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Successful Experiences in the Prevention of Violence: Foundation La Guaca. *Colombia*

Best Practice

New for 2002

Categories: Children and Youth:
- community support programmes
- especially difficult circumstances (abuse, child labour, war)
Social Services:
- health and welfare
Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality:
- community participation

Level of Activity: National

Ecosystem: Tropical/Sub-Tropical

Summary

Successful Experiences in the Prevention of Violence a programme that involves the activities of La Fundacion La Guaca. Participation in this programme is voluntary. This programme mobilises the people in the process of social construction which requires commitment from the participants.

In the 11 years that we have been in operation, we have succeeded in consolidating a successful proposal for the prevention of violence. We have come up with not only personal life projects but also social ones which stimulate the transformation of the surrounding area. We have achieved great results during this period and we have been able to mobilise the people into taking part in this process of creating a better environment for all.

People have been able to appreciate the social services offered and have been able to understand that the prevention of violence makes possible the "recognition by diverse ethnic groups and cultures that it is possible to live a life of dignity." They have understood that it is possible to transform the current situations of education, security, the reduction of violence, physical, psychic and spiritual well-being of the child/youth through this initiative.

In the field of Civic Commitment and Cultural Vitality, it is important to point out that the violence and crime prevention models are the result of concrete facts and for this reason Community Libraries have been created. This give people access to information through books, videos and even toys for the children.

Cultural and community agents become community promoters who motivate the integration and strengthening of affective ties among the members of the group, creating an atmosphere of trust and personalized follow-up among young people aimed at establishing new communication channels with families, communities and institutions.

Eleven years in which the government in office understands that it is fundamental to value the success of this initiative in the prevention of violence. Colombia has been rated as the second most violent country in the world. Therefore for us to free ourselves from this menace, the government has to highly invest in violence prevention initiatives

Narrative

SITUATION BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE INITIATIVE

Before this initiative began its operation - in Bellavista, Mortinal neighborhoods of the 19th District: Brisas de los Cristales in the Andes County in the rural area of Cali, the towns of Puerto Tejada, Villarica and Santander in the State of Cauca - there weren't any consolidated processes of community and institutional citizenship participation; there were weaknesses in recreation and creativity, communities had a low self esteem, hence, they did not prioritise personal growth and development. Family and community relations were threatened and there was a high school drop-out rate, not to mention the the high number of children/youth who joined different armed groups in the country, or formed gangs.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

Priorities of the initiative were identified by the children/youth, who were the main target of the initiative. The parents then met up the statutes within which the initiative operates. Unanimously, the stakeholders visualized that violence should be considered as the minimization of the potentialities and capacities of fera and apathy among individuals, groups and communities at a physical, psychic and spiritual level.

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The objectives and strategies were a product of a participative research-action process, in which children, youth and adults took part in such social sectors, cities or neighborhoods. The process was carried out through various stages:

- a) Neighborhood and sector sensitization: to detect opportunist leaders in the community. Such leaders maintain the momentum even when the motivation is low or when support is withdrawn.
- b) Formation of Operating Base Groups: once the leaders are identified, they are trained about the Foundation's plan of action which permits them to follow-up the activities of the initiative.
- c) Divulgation and Promotion: The project execution is parallel to the youth leadership training, process of multiplication of experience accompanied by financial dependencies, base organizations and in particular the families of the young people.
- d) Evaluative Circularity: Evaluate the procedures executed emphasizing on the citizen and community participation mechanisms implemented and the way in which the community has appropriated them in order to reinitiate the sensitization and formation of new base groups.

MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES

One of the basic experiences of La Fundacion La Guaca is its social mobilization that encourages its communities and in particular individuals, to become architects of their own change. Therefore the volunteers or supporting groups are essential in the consolidation of our experience.

This appropriation by individuals and groups, expressed by social volunteers or supporting groups, makes the government take an interventionist role at financial, professional and technical levels. To accomplish this, it supports the Prevention of Violence Plan and gives an extra amount of money to areas in which the initiative operates (Cauca and Valle del Cauca). These financial resources were

channeled through children/youth participation in the Planning Committees created by the government. These committees ensure that money is given to communities in order to be used in programs and projects that specifically prevent violence through education, arts, communication, ecology and community participation.

PROCESS

The process has had different facets, and has had to overcome various difficulties with time. The following were the most transcendental in the process:

- a. At the beginning of the initiative, one of the difficulties was the dishonesty in community councils and local administrative councils which tried to stop the process and reject the participation in the awareness process. This has been overcome by the creation of a base group, active civil resistance and/or supporting groups and/or cultural agents that contribute to maintaining the process. Children/youths involved have tried to narrate their experiences to others educate other children about the risks involved in participating in violence. The weakness of this process lies in the institution's capacity to generate employment opportunities in order to prevent the population from involving itself in violence acts.
- b. Another difficulty resulted from the extension of program coverage in an attempt to go from a neighborhood plane to a city vision. However, this did not go very well because very many leaders - who had become exemplary role models - were murdered by armed city gangs.
- c. In the year 2002 the Foundation lost its headquarters and at the present, there is a search for national and international support regarding resources and the purchase of land. There are more than 7,000 people affected by our lack of enough resources, especially in the area of education. The Information and Formation Center project (CITOJOVEN) is being consolidated and will be the first to be created in the city of Cali through national and international financing.
- d. Internationalization is important because it allows us to disseminate information regarding this initiative. However, there are no financial resources to support this practice.
- e. The community participation has always been active beginning with the volunteer base groups at an informative, assessment, decision, control, negotiation and self-negotiation level.

The social fabric constructions are not imposed by government just because it finances the project. on the contrary, it is a collective activity beginning with the children/youth who help us to understand that "today we are in a generation that adopts new causes and gives priority to the immediate action to take." This generation is characterised by its diversity of actors, demands and solutions which should imply diversity of policies and opportunities for the population.

Citizen, group, community and institution levels of participation result from their capacities to be critical and active; participation cannot be conceived without these elements. Participation and involvement can be at a level of

- a) information: in the sense of communicating or questioning actions of the social environment,
- b) Assessment: where not only citizens, groups, communities and institutions are informed about the different proposals and decisions, but also where they can express their opinions,
- c) Control: that will be exercised through established mechanisms so that the decisions made are executed accurately,
- e) negotiation: it consists of the possibility that populations negotiate and administer the collective life of their communities.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

We have managed to propagate the importance of this initiative as a road to development. Even the lack of government credibility was not an excuse for negligence. This initiative has influenced more than 11,000 people in the involved states (blacks, whites, Indians, mulattoes, children/youth, adults and

the elderly) has motivated recreational, sports and artistic activities, recovery of self-esteem, wholesome life styles, the pedagogy of tenderness and human development; likewise there is a strengthening of family ties, a strengthening of values and a reconstruction of the family history as well as the elaboration of citizen, community and institutional projects with emphasis on young people which results in the elaboration of social responses and citizen participation in the prevention of violence.

*Through the Community library, the prevention of school drop-outs and absenteeism, the creation of a nexus between daily life and the school, reinforcement of school homework, motivation for children who are not attending school, to return to school, validation of studies and entrance into institutions of higher learning.

*The intervention of the Foundation laid the cornerstone of community agents processes implicated in life choices and condensed into projects such as the creation of areas such as, community libraries, video libraries, youth and adolescent attention centers.

*The process of working in a network is strengthened starting from a process of alliances and the maximization of resources.

*Involvement of the organization in government policies to support the process.

*Initially we began with work in the neighborhood, then we extended to the city and then to the neighboring states.

*Some of the latest results of the process is the generation of exchanges with Spain and the European Economic Community at study, culture and/or volunteer level, which increases the value of the proposal.

*Recognition and identification of opportunities and specified limitations have been advanced at a local and state level.

*Changes in the use and allocation of human technical and financial resources at a local and national level have been generated.

*The Foundation's support groups in the states' different experiences are basic in enabling participative action; this has resulted in qualification of the beneficiaries, which enable them to be employed by the Foundation itself and in similar projects of other institutions.

*Changes in behaviors and attitudes in the population: The populations' behaviors, such as the beggar attitude, begin to be modified and it is emphasized that if the government is really responsible for providing for a part of the population's necessities, then the population should be the main actor in return..

Let's take a look at the indicators that we have used in some of the areas:

AREAS

BASE INDICATORS DATA SOURCE

Necessities of the Population Goal

% of population demand dissatisfied

% of population demanding to space and limit

Coverage of Psychosocial Risks

Community Survey

Community Survey

Community Survey

Gender Focus

% of benefited children of head of family women

% of women/men in clubs

Community Survey

Community Survey

Community Participation

% of community groups involved

Kinds of commitments achieved

Kinds of communication channels with the community

Pronouncement of leaders in favor of clubs for young people

Interviews

Interviews - Documents

Records

Records - Interviews

SUSTAINABILITY

One of the basic elements for the project sustainability is the support of the Municipal Mayors Offices in the different states where projects have been developed for the prevention of violence. This support is provided in financial resources which are assigned each year, guaranteeing its continuity and strengthening its social impact.

Gender equity is fundamental and especially in Web works which we are promoting from the prevention of violence experience, with social benefits through the generation of employment, the personalization of social responsibility and marketing of the products elaborated by the beneficiaries. Sustainability is guaranteed by the participation of citizens, groups, communities and institutions and by the critical and purposeful abilities that they exhibit. Participation cannot be conceived without these elements. The participation and involvement of the communities in this successful experience of prevention of violence is expressed by: Information, Assessment, Decision, Control and Negotiation.

Cultural sustainability is summarized into a slogan which states what our experience is: "We Value the Past, we Build the Present and we Insure the Future." We comprehend culture from the legal framework of our constitution understood as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterize human groups and which go beyond arts and letters, ways of living, human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Thus, this initiative is applicable anywhere in the world.

The interdisciplinary support to the initiative includes contributions from the environmental point of view. In this sense, the process is based on Environmental Leadership School which allows the beneficiaries to implement study groups about reality and environmental legislation, knowledge and base work experiences, the art movement in ecology, and the ecology of humanity.

The practice is sustainable not only because it involves the areas described above, but because some financial resources exist on the part of the government, a counterpart of the implicated communities, through the exchange of services and the marketing of products, the promotion of assistantship and exchange of life histories, publishing and communication systems, the elaboration of audiovisual media, strengthening of social actors, experimentation with new techniques in the prevention of violence and the use of old ones.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1) The Web work and/or alliances are emphasized which allow a maximization of efforts, as a fundamental element of similar processes.
- 2) Through participative actions and experiences in the prevention of violence, one discovers that there are no bad people, that they are just disoriented and through education it is possible to channel and direct their activities.
- 3) La Guaca Foundation Experience is an experience and life choice which can be seen as an example worth replicating especially in southwest Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Spain and has been proposed for international recognition.
- 4) Initiate leadership in children, to make them aware of their necessities and responsibilities which are expressed in shared responsibility, and are expressed as a seed of work to be broadcasted on community radio programmes. This has resulted in the presentation of the radio programme "Los Guaqueritos".
- 5) To visualize the prevention of violence in a new way to mean minimization of the potentialities and abilities of individuals, groups and communities at a physical, psychic and spiritual level.
- 6) Participative work in the prevention of violence has improved the quality of life.
- 7) The opportunity for its social groups to support and become responsible for plans, programs, projects and activities facilitating the generational replacement.
- 8) An opportunity to present our experience to the world; it is an export product.
- 9) The hiring of young people, the product of our processes in management work.
- 10) The lessons learned make it possible for the Foundation's successful experience in the prevention of violence at a local, national and international level in various fronts such as:
 - a) Case and Group Work
 - b) Work techniques with groups and the community
 - c) Youth leadership with emphasis on communication
 - d) Assistantships and student exchanges and universities
 - e) Art as an alternative of prevention
 - f) Life Projects in the Construction of the Social Fabric
 - g) Colombian Youth Culture Workshops
 - h) Prevention as a Youth Social Commitment Alternative
 - i) Life Project
 - j) Social Projects
 - k) Dynamics and Group Work
 - l) Resolution of Conflicts

m) Psychosocial Orientation to students in an institutional environment

TRANSFERABILITY

a. Approximately 17 Foundations have followed in our footsteps. Some of them are:

*Fundacion Escribir no Muerde: devoted to motivating reading and writing.

*Fundacion Puro Pueblo: devoted to contributing to the integral information and the empowerment of population groups converting them into managers of their own social development.

*Fundacion Gea: experimental group of popular alternatives.

*Fundaleonera: devoted to the arts through neighborhood cultural centers.

*Fungeba: Foundation devoted to support for the elderly.

*Consejo de Grupos Comunitarios de Bellavista: unification of the Foundation's area of influence in order for them to work towards a common goal.

b. Practice sites for university students: Universidad del Valle, Universidad Autonoma and Universidad Santiago de Cali.

c. Practice sites for city schools.

d. Application of the experience by the Family Welfare initiative (ICBF) in the state of Cauca through the creation of Youth Clubs.

e. Induction and formation processes in the prevention of violence in the different social networks to which we belong.

f. Presentation of the proposal in the Assistantship Seminar which took place in the Murcia town council in Spain involving 8 countries in November of 2002.

As for helping others to replicate its initiative: We believe that the Guaca Foundation's successful experience in the prevention of violence lies in the possibility of assessing with different professionals wherever is needed in the world and that it is the ethical and moral obligation to offer support to whoever needs it since knowledge and experience is Universal Patrimony

Key Dates

Important Dates (See WWW.LAGUACA.ORG)

2002: We lost the land on which the institution operated due to the lack of funds requisite in purchasing it.

November 2001: The partner exchange was carried out in Murcia town council in Spain and in the European Economic Community where our efforts in eradicating violence were presented to the eight counties that had participated.

2000: The recognition of La Fundacion La Guaca efforts in violence prevention by the mass media and its activities aired or written about by more than media hoises.

1999: The shooting of radio programs that involve children and youth and covers the whole city.

1998: The opening of the video library and the youth and adolescents center.

1997: The consolidation of programs at a local, regional and national level in areas to do with arts, education, ecology, psychosocial, communication and participation.

1996: The creation of a recording studio necessary in communication, ecology and artistic leadership

school.

1995: The initiative is given an operating license and it acquires the name es La Fundacion La Guaca.

1994: The evaluation on 'Prevention of Violence Plan' is studied and it becomes incorporsted in the statutes that regulate the future of Fundacion La Guaca.

1993: The implementation of the Prevention of Violence Plan in its areas of influence.

1992: The implementation of the Prevention of Violence Plan in the areas where the foundation operates.

1991: Arquidiocesis de Cali loans the initiative land on which to build the headquarters for La Guaca.

1990: A support group agrees to support us in the creation of La Guaca Cultural Center.

1989: The creation of a library for the Francisco Jose de Caldas School by young people who work in a youth group which later originates La Guaca.

References

The Prevention of Violence Experience ha been recognized by:

ENTITY AND DATE

90 Minute News TV Broadcast - July 1992

El Pais Newspaper - April 1994

El Occidente Newspaper - February 1998

El Pais Newspaper - July 1998

Cali 19 Newspaper - August 1998

El Tiempo Newspaper - March 1999

Cali Sur, El Pais Newspaper - May 1999

Noti 5 News Broadcast - July 2000.

Rostros y Rastros TV Program - June 1999

Calijoven- May 1999

Telepacifico - May - June 2000

CVN News - July 2000

Telepacifico - July - August 2000

El Tiempo Newspaper - August 2000

Telepacifico - October 2000

90 Minute News TV Broadcast - February 2001

Desaparecidos TV Program - February 2001

El Pais Newspaper - February 2001

El Pais Newspaper - March 2001

El Pais Newspaper - June 2001

Contact

IGNACIO OJEDA BENITEZ

Carrera 3 Oeste No. 13-61 Barrio Bellavista - Santiago de Cali - Valle del Cauca - Colombia.

Telephones (International Code included): 57-2-8930714 / 57-2-8930715 Fax: 57-2-8931654

Internet Port: www.laguaca.org Email: laguaca@laguaca.org / director@laguaca.org

Type of Organization: Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Partners

Secretary of Culture and Tourism of Santiago de Cali
Maria Victoria Barrios
Carrera 6 con calle 7 y 8
Telephones (International Code included): 57-2-8858855 Fax: 57-2-8858862 E-Mail:
dircultura@hotmail.com.co

Type of Organization: Local Authority
Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

Colombian Institute of Interfamily Wellbeing of Cali, ICBF
Leonor Estrada, Hillside Area Coordinator
LEONOR ESTRADA
Entidad : I.C.B.F SANTIAGO DE CALI
Cargo : JEFE I.C.B.F ZONA LADERA
AV 2 NORTE No. 33 AN-45
CALI
VALLE DEL CAUCA
Telephones (national Code included): 57-2-5536503

Type of Organization: Central Government
Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

Colombian Institute of Interfamily Wellbeing of Cauca, ICBF
Carmenza Roa Santander Regional Coordinator for the State of Cauca
I.C.B.F REGIONAL CAUCA
SANTANDER DE QUILICHAO
CAUCA
Telephones (International Code Included): 57-0528-292219

Type of Organization: Central Government
Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

Financial Profile

Year	Total Budget in US\$	Secretaria de Cultura	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar Cali	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar Cauca
2002	42,500	13,000	3,500	16,000
2001	20,000	5,000	2,500	12,500
2000	17,500	5,000	-	12,500

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