



# **Centro Guía Árbol del Ángel**

## **Angel Tree Centre**

The imprisonment of parents affects the lives of their children often leading to family breakdown leaving the children unprotected and in danger of committing the same errors as their parents. The change in situation frequently leads to economic problems which in some cases provoke the children to drop out of school. Society stigmatizes and discriminates against these families.

The Angel Tree Centre, Oruro – Bolivia, opened in May 2006 and reaches out to children of prisoners throughout their school years according to the family situation prioritising family restoration and school performance through programmes which include Christian education, psychological help and health.

The Centre is currently open four days a week and there are 32 children registered. The children all have at least one parent imprisoned. Their sentences are for drug offences (mostly trafficking), fraud, rape, murder, and manslaughter. The maximum sentence is 30 years without parole and we currently have several parents with that sentence.

The Centre operates with a Director, six educators, an administrator, a psychologist, a social worker and a cook. Our budget for 2014 is about US\$30,000. We continue to manage our budget very carefully because of the economic situation and are doing everything possible to keep costs down and only spend what is necessary.

The children and staff are provided with a healthy three course meal each of the four days (soup, main course and pudding plus drink) and a snack mid morning or mid afternoon (depending in which shift they go to school). There are special celebration meals for Day of the Child, Friendship Day, Day of young people, and Christmas among others. Every year there is a camp (financed by donations from local people and companies) for the children just before Christmas and 2014 will see the 11<sup>th</sup> one from 11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> December.

Apart from their days at the Centre the educators make visits to the imprisoned parent, the family outside and the child's school and also run monthly parents' meetings (one for imprisoned parents and one for those outside) and a monthly celebration for the children remembering those who have had a birthday that month. They also make emergency visits to families in crisis and attend court if the parent of one of their children is on trial. The tutors become a valuable source of support for the families and share with them in their most difficult moments.

The "Uniting Hearts" project brings the children and their parents together for times of reflection, games and craft in the prison. These sessions are held one Thursday (visiting day) a month.

In 2011 we expanded the work with the teenagers at Angel Tree. Apart from attendance at Angel Tree they have established a group called Alfa D (Beginnings with God) which meets twice a month for teaching and activities. In January they attend a Word of Life camp in Cochabamba. There are many challenges in finding a suitable time to meet as many of the teenagers work but we continue to look for ways to reach this age group more effectively and provide the support and guidance they need.