date: ____/____/____ (tick box)

I want **UNiViDA** to treat all donations that I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations.

You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the appropriate tax year. (currently 25p for each £1 you give).

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