



Rugby star Joe on his life after career-ending injury



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# Dumfries & Galloway Life

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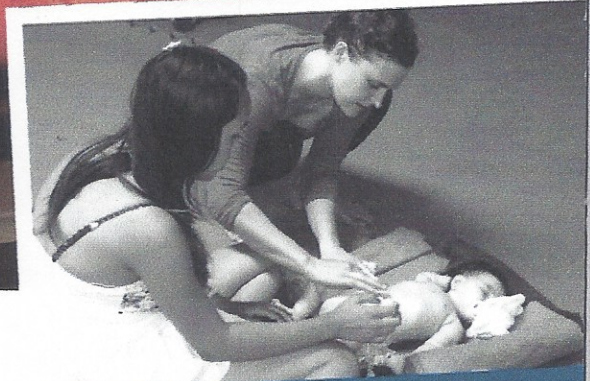
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# Miranda

At home in Dumfries with the managing director of Bonhams in Scotland



Rhea's mission  
 My year with Brazil's street kids



**BETHAN HALLIDAY**  
 Young designer is wild about denim

**D&G LIFE PEOPLE**

**PETER DOWDEN**  
 Sculptor's garden shaped by stones



Profile  
RHEA  
MCATEER

# Seeing the light

Despite the poverty and difficult conditions, Rhea McAteer of Auchencairn 'saw the brightness' in Brazil, where she spent a year working with street kids, pregnant teenagers and young mums

WORDS CAROL HOGARTH PHOTOGRAPHY JENNY WOOLGAR AND RHEA MCATEER

**H**aving volunteered in an overcrowded, deprived suburb of the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere for a year, former Kirkcudbright Academy pupil Rhea McAteer has nothing but good things to say about the people of Eldorado, Brazil.

Rhea, 29, from Auchencairn, volunteered for the Charlotte Miller Art Project (CMAP) and ACER, an NGO (non-governmental organisation) based at a community centre in Eldorado, a *barrio*, or neighbourhood, of Sao Paulo where less than 6,000 square metres is home to more than 30,000 people.

She ran yoga classes for the community, art and music classes for school children and worked with pregnant teenagers and young mums on exercise and baby massage.

"It just doesn't feel deprived all the time. The beauty of the people is amazing. There's this incredible energy to the place. I felt so welcomed. People who have very little are constantly opening their arms to you.

"Some days the poverty did affect me, all you can see is the doom, the hard, hard work. Everything is so fundamental; the changes that would have to be made.

"But on other days I just saw the brightness and the light and how one child can be so positively affected by a class."

Rhea studied performing arts in Newcastle and was living in Brighton, studying music and working as a teaching assistant, when she met a friend who was working for CMAP.

Inspired by the charity's work, she raised enough money to volunteer for a year with the charity's project in Eldorado.

"It's about using art as a medium to help



Rhea in Eldorado playing creative musical games with street children

*'The beauty of the people is amazing. There's this incredible energy to the place'*

street-based kids express themselves, to give them a voice, build confidence and promote self worth. I was there to supplement the music teacher, adding creative musical games."

Most of Rhea's pupils lived in Eldorado's favelas, or slums, which are notorious for drug dealing and violence. She explains that ACER founder Jonathan Hannay tries to prevent vulnerable children from these areas ending up on the streets: "He set it up in 1993 after working with street kids in Sao Paulo then stood back and thought it needed to be more about prevention.

"Some of them were drug running or helping their parents in markets and not going to school."

Another of ACER's major aims is to break the cycle of teenage pregnancy in Eldorado and as well as teaching yoga to pregnant teenagers, Rhea



worked with them on baby massage after their births, helping them develop bonds with their babies.

“Most of them live in very basic houses: mothers and grandmothers and aunts and lots of kids all together, though not all of them were single parents.

“There’s a lack of education about proper contraception but some just think teenage pregnancy is so normal, it’s just the way it goes.”

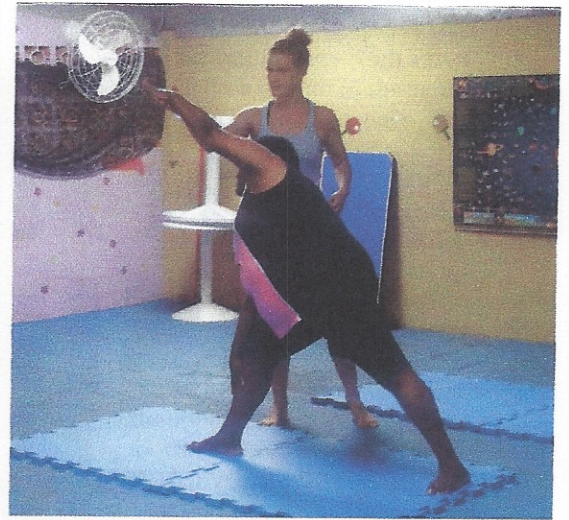
Rhea also ran yoga classes for the wider community which attracted older women, one of whom, she says, despite the language barrier “would come in and talk and talk and tell me her troubles and cry. People are so open.”

***‘Some days the poverty did affect me. Other days I just saw the brightness and the light’***

Having fallen in love with Brazil when she first travelled there eight years ago, Rhea spent a month off her volunteer job, seeing more of the country, including the centre of Sao Paulo, Brazil’s largest city: “Sao Paulo is crazy, just so huge. But I really liked it. It has some really lovely architecture.”

Although Eldorado had been one of the most violent barrios of Sao Paulo, Rhea insists she felt completely safe there: “Because of its violence in the past, everything shut at 11 and I wouldn’t have gone wandering around on my own after that, but otherwise I felt really comfortable in Eldorado.

“I used to run in the park and had complete freedom. I did genuinely feel safe.”



After a summer at home in Auchencairn, Rhea returned to Brazil to visit friends at a kite surfing centre in the north east of the country but says she would like to do more work with ACER and CMAP.

"I will definitely stay in contact with these organisations, it was such a great experience working with them, with the kids and doing some amazing arts projects, with the teenaged mums seeing them come in and build up their bonds with their babies and with the ladies from the community who came to do yoga. There were so many highlights."

[www.cmap.org.uk](http://www.cmap.org.uk)  
[www.acerbrasil.org.br](http://www.acerbrasil.org.br)

**Rhea at home in Auchencairn last August; right: teaching yoga classes, baby massage and art in Brazil**