

## DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

### Getting Back to Where We Were Before . . . . by Larry Brady

It is slow getting back to where we were before COVID 19, but **we will get there**, thanks to our faithful supporters and our courageous workers who have started returning to Panama.

So many have asked me about how the pandemic has affected the people of Panama. Panama reported over 423,000 cases with about 7,000 deaths. Restrictions were much more severe than in the U.S., making it almost impossible for some to go out for basic supplies.

Because of generous donations from many of you, we have been able to purchase and distribute over \$20,000 in food and medicines for those hardest hit!

The **Clinic of Hope** in Sanson has been closed for more than a year! Just a few weeks ago, we were able to "reopen for business." Our medical team saw close to 1,000 people needing medical attention - at the clinic and beyond to remote villages and refugee camps.

The clinic is still the most beautiful building on the Pan American Highway. It stands as a symbol of the compassion of Jesus.

#### FINAL 2021 CALENDAR

Operation Christmas Joy Gifts Due . . . . . October 13  
(Except for the Truck Route . . . . . October 14-15)  
Operation Christmas Joy Trip . . . . . December 7-17



First mission team to the Clinic of Hope since December, 2019, provided medical services, a gospel meeting at the Sanson church and clinic maintenance.



Front: Luis Tojin, Belinda Tipton, Kimberly Howard, Diane Edrington, Raul Cabrera. Back: J.W. Furr, Rebecca Harris, Larry Brady, Dr. Francisco Mayorga, Mark Dillman, Urian Ponce.

## 'Catching Up' With Panamanian Success Stories

**Neilis Saenz** from Sanson lived with Larry and Betsy Brady in 2015 while attending AUM's Second Language program. Neilis completed 9 months at the top of her class! She returned to Sanson where she was hired to teach English in a local school.

Neilis met and married a fine man, **Jose Ezequiel Pinto**, who is a lawyer. He was taught and baptized by **Luis Tojin**, the Sanson church preacher, where the couple attends faithfully. They are also proud parents of a six month old daughter, **Noah Camila**.



Neilis is now owner of a small clothing store in Santa Fe that specializes in American attire.

**Yati Chami**, the Brady's Panama godchild, has been with them for eight years, graduating from Prattville Christian Academy with honors in 2018. After two years at Freed-Hardeman University, Yati transferred



**Raul Cabrera**, an outstanding Christian young man from the Embera community of Sambu, will be continuing pilot training at the Epic Aviation Academy in New Smyrna Beach, Fla., beginning August 5. Becoming the first Embera pilot is one of Raul's many accomplishments. **Diane Edrington** is Raul's American sponsor.



to Faulkner University in Montgomery, where she will begin her senior year in August. Her studies are preparing her for a career in criminal justice.

Yati loves going to Panama with Larry to interpret. Her desire is to "make a difference in the lives of others."

# Panama Missions

## Summer 2021 News Update

### Return to Panama was Emotional Time for Mission Team

by Larry Brady

It has been 18 months since I was in Panama with a mission team, and the process of getting the team into Panama was extremely challenging. In addition to multiple testing for COVID 19, we had to be cleared to travel to the Darien Province. We are grateful for the support and protection of the **Senafront Border Police!**

#### Our goals for June 8-18 were threefold:

**1.** Reopen the Clinic of Hope (including making needed repairs); **2.** Conduct a gospel meeting at the Sanson Church; **3.** Provide medical and spiritual aid to remote Indian villages and in nearby refugee camps.

Two full days were devoted to the Clinic of Hope, seeing as many church members and area folks as possible. Many in the region depend on our clinic for assessment and treatment of chronic conditions.

**Dr. Francisco Jose Mayorga**, a physician and evangelist from Honduras, is a wonderful addition to our medical team. Also assisting medical director, **Diane Edrington CFNP** of Long Beach, Miss., was **Rebecca Harris RN** of Montgomery, Ala., a veteran medical missions worker. Others served as aides and interpreters.

**Mark Dillman**, minister and elder from the Airport Road Church of Christ, Crestview, Fla., led the evangelistic efforts while also assisting **J. W. Furr** with repairs at the clinic building.

By far, rendering aid in the refugee camps was the most emotional experience any of us has ever had before in Panama.

Injuries and stories of atrocities, even murder, especially in the Darien Gap, are too horrendous to describe. (See p. 2 for more information.)

Refugees are coming through Panama from approximately 20



**Water! Water!** That is what we heard the most from refugees. Water was purchased and given out. Minister, Luis Tojin, pictured.



Above: Larry Brady baptizes a young mother on Sunday who he has studied with on past visits.



Rebecca Harris RN (left), Dr. Francisco Mayorga and Diane Edrington CFNP (above) saw close to 1,000 patients during the mission effort.

countries. Some report having traveled as many as 10,000 miles. Sadly, there is no end in sight.

The Panamanian government is treating the travelers humanely, but Panama does not have adequate resources to house, feed and care for refugees.

**Please consider a donation to Panama Missions to help provide funds for travel to Panama and humanitarian assistance to those in greatest need.**

## Refugees Who Attempt Darien Gap Create 'Humanitarian Crisis'

Once again, a Panama Missions medical team has been compelled to render compassionate aid to refugees who have made their way into Panama via the "Darien Gap," described as one of the most dangerous regions of the world.

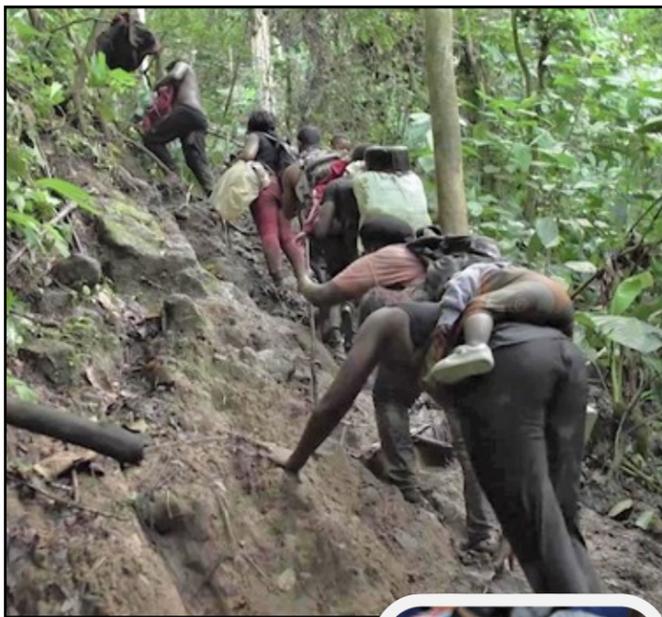
During the recent June 8-18 evangelistic/medical mission trip, the medical team, led by **Diane Edrington CFNP** of Long Beach, Miss., spent two days providing medical care to refugees who were severely injured and dehydrated from the 60 mile trek through the Darien Gap, a dense and dangerous jungle that connects Colombia to Panama. It is notoriously overrun with thieves, drug smugglers and human traffickers from Colombia.

"Most don't fully realize the dangers of this route and are robbed, beaten, (women) raped, and/or forced to traffic drugs," describes **Michael Yon**, a freelance war correspondent who explains that the Darien Gap is the only route to the United States for refugees who cannot acquire visas to travel to Mexico or Canada. Instead, their trip begins in Brazil and on through Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica and finally Mexico. The problem involves thousands from at least 19 countries.

Those who survive the Gap journey are temporarily housed in a refugee camp in Panama and bused to Costa Rica. Unfortunately, many lives are lost in the Darien Gap, sometimes leaving orphaned children.



*Nurse Practitioner Diane Edrington and the other medical workers treated many serious foot and body injuries sustained by refugees hiking through the jungles of the Darien Gap. Many were robbed of everything, including their shoes.*



*(Above) Refugees attempt to hike the treacherous 60 miles of the Darien Gap connecting Colombia to Panama, many carrying children and supplies.*

*Refugees are treated humanely in Panama. If parents of lone children cannot be located, the Panamanian government provides long term care.*



The **most touching refugee story** encountered by the mission team involved a three month old infant whose mother died in the Darien Gap, leaving the African father with no way to feed his child.

Shortly before the refugees were to be transported by bus to Costa Rica, team members **Belinda Tipton, Kimberly Howard** and others had the idea of purchasing powdered milk, water and baby bottles to give to the father. Returning from making the purchases, Belinda and Kimberly frantically searched for the father, finding him just moments before the bus pulled away. Many tears of joy were shed!!

*Kimberly and Belinda hug and cry for joy after milk and bottles were provided the dad.*



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

BY LARRY BRADY

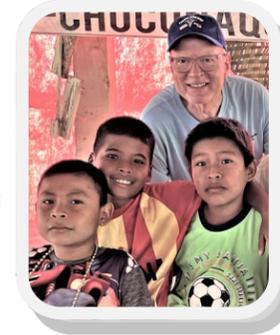
**Mark Dillman** has become a veteran traveler to Panama. In December 2016, Mark, minister and elder for the Airport Road Church of Christ, Crestview, Fla., joined us for the Operation Christmas Joy trip, helping hand out gifts to thousands of children.

The rest of us could see it! Mark was hooked! He connected with the children, as well as the kindhearted people of Panama.

Mark is easy to get to know; the Panamanians have grown fond of his relaxed and kind manner.

He also goes with us on summer evangelism trips, including this past June, enjoying the opportunity to preach and evangelize.

Mark writes this statement about Panama: "The Lord has opened windows of opportunity for Larry Brady



### Scholarship Students Worthy of Support!

Because of generous U.S. sponsors, eight students are currently being supported to attend school: five in elementary, two in high school, and one in college. All are good students (minimum C average) with a desire to attend college upon completion of high school.

Because most children in the rural areas of Panama we serve live in extreme poverty, the costs are prohibitive without some extra help. In addition to uniforms and books, each student must pay for his/her own transportation and food.

**Only through education can we begin to break the cycle of poverty in Panama!**

#### Please choose a level to support:

- Elementary School - \$50 month
- High School - \$60 month
- College - \$100 month

**Return the enclosed response form with your commitment. You will receive information about your student.**

Larry Brady, Director



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and others to share the gospel in this small corner of the world. I feel extremely blessed to be included in such a worthwhile and fruitful endeavor."

Mark is already committed to the OCJ trip this December, which he recalls will be his eighth mission to Panama.

### PEOPLE WHO 'MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

In 2010, a U.S. Peace Corp worker in Panama named **Kimberly** served as an interpreter for the annual Panama Missions Vision Clinic headed by **Dr. Russ Burcham** of Denver. She recalls how much she admired the "incredible people of faith" she met, including Larry Brady and many others she has met since, as she continues to make herself available to Panama Missions medical teams. **Kimberly Howard** is married and lives in Ft. Worth, Tex., with husband Devon and two young daughters.



*Kimberly Howard is founder of Prospera, a soap recycling project that is meeting humanitarian health needs in Panama.*

In pre-COVID 2020, Kimberly worked with **Diane Edrington**, medical director of Panama Missions, and observed the long lines of people waiting for medical care at a mission clinic being held in Meteti.

It raised a question in her mind which she posed to Larry and Diane: "What can be done year-round to help **prevent** illness?"

**The simple answer was SOAP!** "Soap is inexpensive and the most effective tool doctors and scientists have discovered to combat sickness," she explains, adding: "The value of soap was rediscovered during COVID 19."

A short time later, Kimberly founded **Prospera**: a health and soap recycling initiative. Partially used soap is collected from Panama City hotels and U.S. factories (via Eco Soap Bank\*). The soap is sanitized, enhanced and recycled into new bars to be distributed in Panama, primarily in the Darien Province where Panama Missions works. Women in the Meteti community are employed to make the recycled bars, creating another benefit of the project, jobs for women.

"Our Handwashing Promotion Program is called 'Bright Hands Bright Future' and is being designed into an educational coloring book for school children," she continues.

Larry and Diane compliment what Kimberly is doing to promote health and provide jobs in Panama. "Kimberly is a great asset to our work!" "She is amazing," adds Diane.

Anyone interested in being involved in Kimberly's health education program in Panama is invited to contact her: prosperadirector@gmail.com or 602-363-2663

Website: [www.prosperapanama.org](http://www.prosperapanama.org)

\*Prospera was established in collaboration with Eco Soap Bank, an international non-profit soap recycling program founded in 2014. Learn more: [www.ecosoapbank.org](http://www.ecosoapbank.org)