

# Jungle Kids for Christ, Inc.

## 2025 Annual Report



**JUNGLE KIDS  
FOR CHRIST**  
Empowering Children



UNIDAD EDUCATIVA  
**ANTIOQUIA**

Provincia de Antioquia - Colombia  
Empoderando a estudiantes para la Gloria de Dios



*Empowering children in the jungle of Ecuador so that they can break the cycle of poverty and abuse and share a message of transformation with their family, community, country, and world.*

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# Fingerprints

By Al McConnell

A few weeks ago, I sat with a few long-time supporters of Jungle Kids for Christ, listening to stories of the first mission trips and paging through photographs of the abandoned farm site where today's Antioch Christian Academy campus now stands. Marveling at what God has accomplished over two decades — through thousands of willing hands and hearts — I was reminded that great works are built not just in wood and concrete, but in the lives of those who give themselves to the vision.

In 2025, we said farewell to several of those people:

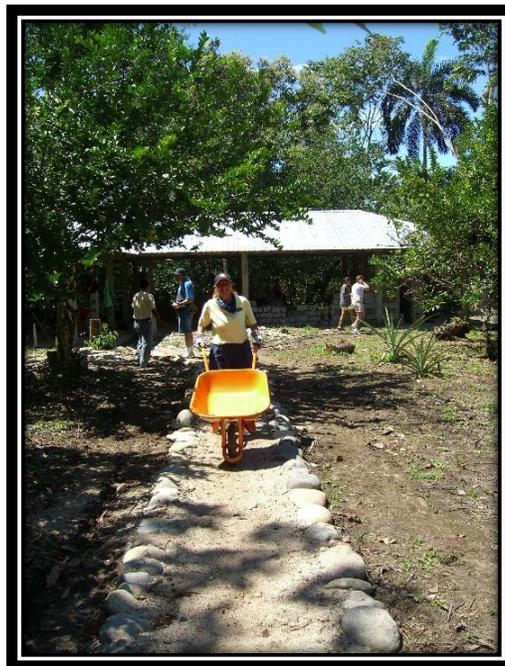
**Roberto Davalos**, JKC's founder and Executive Director, stepped down last summer after shepherding this ministry from a dream into a thriving campus. It was his vision, and his family's sacrifice alongside it, that gave Antioch its foundation.

**Kelvin and Monica Johnson**, our longest-serving missionary family, transitioned their ministry to Quito, leaving behind a legacy of deep love for the community children and two cornerstone JKC programs they built from nothing — the Student Residence Home and the Warrior Basketball Club.



And last summer, **Katie Hunter** returned home to Michigan. She was an English teacher whose initial commitment stretched into years simply because she believed in the ministry too much to leave. She left her spirit painted into the walls of the school — quite literally, in the mural that now graces the very building where those first mission teams laid foundation blocks twenty years ago.

We are grateful for each of them — and for the countless others like them whose names will not appear in any annual report, but whose fingerprints are all over this ministry. The teenager who spent a sweaty week laying cement block in what would become our preschool building. The donor who gave sacrificially to a vision they'd never seen in person. The missionary who served a year or two, poured themselves into the children and the work, and then carried Antioch home in their heart. Roberto, the Johnsons, and Katie are exemplary expressions of something that has always been true of Jungle Kids for Christ: God draws people to this work, and what they offer often multiplies far beyond what they themselves could have imagined. Their faithfulness is the story in those old photographs — and it is the foundation beneath everything that comes next.



## New Leadership Team, Same Mission

Last summer, a new team assumed responsibility for leading JKC into the next season. Realizing that no individual could fill the founder's shoes, we opted for a team leadership model, leveraging the strengths of four very different individuals.

**Al McConnell** serves as General Director, with responsibility for financial management, board relations, and strategic planning. Al, who lives in the Atlanta area, was a long-time JKC board member and has a background in consulting and technology.

**Fausto Guerra** joins JKC after a long career as academic director for Montebello School in Quito, where he lives with his wife and two daughters. He leads campus-based programs including Antioch Christian Academy as well as campus maintenance and construction.

**Adam Duncan** has been serving with JKC in Misahualli for five years, and he assumes responsibility for all outward facing ministries: community development, basketball, and the student residence home.

**Tyler Foster**, along with his wife Kaylan, are JKC's longest serving missionaries, and he leads JKC's partnership development programs: short-term teams, recruiting, and fundraising.

As a team, our first project together was to write a clear statement of our common purpose — not to change direction, but to articulate what JKC already does and how our day-to-day work serves

the Kingdom purposes we share. The JKC Rule of Ministry, which is included in an appendix to this report, was the result of that effort and will serve as a touchstone for every program and decision. In summary:

- **WE BELIEVE** that every child is born in the image of God and deserves the chance to write their own story.
- **WE WORK** to make that promise a reality for the forgotten children of the Ecuador jungle through quality education and Christ-centered character development programs that provide them with the knowledge, skills, and agency that they need to take back their life stories.
- **OUR GOAL** is that these children then become change agents in their own communities and powerful witnesses to the transformational power of the Gospel.

I invite you to read it all; it will give you deeper insight into the heart of the ministry and the ultimate aims your partnership helps fulfill.

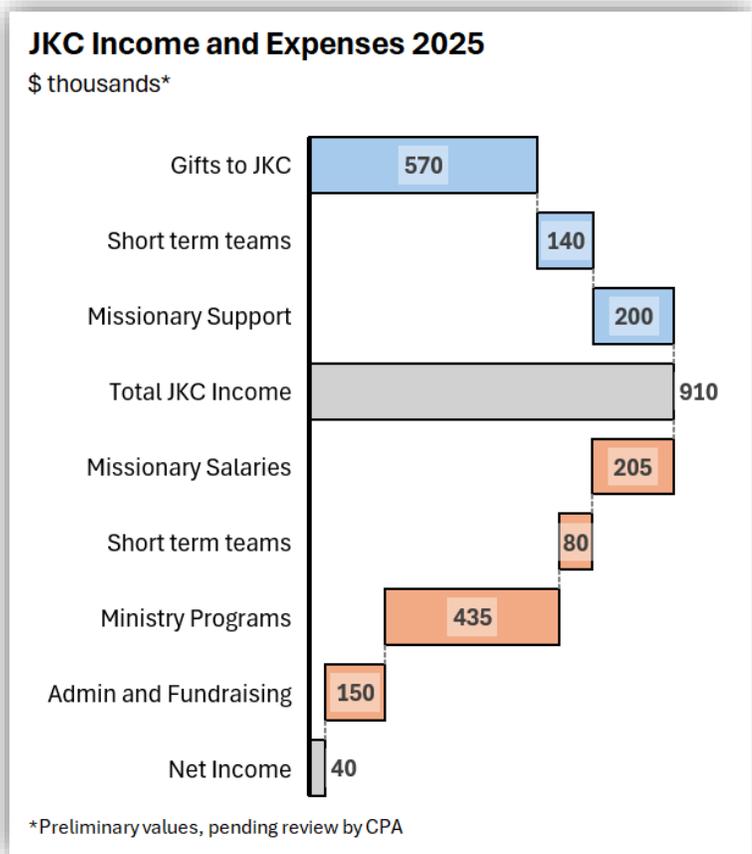
The pages that follow offer the familiar review of 2025, written by our program directors and leaders. They include both the moments of joy and the honest challenges that mark any work offered by human hands for the glory of God. We continue to depend on your prayers and support as we move forward, confident that the One who receives our offerings will multiply them—again and again—in ways we cannot yet see.

## Financial Overview of 2025

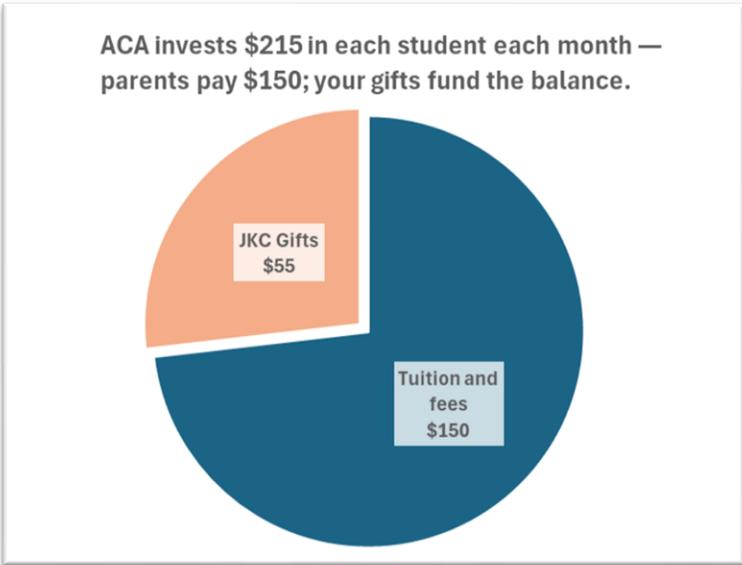
Financially, 2025 reflected the steady faithfulness that has characterized JKC for years, with income and expenses remaining well-balanced and a modest surplus providing added resiliency for the road ahead.

In 2025, direct donations reached approximately \$570 thousand (26% from student and basketball player sponsorships). Short-term team fees and missionary support brought total income to about \$910 thousand.

After covering missionary salaries and short-term team expenses, JKC allocated approximately \$435 thousand to core programs, including Antioch Christian Academy, the Student Residence Home (La Residencia), and Warrior Basketball. Stateside salaries and administrative expenses totaled about \$150 thousand, resulting in a small surplus carried forward for financial stability and future program needs.



Antioch Christian Academy is the largest of JKC's programs, and it makes up about half of all program grants. These funds make the school financially viable, because tuition and fees cover only about 70 percent of costs for our 245 students in PreK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.



More than 200 student sponsors give faithfully each month, and their gifts provide the majority of JKC's support for the school. These dedicated sponsors include church Sunday School classes, families, and even children who share in a sponsorship.

Their generous, consistent support is essential to ACA's life-changing ministry to the kids of the jungle — empowering them through quality education, strong values, and hope for a brighter future.

# Education Ministries

By Fausto Guerra

During my first semester as leader of Antioquia Academy, I encountered both significant challenges and an extraordinary learning opportunity. The first three months allowed me to develop a 360° understanding of the school's structure and daily operations. I was fully aware that the community might feel uncertain about a new leadership approach that differed from what they had previously experienced.

I had very positive impressions from the beginning. I observed several encouraging indicators that revealed the school's strong potential. Students pray with sincerity and demonstrate an authentic desire to connect with God. They are respectful and kind toward adults and generally engaged in their learning. Teachers show commitment and responsibility in fulfilling their duties. School leaders work diligently, and the campus environment is clean and well maintained. These visible characteristics fostered a genuine sense of community.

Consequently, I designed a strategic plan to strengthen some of the essential features that made the school a great place to work where teachers and other collaborators can grow not only professionally but above all spiritually.

Beginning in September, I launched a series of workshops aimed at cultivating a psychologically safe school culture for all. Teachers are focusing their lessons on student learning and growth by implementing the best teaching practices that are supported by evidence. By November, teachers began developing personalized professional development plans grounded in collaborative reflection and deliberate practice. In January, school leaders also initiated their own development plans, with emphasis on becoming consequential leaders, capable of making courageous decisions and managing resources effectively.



Simultaneously, we began reviewing and refining curricular systems in core subjects (Math, English, Reading and Writing). Looking ahead, the math department plans to apply a more rigorous curriculum proposal inspired by Hillsdale University for the upcoming school year.

In summary, our efforts are focused on cultivating a psychologically safe culture where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for growth. We are working hard to foster a school community where teachers and students feel empowered, responsible, and confident enough to exceed expectations.

## Main initiatives

- Unleash teacher creativity and autonomy – encourage risk-taking to help students learn.
- Teacher professional development.
- Refocus our financial support for the most vulnerable families.

## Antioch Christian Academy

By Paúl Calapucha

### Achievements

- Student enrollment currently reaches 91% (250 out of 280 students) of the planned quota for the current school year. We expect to incorporate more students in the future.
- Class 2025: 9 of the 10 graduates are enrolled in higher education. 3
- Class of 2025 – 2026: By August 2026, 70% of high school students will be enrolled in an Ecuadorian university, while 30% will be abroad. (1 student in the U.S.)
- By August 2026, 6 students will be studying in the USA: 2 class of 2023, 2 class 2024, 1 class 2025 and 1 class 2026.
- 39% of students receive a scholarship. 6% cover tuition fees with work.
- 31% of the students are from Misahuallí and surrounding communities. Of this percentage, 3% represent the girls of the Residence, 8% represent the children from the low-income communities and 20% the children who live in the center of Misahuallí.
- The staff retention rate is 92%.
- We are implementing professional development plans with all the teachers focused on planning, classroom management, scaffolding, and assessment.
- Late payments in school tuition fees and other items of the 2024 – 2025 school year will be collected by 98% in August 2025.
- The location of cameras at strategic points has been of great help to strengthen the security and surveillance of the campus.



### Challenges

- Although the rate of late payments in tuition fees has improved, 5 families still have debts.

- We continue strengthening compliance and control of payment agreements with parents through periodic controls, notifications, meetings and direct calls.
- We are continually working to implement effective emotional salary strategies focused on teacher well-being. This initiative will involve planning an additional budget for the next school year.
- We have organized workshop, talks and events that strengthen our students' understanding about topics related to their age and development from a Biblical perspective.
- We are evaluating adjustments to the admissions process based on a comprehensive diagnostic approach that is not only limited to the academic field, but also incorporates missional, psychological and pedagogical dimensions.



## Construction and Maintenance

By Luis Ushinia

Last August, we established a dedicated construction and maintenance team responsible for addressing all the needs of our organization. This new department has its own budget as well.

Additionally, the team operates on a well-organized schedule, with specific tasks assigned for each day. They utilize a new communication system to respond to maintenance needs more effectively. A color-coded system is in place to indicate the urgency of each case.



Juan Carlos Logaña, Luis Ushinia, Brayan Ushinia

Communication with the leaders of the various programs within the organization has become clearer, more direct, and more effective. For instance, Liz and our program directors appreciate receiving immediate responses to their requests.

New projects were defined and planned starting in February, with the support of the basketball program, SRH parents, and visiting short-term teams.

### Achievements

New storm drains have been installed, and they are saving our classrooms from being flooded due to the heavy rains which are very common in Misahualli.

## Challenges (difficulties)

- The transition of Luis as leader of this new department to find the right balance.
- Coordination with other collaborators in the organization of events is flowing, but Luis is still learning how to be more effective.



# Community Ministries

By Adam Duncan

Recognizing that quality instruction is just the beginning of empowering students, Community Ministries examines the barriers to success and seeks to find partners and solutions to overcome these barriers. La Residencia (student residence home) was founded with the understanding that



physical distance, lack of early childhood development, and lack of parenting education are significant barriers to success, especially for young girls in rural communities. The Warriors Basketball Club addresses the lack of healthy social opportunities and parental supervision after school hours. We hope that the basketball club serves as a pillar of a growing extracurricular program designed to address the spiritual, social, and academic needs of our students and potential students. Our Community Development Ministry is founded on the principle that poverty is not primarily economic, but rather a series of relational connections that are not being made and responsibilities that are not being fulfilled. We seek to identify and connect community partners, including schools, churches,

government agencies, and community leaders, to address the barriers to entry that many of our potential students' families face. This is an ongoing discovery process that requires a heavy reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance and strategic use of physical and economic resources to build and strengthen communities, not just complete projects.

## La Residencia

By Lizbeth Acosta

### Celebrations

- You can see the commitment of the parents to their daughters and the foundation in that most families started the year without an outstanding balance from last year.
- The 6 oldest girls attend the basketball club, which helps to better channel their energy, improve their physical health, and learn to work as a team
- All of the girls have grade at a medium-high level and for the first time, everyone passed their evaluations and did not have to stay for remediation. Madelin received a certificate of academic excellence for obtaining excellent academic performance, obtaining a level of 4.57, which is equivalent to 9.14, in the 2024-2025 school year

- The girls have remained healthy and received preventive medical exams and treatment for any chronic issues. In the past sickness has been an academic challenge due to missed class time.
- It is possible that Madelin will complete her Spanish reading list this school year (6 levels remaining). This will be the earliest that a residencia girl has finished this milestone
- Jeimy and Jessica continue to help with the translation from Kichwa-Spanish-English, in the small clinic in Bellavista.
- We are grateful to have an excellent team. Mami Laura's health has improved, Julissa has increased her availability to help with meal preparation, and Laura and Moriah are helping with after-school tutoring. Without each member of our team we would not be able to move forward.
- The girls are receiving bi-monthly individual counselling with a psychologist from Quito. We can see an improvement in the security and confidence of the older girls (a specific development focus). We also see improvements in the younger girls in developing learning methods and improving short and long-term memory



### Story: Yureimy's Journey

In Yureimy (which means tree in Kichwa), you can see how God has worked in her life and academic performance. When she entered the residence, she had little understanding of Spanish, she didn't recognize numbers, letters, and if something was taught she couldn't remember it. One of the anecdotes I remember is that she was learning colors in English and for several months she identified all colors as "blue". Yura has been with many tutors, teachers, caregivers and missionaries who have taught her, but her progress was slow and sometimes it seemed that she would never advance. However, after almost 4 years, you can see a Yureimy who can read, recognize most of the words, identify colors, shapes, and numbers.



God is also working in her character. Four years ago, she had frequent episodes of anger and frustration, a fear of making mistakes, and despair. She could not move forward since

she did not understand so many things. The evenings in the residencia were like a house of screams because she cried and screamed so much that I ended up crying and frustrated too. At the same time, I could see the hand of God through patience, love, and trying again, just as God has done in my life. So we would start her classes again after talking to God. Working together we created rules and strategies to use when we felt tired. With the passage of time, we could see a change in the environment and from there we began to include God in our afternoon study sessions. I can say without a doubt that God has not only worked with Yura but with all the people around her. As a result of this process, you can now see a girl who says please and thank you, she is kind, she can do her breathing exercises to calm her frustration, she is so excited to do her tasks, she has a beautiful smile on her face, where angry or sad expressions were before.

When I remember the change in Yura, I can only think of this verse—Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I sanctified you; I gave you as a prophet to the nations.” I believe faithfully that it is the work of God and that her name is not a coincidence, but that God gave Yura this name. In her language it means tree and Yura is a tree of seasons. Now that she knows God she knows she can have many colors, leaves, beautiful flowers and fruits and that she herself will someday become a tree as spoken in Psalm 1:3. She can hold to the promise that whatever she does will prosper and that her fruit will be given at the right time, and in this way help many more in her community. She knows that her past is part of her life but does not control her because in God she is a new creature and now she is a daughter of God.

### **Challenges we have faced this year and will face next year.**

- Many of the girls face relational problems in their families, especially with alcohol since this causes fights, poverty, and abandonment when they return home.
- Family losses very close to the girls, which has caused a deep sadness in their lives and has destabilized their emotions. This is sometimes reflected in their daily behaviors and school performance.
- The past and its origin, especially for the older girls since they are at an age where their character, personality and identity are being shaped. They frequently have questions like: “Why did this happen to me? Why is my family like this? Is this right or wrong?”. They wonder if God loves them in spite of everything and where they belong. We ask for prayer that they would be surrounded by the right people who will show them the true love of God and be a guide to remain in God.
- Cultural shock and conflicting beliefs: Coming from an indigenous community which has its own customs, ancestral practices and beliefs, there is often a conflict with Christian faith. In many communities traditional witchcraft is practiced and it has been a struggle to teach and explain to them that evil exists and there is a spiritual world, but that God is stronger and can do greater and more lasting things than witchcraft. Finding a point of

balance between explaining to them and not diminishing their faith or connection to their families has been a struggle because it seems that they finally understand, but when they return to their communities they somehow stop believing or do not feel the presence of God in their lives.

- The lack of a native English speaker living in the residencia is a challenge. We can observe a deficit in the learning of the language in the girls who entered in the last years since the last missionary was in the residence.

## Warrior Basketball

By John Verdezoto and Mike Neil

### Celebrations

Coach John's intentional outreach into surrounding communities is bearing fruit.

- We have seen an increased interest in participation in the Misahualli and Pucachicta locations.
- There has been a 50% increase in the Juniors age group in Pucachicta.
- A large portion of the growth has been girls joining the club.

We also added Coach Matias to the club. He is currently working with Coach John in the Varsity age group.

There has been observable growth in the spiritual maturity of coaches and players.

### Story: Spiritual and Leadership Development

A spiritual success in the club can be seen in the ways that the players interact with each other and the coaching staff. For example, it is not uncommon to see players encouraging one another during practice or giving each other tips on how to improve in a way that shows teamwork. There



are players who are starting to take on more and more leadership within the teams. A clear example of this is a boy who is part of Varsity Basic, but with a very positive internal energy. He is always watching to make sure that his teammates feel good. We see in him a strong competitive,



but compassionate spirit. For most of his life he has been in the shadow of his younger brother. He is a little quieter and does not often speak out, but that has not stopped him in the style of his game, and in his struggle to seek God. For most of our players, their search for God is a slow struggle. We see this player taking certain steps, demonstrating with the passing of days the love of God through him. He demonstrates God's love through His words to His companions, encouraging them to move forward despite difficult life circumstances. This boy is a clear example of how God reaches each of us in different ways, then reaches out to others with God's love through us.

### **Challenges we have faced this year and will face next year.**

Coach Kelvin stepping away from the program has caused us to re-evaluate all areas of the program. Coach John and Manager Mike are working to refine the vision for the next steps in club growth. We made the difficult decision to exit the Machakuy Yaku community due to declining participation and an unhealthy partnership dynamic with community leadership.

## **Community Development**

By Carol Duncan

### **Celebrations — collaboration with 9 communities**

- Two additional part-time staff added in November (Eloy: 8–20 hours/week; Mike: 10 hours/week).
- Over 100 eyeglasses and 75 Bibles distributed.
- Fifty mingas (community work days).
- Approximately 2,100 patient encounters.
- Three short-term medical teams increasing the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health and community development.
- Three extended professional trainings: Adam and Carol – CMDA, and Carol – CHE TOT1 and malnutrition strategies in Ecuador through CAF: Banco de Desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe.

## Story: Taking away pain — Verde Cocha

While statistics measure our reach, the true successes lie in the encouragement we see in the eyes of the people we meet. Verde Cocha is a distant hill community that we started collaborating with in a water project this year. Working with the small church, which consists of one family at this time, they expressed a desire for a pop-up medical clinic. The oldest father there has a significant limp from an old, poorly set fracture, and I had never seen him smile or respond emotionally. During our clinic time, he received care, and at the end of the day, he gave me a two-handed handshake and a smile—the cultural equivalent of a tight hug in indigenous Ecuadorian culture. This gesture shows connection, and knowing he is encouraged to continue to lead his family in healthy cultural change is one of the things that encourages us.



## Story: Giving sight — reading glasses in Bella Vista Alta

While we seek to open spiritual eyes, this often happens first by meeting the physical need of eyesight. Due to the intense UV rays of the equatorial sun and vitamin A deficiency, poor eyesight is common. Isela, a Christian in the Bella Vista Church, had become a midwife later in life after seeing her daughter die in childbirth. In her mid-sixties, her eyesight was failing; even in mid-day it was hard for her to read. We were able to provide reading glasses so she can continue to study God’s Word, provide care to the most vulnerable in society, and prevent birth complications.

## Story: Reconciliation — Awatino Water Committee

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Awatino consists of four neighborhoods. Relationships had been fractured over time due to disagreements, mining disputes, and failed promises by outsiders. The village had a common problem: frequently, when rain does not come, the public water system is turned off to rural villages to supply the larger towns, and they are left without access to any water. Through our workers meeting with the local leaders, a committee was formed, and after two years, they are developing a local water spring and are in stage 2 of getting it delivered to homes. More importantly, neighbors are cooperating to meet a unified goal.

**Challenges we have faced this year and will face next year.**



The addition of Eloy (national worker) and Mike (missionary) on a part-time basis in November has not resulted in a net gain, because Adam's capacity to work in multiple communities is lessened due to his new responsibilities with the SLT.

Managing the many requests that are beyond our capacity or do not fulfill the mission of JKC often feels like we are letting people down every week (i.e., working in more communities,

scholarships for surgeries, college tuition, etc.).

Elena, Bajo Pusuno's teacher and our long-time partner, changed location and we have been unable to connect with the community since her departure in July 2025.

# Partnership Ministries

By Tyler Foster

Up to this point, you have read about the impact of our work in the jungle, but we need to take a moment to recognize those who are inspired by God to give financially and support us through active prayer. You are our partners in this mission.

Last year was stable and demonstrated the faithfulness of our supporters. Our student, child, and player sponsors continued to contribute, our short-term teams traveled and served, and our institutional partners remained deeply invested. —even as we walked through a leadership transition.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tells us,

“<sup>9</sup>Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor; <sup>10</sup>for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup>Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? <sup>12</sup>And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart,” (NASB2020).

And the year 2025 exemplifies this truth. Our threefold cord—God, our ministry team, and you, our partners—is resilient and strong. Together, we proved that. As we reflect on our achievements and the challenges ahead, I encourage you to continue partnering with us. Please also consider who else in your network might be interested in joining our efforts!

## Partnership Development

### Celebrations

- Continued to see success in receiving major donations from various sources:
  - Three individual gifts of \$20,000 or more were received, including a \$50,000 legacy gift from a member of Alpharetta Methodist, partly due to our student sponsorship program.
  - Ten gifts of \$5 - \$5.5k gifts from various supporters.

- Molly Castina met her personal PDM goals and deployed to the field in just one month of active meetings and invitations.
- Year-end stewardship giving campaign exceeded initial goal by more than 40%, paving the way to begin working on overdue and needed projects and initiatives in each of our programs.
- *Sponsorship program specifics:*
  - 150 Christmas cards were sent by sponsors to students.
  - 30 new monthly sponsors signed up from the Alpharetta Sponsorship Sunday.
  - Child sponsors of three girls in La Residencia gave generously to help with the costs of their Quinceañeras.
- The average open rate across all emails sent from the ministry is 56%, which is 3% higher than in 2024 and almost double the most-reported industry average (28.5%) (**thank you for reading!**).



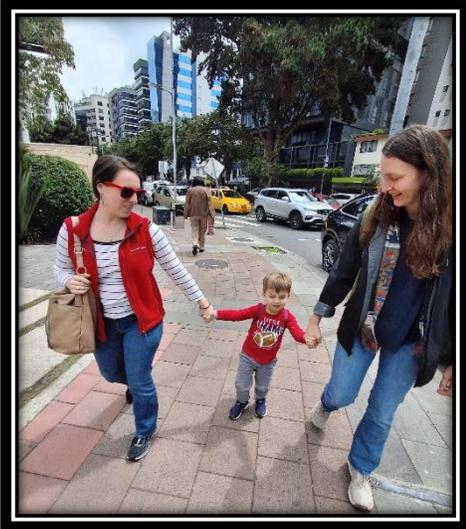
## Challenges

- Recruitment lacks clear directions and a strategy. There are positive pieces, but they need active focus to clarify those channels and get them to work together.
- We lack a strategy to bring new accounts like churches, schools, and other institutions into partnership, financially or otherwise.
- *Sponsorship program specifics:*
  - Player Sponsorship is facing high turnover rates, possibly because of a lack of personal connection compared to other programs.
  - Child Sponsorship fundraising structure is outdated due to evolving needs and rising costs, resulting in insufficient support.
  - Communication regarding appropriate behavior towards sponsors needs improvement, as misconceptions have led to parents improperly leveraging sponsorships for additional funds or scholarships.

## Story: Partnership Development as a blessing, not a necessary evil.

There is a stigma around becoming a missionary, and support raising, or partnership development (PDM), is often viewed as a necessary evil. Missionaries must navigate the uncomfortable task of asking family and friends for financial support to fulfill their calling. However, we aim to shift this perspective.

Molly is our newest missionary teacher, set to join Antioch in August 2026. She began her PDM journey last spring during her final semester of college. We moved at a gentle pace to allow her to focus on finishing her degree while taking steps on that journey. In the first month, she engaged in a Bible study that highlighted the Biblical foundations for financial support from others. Following that, she prayed for guidance on potential partners, the timing for her outreach, and suitable giving levels. Additionally, she developed a presentation to convey the urgency of her mission and how they could be a part of it. Every step was prayed over.



After graduation, Molly began scheduling meetings with her community to share her calling. This aspect can be daunting because it involves risking rejection by loved ones. Yet, it's crucial to view PDM as an opportunity to invite others into a God-driven mission. Typically, at JKC, new missionaries take 3 to 6 months to gather necessary commitments. However, due to Molly's Biblical mindset, the generosity of her community, and God's provision, she successfully secured her funding in just over a month.

Molly's experience demonstrates that God provides through community support when we trust Him and step out in faith. PDM is not a necessary evil but rather a divine gift, encouraging us to rely on Him as we invite others to join in the mission.

### Quotes from Student Sponsors

“I always look forward to the opportunity to see and talk with the students we sponsor. This year I saw one of the students for the second time. His name is Angel and I was excited to reconnect and build on our relationship that started two years ago. He remembered our first meeting and got very excited knowing I was visiting again. I met Luis for the first time. Luis was older spoke English very well and quickly became my interpreter for Angel. I got to listen to their plans and dreams for their future, and they wanted to know all about me as well. It was a meeting that I will always remember and hopefully I will have additional opportunities in the future!” - *Bob Capps student sponsor since 2020.*



Picture Captions: (L): Bob Capps with the students he sponsors. (R): Despite a last-minute cancellation, these students wanted to connect with their sponsor virtually while his church was here!

“For several years I have had the privilege of sponsoring students (both boys and girls) through JKC. It brings me joy to receive cards, drawings and photos from these precious children, and to see how they are learning and growing in God’s grace. I keep their photos in my gratitude/prayer journal to remind me to pray for them. It is also a joy to be able to send cards, letters, and gifts to them. It is such a blessing to have a small part in these students’ lives for the Kingdom of God by praying for them and their families and encouraging them in their walk with Jesus.” - *Babs Robinson, student sponsor since 2020.*

## Short term teams

By Laura Cavalenes

### Celebrations

- There were 314 participants from 18 teams: 10 hosted by JKC and 8 hosted by LLI. There was an even spread of programming with teams collaborating alongside each of JKC's ministries: Antioch Christian Academy, La Residencia, Warrior Basketball Club, and Community Development.
  - Eight recurring JKC teams, two new JKC teams



- Onboarded Isbelis Montilla, STT Coordinator, who has been a vital addition to the team with her strong work ethic and ability to connect quickly with people.
- We saw another strong financial year for Short-term Teams
  - Net profit for the ministry overall was \$34,000.00
  - Total fees generated: \$37,600.00
- 697 patients seen by providers during clinics put on by medical STTs
- Almost \$60,000 added into the Ecuadorian economy.



### Challenges

- Effective communication with team leaders is a challenge. To improve clarity on deadlines, we introduced a “checklist” in 2025. For the upcoming season, we will implement a new program to strengthen relationships among team leaders, ensuring at least three virtual meetings before the trip to align everyone and maintain a unified approach.
- Average cost per participant this year increased to \$526, and so, likely after 2026, we will need to consider a participant fee increase.
- Airline tickets seemed to be rising with limited baggage space as well. This will continue to be a challenge to maintain our status as an affordable mission trip destination, and how we often use groups to transport ministry purchases in the U.S.
- Communication regarding the schedule of teams within the school remains an issue.

### Story: College Major Fair

Deciding which major to study in college is a significant decision, and many high school students lose sleep over it as they contemplate their options. Recently, one of our 11th-grade students faced this dilemma. He had been studying here since elementary school and aspired to pursue higher education, but he was unsure about his field of study.

Last fall, a team of university students studying abroad in Quito came to the jungle to support our students. We invited them to host a “college major fair” for our high schoolers, during which they shared their experiences with various majors. This event provided a valuable opportunity for Antioch students to learn about different fields of study and understand why their slightly older peers chose their respective majors.

As a result of the college major fair, our uncertain student discovered his passion. He later told his mom, who then shared with us, that he decided he wants to study marketing in college—all thanks to the insights he gained at the fair.



Picture Captions: (L): small group time during the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual intercambio. (R): L&LI and Antioch students after the college major fair!

### Story: Goodbyes after Connections

Our 3rd Annual High School Intercambio (cultural exchange) between Antioch and Briarcrest students was undoubtedly one of the most moving moments of the year. For three days, these high school students from the Ecuadorian jungle and the suburbs of Memphis, TN, came together to play games, overcome challenges, share laughs, and open their hearts to one another.

At the end of each day's activities, the students would gather in small groups and respond to a few prompted questions from the leaders. These questions prompted deep and thoughtful answers, facilitating the true essence of the Intercambio. Students learned about each other's cultures and formed genuine bonds.

This was especially evident when it came time to say goodbye on the last day. Farewells are always difficult, but this one was particularly difficult because of the connections that had been made; those closing moments were filled with emotion, tears, hugs, and laughter. We are already looking forward to the 4th Annual Intercambio and all that God has in store for the students.

# Member Services

By Kaylan Foster

## Celebrations

- New missionaries: We welcomed Mike Neil back to the field in January as the Warrior Basketball Club manager, though he has since begun to transition to Community Development. Fausto joined our team in August as a member of the SLT, and Sharon Frame joined us on the field in August as an English Literature teacher.
- Re-committed missionary: Cheyenne Johnson chose to commit to another two years serving in a new role as the English Department Coordinator.
- Created a two-hour virtual training for friends and family members receiving missionaries back from the field to facilitate a community approach to care once missionaries return to the U.S.
- We sent our first missionary family on Sabbatical!

## Story: Saying Good Goodbyes

Katie Hunter taught English Literature at Antioch Christian Academy for four years and made a huge impact not only on her students, but also on the English curriculum development and coaching of the other English teachers. She became a pillar of our missionary team as a single female guiding younger team members and creating a comfortable space for everyone. Katie first arrived to JKC with a two-year commitment, and she chose to commit for another two years after that. Even with as much of an impact as Katie had made, and with the enormous impact the jungle and this community had had on her, she still knew that four years was the end of her time in the jungle. We began her offboarding process in January, giving us plenty of time to prepare for the hardest plane ride of her life in early July.



We worked together to carefully plan when and how to share the news that she would not be returning for the 2025-2026 school year with each person in her life -- a delicate process. Katie needed to share with her superiors at the school, Paul and Shirley, and the missionary team, as is customary. After that, it was most important that the girls in the Student Resident Home hear it from her first. She shared the news with them one Thursday evening after leading worship for them before bedtime. They shared sweet, heartfelt words with tears in their eyes and took time to feel the impact of losing another confidant in their lives. At the

next weekly Monday meeting, Katie shared with the entire school staff and received their words of encouragement and thanks for her years of service. Next came her students, the people she'd poured into for four years. They listened and tried to compel her to stay in their sweet and genuine voices, but eventually they carried on with classes as normal.

In the months that followed, Katie stumbled across a Bible study on grief which prepared her beautifully for the conversations, feelings, and process that happened next. We talked about the different things that she might experience with reverse culture shock, ways that she could set herself up well for processing the tough emotions to come, and how to say goodbye. With his skills as a life coach, Adam spoke with Katie about the necessary logistics of moving back to the U.S. and found that the Lord had already laid a plan at Katie's feet for a house, job and car. I met with Katie's parents, long-term boyfriend (now husband), sister-in-law and close friend via video call to train them on best practices for receiving a missionary back from the field. They asked wonderful questions and engaged with the content, eager to support Katie through this transition.

We planned a special dinner so that community members closest to Katie would be able to share their appreciation with her and celebrate all that God had done in and through her as she served here. Saying goodbye is something that Ecuadorians do quite well! Each person took time to stand and share from their hearts, bringing tears to Katie's eyes.

But the hardest goodbyes were yet to come -- the students. May brought the last days of class and with it many emotions for Katie and her students. They gave her gifts and letters and spoke about favorite class memories. They knew she wasn't leaving yet, but the end of an era of English class had come and things wouldn't ever be the same again, so they grieved together.

Katie spent June, her last month in Ecuador, leaving a gift for us all. She painted a huge wall mural on the side of the preparatory building facing the playground. The project allowed her to artistically process our mission statement and leave a physical mark just as vibrant and impactful as her ministry. She took time to write letters to as many people as possible, and she engaged quality time with the people she had grown closest to.



The missionary team gifted her a notebook full of letters and prayed over her at her last Wednesday night prayer. Then we watched her ride away in a taxi to Quito to catch her flight. Saying goodbye is hard, but Katie excelled at even this most difficult task. In her leaving, she honored every single relationship she had built in her time here. She gave of her gifts and talents in order to bless us forever, and she carried with her the prayers and wisdom over the transition ahead. I'm certain she will be back to visit someday, and when she does, she'll be welcomed back with open arms by the community that said goodbye with healthy, open hearts.

# Appendix: Jungle Kids for Christ – Our Rule of Ministry

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5*

## Context: What is a Rule of Ministry?

The purpose of this declaration is to ensure that our work remains aligned with God’s purposes, because we know that apart from that will, we can accomplish nothing. We have adapted an ancient tool of the early Christians, a “Rule of Life” (see sidebar), to help us create a framework to ensure that our efforts are truly in Christ and on mission. Our “Rule of Ministry” is designed to bring intentionality to the day-to-day activities of our ministry, drawing a straight line from the world that we find (The Problem) to the transformation that we seek (Our Vision) by defining the actions we will undertake (Our Work) to advance God’s redemptive plan.

### The Problem

A Rule of Ministry begins with a clear-eyed understanding of the problem, the alienation and corruption in communities we serve and the myriad symptoms that result from their separation from God. In a ministry context, clarity is important because we must focus our finite efforts on only a portion of the fallen world, specific problems in specific communities.

### Our Vision

We contrast the problem with our vision for these communities when they have been restored to a right relationship with their creator. Of course, we have only a small role to play in God’s overall redemptive plan and so we must be clear about the specific ends that we seek and our role in pursuing them. Only then can we test them to ensure that they align with God’s purposes, our collective gifts and capabilities, and our day-to-day activities.

### Our Work

Finally, we describe our ministry programs and how we intend them to create space for God to heal and ultimately redeem. We understand that we cannot achieve the ends that we seek by direct effort; throwing money and resources at a problem is a tempting form of missionary hubris that usually causes more problems than it solves. Instead, we design our programs to begin with relationships and address specific aspects of the larger problem that we can solve through steadfast effort, playing our role so that that God can do what only he can do.

## RULE OF LIFE

A Rule of Life was a tool developed by early Christians to align their daily activities so that they could bear fruit for the Kingdom. The word “rule” as used by the early Christians is “regula”, which means literally a ruler or straightedge. There is some evidence that this was also the word used in the Mediterranean region for the trellis on which grape vines were held, keeping them off the ground to provide light and air to maximize fruit bearing. Either way, the word picture is clear: a Rule of Life is, in the words of Pastor Tyler Staton, “drawing a straight line from us to our telos (or goal) — like an arrow. It’s aiming our lives at our deepest desires.”

As Christ followers, we cannot achieve our deepest desire of intimacy with Christ by willpower alone. But it is within our power to organize our lives around certain practices (prayer, scripture, sabbath, solitude, etc.) that give space for the Spirit to work, so that over time we move steadily onward toward that goal. And so, a Rule of Life is a way to bring intentionality to our spiritual development, or as John Mark Comer has said: “we do what we can do, to create the conditions in which God can do what only he can do: transform our hearts and, through us, the world.”

## The Problem

*So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us.  
We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Isaiah 59:9*

Across the Napo River watershed in the jungle region of Ecuador, generations of families are locked in relentless cycles of poverty, domestic violence, alcoholism, and familial breakdown. What begins as economic scarcity rapidly becomes a self-perpetuating spiral of trauma: absent parents chasing sporadic work, homes ruled by alcohol and isolation, children raising children, and early pregnancies that close off almost every avenue of escape. Materialism, amplified by television and cheap mobile phones, has replaced older values of community and restraint with envy and instant gratification. Racism, poor roads, contaminated rivers, and the lingering effects of decades of mining activity ensure that even the most determined individuals face nearly insurmountable barriers to education, dignified work, or stable family life. Without local examples of another way, despair settles in as the only rational response.

The crisis reaches its most acute and heartbreaking expression in the rural indigenous communities in the eastern part of Ecuador's Napo region. Here, a child's future is too often written at birth. From the age of six or seven, girls shoulder adult responsibilities—carrying infants on their hips, fetching water, cooking, and cleaning—while missing months of school at a time. Overcrowded homes offer no privacy, and sexual abuse is widespread and rarely addressed. Pregnancy by sixteen has become commonplace; motherhood by eighteen is expected. Boys grow up immersed in a culture of rampant alcoholism and machismo; cane liquor is as often easier to obtain than clean water, and early, often irresponsible fatherhood is the norm.

Education can be a pathway to change, but schools here, when they function at all, are often single-teacher operations where one educator juggles multiple grade levels in the same overcrowded room—trying to teach math to the older kids while explaining the alphabet to the youngest. With so many students to manage, the focus inevitably shifts from sparking curiosity and deep learning to simply maintaining order: enforcing silence with threats, doling out punishments for fidgeting, or sending children home for minor infractions. And even where there are functioning schools, a culture of compliance and rigid process chokes teacher initiative and so children are passed along from grade to grade without real learning. Consequently, almost no one from these communities is equipped to complete higher education, and so no one returns as a professional role model to show that success is possible without leaving the jungle behind.

This is not mere hardship. It is a profound injustice that obscures the imago Dei, the image of God declared by Scripture to be present in every human person from conception. When a little girl's childhood is stolen before she reaches primary school, when a boy's adolescence is scripted to end in addiction and broken families, something sacred is being crushed: the inherent dignity, potential, and worth of children created in the likeness of their Creator.

## Our vision

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11*

We long to see entire communities restored to the abundant life Jesus promised—where every child grows up knowing they are seen, loved, and full of God-given purpose; where alcoholism and violence are old stories of bondage, not daily realities; and where the local church stands as living proof that the Kingdom has come near.

We do not pretend that we ourselves will bring this redemption. The redeeming work is God’s alone, and we are granted only a small, humble part in one bend of His great river of restoration. Our calling is to do what human hands and hearts can do—love faithfully, show up consistently, and share our gifts—so that God may do what only He can do: bringing light into dark places, mend what has been shattered for generations, and cause hope to rise where despair once ruled.

The wounds are deep, and so the remedy is neither simple nor quick. It proceeds in three broad stages:

**Encouragement** – We come alongside mothers, fathers, and young people and invite them to believe that a better life is possible. Change is hard, but it is possible when no one walks alone. We offer practical help, but always as companions, never as rescuers, showing that new habits and new hopes can take root right here in this soil.

**Exhortation** – The road is narrow, and the old ways pull hard. When exhaustion sets in, when a middle school student struggles, or when a parent wonders if the investment in their child’s future is worth it, we do not walk away. Perseverance is learned in community, not just the classroom, and so we walk beside them, counseling reconciliation rather than retribution, encouraging and not merely punishing a misbehaving child, always with the goal of helping them to stand up one more time.

**Empowerment** – Our deepest joy is to work ourselves out of a job. We labor with families so that the first young woman who finishes nursing school and chooses to come home, the first father who stays sober for ten years, the first couple who marry as adults and raise their children in peace become the living proof the next generation needs. These are the witnesses every child along the river deserves—ordinary neighbors who show, in their own bodies and families, that the cycle can be broken. They become the true change agents, the ones who multiply hope from the inside, turning generations of despair into ever-widening circles of redemption.

This is the ministry of reconciliation we are invited to join: not to fix broken families, but to encourage, exhort, and empower them while God restores what has been stolen.

## Our work

*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.  
Galatians 6:9*

Following the example of Jesus—who ate with sinners, touched the untouchable, and never hurried away—we love these families by staying. For fifteen years we have lived along the Napo through floods and drought, through funerals and baptisms, refusing to leave when the road washes out or the money runs low. Generations of racism, decades of economic plunder, and the memory of well-meaning but transient outsiders—missionaries, NGOs, and government officials who arrived with promises and left when the funding dried up—have taught people here to guard their hearts. Trust is earned slowly. We have shared yuca and chicha under palm roofs, grieved with students who had to drop out of school because of teenage pregnancy, and danced at graduations when everyone said it was impossible. That stubborn, fifteen-year presence is the distinguishing mark of our work and the only reason anyone listens when we speak of hope.

Everything we do flows out of those relationships and points toward the same goal: empowering the children of the jungle so that they can break the cycles of poverty and abuse and become embodied witnesses of transformation in their communities.

**Antioch Christian Academy (ACA)** is JKC’s main effort, a Pre-K-12 school that provides kids with the knowledge, skills, and agency they need to challenge the narrative that their lives are predetermined by poverty. Here, students learn to read well, think critically, and—crucially—speak English, a skill that opens real jobs in tourism and beyond. But just as important as books are the Christian values and life skills modeled daily by our staff: resilience when things go wrong, personal accountability instead of mere rule-following, and the constant message that who you are is always more important than what you achieve.

Because their educational options are so poor, we make extra efforts to recruit and enroll children from rural communities. But while everyone along the river knows ACA is the best school in the region, many families believe it is only for “rich kids” from the city. This perception reflects a deeper wound, that a good education is out of reach, but we are working hard to encourage families to believe that change is possible and take the first steps, one relationship and one scholarship at a time.

**La Residencia** is home for eight indigenous girls whose families live three to five hours away by taxi, canoe, and foot, making daily travel to ACA impossible. La Residencia gives them a safe place to live during the school year, plus the emotional support, personal development, health care and nutrition, and extra academic help that their families long to provide but often cannot. Our staff visits the families to offer health and parenting classes based on Biblical principles,

building trust and resilience to get through the inevitable difficulties. The sad truth is that, without this extra help, most of these girls wouldn't make it through school.

**Warriors Basketball Club** fills the court four times a week, ninety minutes each session. What began as a handful of ACA students now draws dozens of kids from the local communities—kids who rarely attend school, who seldom have a man speak to them without yelling. Through practices and games, our coaches teach that character is forged when you keep running after you miss the shot, when you shake the other team's hand after you lose, and when you choose to encourage a teammate instead of mocking him. In those sweaty moments after a bad call or a tough defeat, trust and resilience are built, and a coach can quietly say, "You are not what your father says you are when he's drunk. Jesus says you are His brother, and He loves you."

**Community Development** works at the frontier of JKC's efforts to reach these communities. Through identifying and educating communities using tools like health clinics and community-based water projects, we help people identify and solve their most basic problems themselves, using as many of their own resources as possible. The goal is to avoid unhealthy dependencies and break cycles of poverty and disease. Recognizing that this requires a holistic response, we actively seek partnerships with community leaders, government departments, and local churches—helping set up medical clinics, early childhood development training, youth programs, adult Bible studies, and leadership training. Crucially for our other ministries, community development is often our first point of contact in a new village, building the trust that later lets us encourage families into a deeper relationship by enrolling a child in ACA or joining the basketball club.

\* \* \*

All of these relationships—classroom, boarding home, basketball court, village clinic—create natural opportunities to share the gospel, first by demonstrating Christ's love in action and then, when hearts are open, in trust-based conversations.

We persist in doing what faithful hands and hearts can do—teaching, coaching, healing, staying—so that God may do what only He can do: redeem these families, restore what has been stolen, and fill the Napo with joy that echoes for generations.