The programmes are complementary: *Estrellas en las Escuelas* targets the pupils and teachers (with the teachers providing a huge capacity to pass on information to others) in an academic environment, while *Viaje a las Estrellas* focuses on the families, bringing science to the communities as another route to the education of children.

Challenges and perspectives

The different activities have been a tremendous success and the ESO-Chile volunteers will no doubt be called upon once again in 2012. Preparations for these activities have also been a very nice way to get to know our colleagues in a different context. The focus will now be to develop our palette of activities and to adapt them to the different audiences we encounter. ESO has already agreed to fund the purchase of one telescope, which will be more than welcome. Working together with higher authorities, whether local (schools, associations) or national (the education ministry) has proved to be a powerful way to make sure we meet the needs of the different communities. The challenge is now to keep up the momentum while continuing with our own research and operational tasks and to encourage new volunteers to get involved in order to assure the longevity of the effort.

The team

The ESO-Chile outreach volunteer team consists of all those listed above and is growing fast. In addition, we have been accompanied during these activities by colleagues from other institutes in Chile and abroad: D. Carrasco, C. Infante, C. Sifón at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile; C. Tappert at Universidad de Valparaiso; R. Zepeda, a member of the *Telescoperos* group that provided the telescopes; Prof. L. Barrera at Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación; N. Huelamo (Centro de Astrobiologica [CAB], Madrid); and A. Galenne (Observatoire de Meudon, Paris).

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Inspiring Young Brazilian Astronomers at the La Silla Observatory

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Eight astronomy students from the University of São Paulo in Brazil had the invaluable experience of visiting the La Silla Observatory from 27–30 April 2012. This visit proved an excellent opportunity to develop stronger links between the new generation of Brazilian astronomers and ESO.

The group of astronomy graduate students was led by the author as part of the activities for the graduate course in Observational Astrophysics at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). I started teaching this course in March 2012 at the Astronomy Department of the Institute of Astronomy, Geophysics and Atmospheric Sciences (IAG) at USP, and thought it would be important for the students to visit a world-class facility such as La Silla. Since I had been allocated time in late April 2012 for my ESO Large Programme for a search for planets around solar twin stars, I asked the Director of the Paranal and La Silla Observatories, Andreas Kaufer, if the IAG/USP students could join my observing run and get to know the telescopes at La Silla. I was delighted when this exceptional visit was approved.

We were warmly welcomed at La Silla. All the staff and most of the astronomers observing there were very helpful with all aspects of our trip. We visited the ESO 3.6-metre, the 3.58-metre New Technology Telescope (NTT) and MPG/ESO 2.2-metre telescopes and were given detailed explanations of the telescopes and their related instrumentation. Getting close to the HARPS spectrograph, the very precise instrument for planet hunting that was being employed for the Large Programme, was one of the highlights of the trip. The observations for my Large Programme were being undertaken by Luca Casagrande, a team member of the collaboration. He explained to the students how the observations are performed. Thanks to the HARPS pipeline that reduces the spectra in a few seconds, the students could discover for themselves the most promising candidates for hosting planets around our sample of solar twins.

The students enjoyed all aspects of our visit, experiencing for themselves the life of observational astronomers. During the first half of the visit the weather was not very friendly, but during the second half the skies cleared. Although it was a privilege to observe with large telescopes,

it was also wonderful to see, with the naked eye, the beauty of the night sky, the magnificent Milky Way and its dark clouds, our neighbouring galaxy, the Large Magellanic Cloud, and some stellar clusters with the help of binoculars. During the day it was a magical experience to witness the vivid colours of the sky and their contrast with the white domes and the desert mountains, especially at sunset. The contact with other astronomers and students working at La Silla has surely widened the astronomical vision of the student visitors. The visit to La Silla ended with two other memorable experiences. We hiked around the La Silla site in search of petroglyphs. This proved to be a challenging but exciting experience, and we successfully found the ancient petroglyphs. Finally, during our last night at La Silla, the students were awakened by a 5.5 magnitude earthquake with an epicentre close to the city of La Serena.

Taking advantage of this rare opportunity to visit La Silla, the group also made a one-day trip to other nearby observatories while they were based in La Serena. The visit to La Silla was a fantastic and unforgettable experience for the students. They have learned a lot, not only about telescopes and instruments, but also about themselves, and that dreams can come true. This trip will surely inspire them for many years to come.

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Fernando de Sousa Mello

Figure 1. The visiting students in front of the 3.58-metre NTT telescope. From left to right: student Ana Molina, Prof. Jorge Meléndez, students Patricia Martins de Novais, Miguel Paez, Nathália Cibirka, Fernando de Sousa Mello, Viviane Salvador Alves, Marcelo Tucci Maia and Andressa Silva Ferreira.

Ana Molina

Figure 2. The Brazilian graduate students pose in front of the, now de-commissioned, 15-metre SEST submillimetre telescope, with Prof. Jorge Meléndez on the left.