



Fifty-one of the 125 children Mike Culliton sponsors in Brazil.

Sponsor of 125 Children Has 'Experience of a Lifetime'

Mike Culliton gathers no moss. Last year, the retired businessman traveled around the world three times. But his heart belongs in Fortaleza, Brazil, where he has sponsored as many as 125 children at a time.

It all started five years ago with one child, Fabiolla. Culliton saw a Christian Children's Fund ad and decided to make the call. Through correspondence, he got to know Fabiolla, and decided to sponsor four of her friends. Then, "I made a large commitment after the September 11 disaster," he said. "I believe the major problem of the world is four billion impoverished people...one of the symptoms is terrorism. My approach is to go directly to the problem, and help the people help themselves."

He first visited his sponsored children in January 2002—and has since been back three times. He sponsors 65 children in one project, and 60 more in another nearby. Visiting them, he said, has been the "experience of a lifetime."

"When you first arrive in Fortaleza," he said, "you see a beautiful city on the Atlantic. It looks like paradise. But in the back streets, you see huge disparities of wealth, and the less fortunate live in extreme poverty, surrounded by violence and drug use.

"Yet the project community center is clean as a whistle and run very professionally. The directors do not put up with any foolishness," he said. "All the people involved — CCF personnel, the children and the families — are neat, orderly, polite and appreciative. These people are very poor money-wise, but they smile a lot and are very positive and strong."

In the project areas, they think

he's Bill Gates. But, he said, "It's more about how you choose to spend your money. The sponsor dollars turn the children's lives around." His assistance provides for the health, educational, and clothing needs of his sponsored children, and he has also provided the start-up funds for a conversational English program. "The children's chance of getting a better job later in life increases many, many times if they know a second language," he said.

To his friends back home in the U.S. who tell him the world is coming apart, "I tell them to wake up, get to work." He encourages them to support CCF. "CCF is doing a very good job helping children," he said. "We just need to find a way to help about 10 million more."

• Your sponsored child receives benefits because of your contributions. In addition, funds are pooled to help other children waiting for sponsors.