

## To ICDP International

FERNANDO DE LA MORA, APRIL 17, 2023

### REPORT 2022

Very distinguished colleagues of ICDP,

At the year 2022 we can look with some satisfaction.

- a) We have been able to carry out **12+3 workshops** for fathers and we were able to deliver certificates of the caregiver level to 6 mothers.
- b) These workshops were the self-training project of the 4 educators, who **in turn have received their ICDP Multiplier certificates**.
- c) My team consists of: three women younger than me (I am currently 73 years old), Daily Domínguez, collaborator of the Vida Plena Foundation since 1997; Myrian Justiniano (since 2008) and Carmela Vega (since April 2021); and a young man, Miguel Ángel Pérez, (since 2012). who are attending to the children and adolescents of our ongoing project (since 2008), **a Support Center for children in the area of the Municipal Market of Abastos of the capital Asunción**. They are caregivers who are aware that they are important people in the lives of these children and adolescents.

Every year we have volunteers who need an introduction to the practice of the 8 guidelines in order to better understand our objectives and put those into practice. In 2022 we had two German volunteers who supported the educators full-time.

- d) Approximately every two months I have carried out workshops (8 of 3 hours each) of training with this team, to strengthen and deepen the practice of the eight guidelines and above all, of empathy and emotional attunement in their daily work of direct attention to children between 3 and 18 years old. There are usually between 40 and 60 children who attend the activities of the Center daily. In 2022, we have 116 registrations. We reached 60 families.
- e) The most important success continues to be that the children and adolescents of the Support Center **prefer** to go to our Support Center: when it rains they do not go to their schools, but to the "escuelita", as they affectionately call the Support Center, they do come. They tell us *that they feel comfortable in this space*, unlike the schools where they obligatorily attend. Since the second semester of 2021, schools and colleges work in face-to-face mode. In the "escuelita" we already started before, complying with sanitary protocols. The children who attend come from different schools and grades and can "play more and find more friends" than in formal institutions. They say that "here we are heard", "we are respected".

The success most considered by mothers and fathers is that their sons and daughters continue to attend the schools/colleges where they are enrolled, until they finish it regularly. With very few exceptions, Support Center users achieved this goal by 2022.

Among the alumni some are already mothers / fathers and they send us their children, or recommend their relatives to send us their nephews.

f) Challenges:

- As a result of sanitary measures in the pandemic, in our community also, as in the whole country, domestic violence increased. Social work remains an important arm of our institution.
- Despite the psychological attention that several enrolled children and adolescents have received since 2020, the pedagogical team does not see much progress in them, and they argue that the greatest difficulty remains the low participation of mothers and fathers in the development of their children. "Very low levels of empathy" are found by educators in many families – and in teachers in schools and colleges.
- Convening adults for workshops is the biggest challenge for 2023. In addition, we observe the same challenging situations of previous years, which even show a tendency to worsen:
  - The concept of the child prevails as a limited being in his physical and cognitive capacities who must be "educated in the first place" – that is "to discipline, to make him obedient, to punish". For the child to be useful (productive) as soon as possible, this is a high value in low-income families. For middle-class families upwards, the child is a small adult who does not need to take on other responsibilities except that he must function well in school, in sports or other areas, that parents consider important, and that they are always competitive. At all levels of society, it is considered normal to use some violent or humiliating method to educate children and even adolescents. What would be the solution? To awaken empathy for children and adolescents in the surrounding society.
  - Our low profile as an organization with a different educational practice (in non-formal education) towards society in general and the surrounding community. Few adults understand our goal of the affective shelter we try to offer, to help children "take off" in their own life project.
  - The constant challenge is the low understanding of adults in general about the authentic affective needs of infants and toddlers and of any age. They are not aware that if an adolescent does not have a stable bond with an adult person interested in him/her and does not find containment in his/her community, he/she will not know how to set goals or have enough discipline to achieve them.
  - Adolescent easily falls into negative situations:
    - The use of electronic screens increased, especially the cell phone with Internet connection. The confinement decreed by the State has isolated and depressed children and adolescents. In our community, it brought some to the brink of suicide.
    - Harassment through the Internet increased.
    - Drugs are a constant and very close danger in the surrounding neighborhood and almost anywhere in this country.

Our teenagers are tempted by their mobile phones; they recognize it and agree to deliver their devices during the hours in our Support Center.

- Other dangers lurk for adolescents: a) the message is omnipresent in the media and in society, to resolve any conflict with some kind of violence. b) Message is omnipresent in the media and on the part of their peers, to initiate as soon as possible in sexual relations; they are presented as a game. c) Messages in the media and in society, that for any health complaint there is a "substance that combats the problem".

My intention for 2022 was to register ICDP as a Mental Health Program in the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, in the Directorate of Mental Health. I did not succeed because the workload of the accompaniment to the "Support Center" project increased. I am also upgrading with my family (husband and an autistic son) a rural property with an orchard and field, where we eventually want to move.

Finally, I mention that I continue to support mothers in breastfeeding issues, being a certified leader – volunteer like all leaders – for more than 30 years. I continue with that task because over the years I understood that the first opportunity for new mothers / fathers to build strong bonds based on love with their children, is breastfeeding. If that opportunity could not be seized, then ICDP – empathize, listen, dialogue – is a second chance!

**Lessons learned:**

In recent years I had to accompany and observe more carefully the work of each and every one of the team members, especially evaluate how they get along with each other. The pedagogical team grew and knows how to communicate with more awareness since 2021, and this process continues; benefiting the environment of attention to children. This is an outstanding result of the practice of the wonderful instrument of peace that we have with ICDP.

We will only be able to summon a minority of mothers and fathers if we intend to carry out the ICDP courses during educators' working hours. That is why we must request special funds to carry out the courses on days and times of the weekends. Educators must get extra pay for those activities. And other expenses (materials, refreshments) also need funding.

Each step forward in the dissemination of ICDP in Paraguay depends on other factors. For example, it depends on the focus on *psychosocial and sustainable prevention*, a solution that until now has been little thought of among experts, both from the State and in private organizations, in the field of Children's Rights, Human Rights in general and the economy.

A hopeful fact in this regard is that community mental health is being focused by some experts in psychology, but their perspectives are being little disseminated.

Another encouraging fact is that Paraguay has had a Good Treatment Law since 2016 (whose regulation is on track but not finalized), and Paraguay accepted to be a pioneer country for the eradication of all forms of violence against children, within the framework of the SDGs and the ChildFund Alliance. However, experts note the very low level of compliance with laws by the State.

With cordial greetings I say goodbye, with my best wishes to the entire ICDP team in this 2023,

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