

Fundación El Refugio

REPORT TO SDI (October 2004 – January 2006)

Fundación El Refugio moved to its Kennedy headquarters in October 2004 with many expectations due to the immense possibilities open to it in this new stage.

This move was possible thanks to the contributions of Great Britain in August of the same year. With a part of these new resources the training process with displaced youngsters, which had begun thanks to a donation from SD France, was reinforced.

The jewellery training workshops given to these young people led to eight young people being trained in basic jewellery-making, and five being trained up to the productive level.

These young people were offered a short-term paid job in order to fulfil an order from a chain of shops called Di-Pui. The same young people remain involved with us for this kind of activity.

Once settled in the Kennedy house, we entered the ICBF (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) tender in order to run programmes for young people in this locality.

We were visited by ICBF inspectors, but a problem with the house's terrace (electricity cables in close proximity to the terrace roof) meant that the ICBF decided not to make a contract with us.

Under these circumstances, we took the decision to act in order to cover our operational costs, albeit minimally, while trying to find other means of financing the project.

Thus with a remnant of the money we had received, we printed posters and leaflets to advertise jewellery-making, painting and drawing workshops for adults.

The success of this activity depends on many factors: the price, the receptiveness of the public to the workshops proposed, the time of the year, etc.

These processes initiated in November when people were starting to prepare for Christmas, and not for training (*the Christmas holidays also mark the end of the academic year in Colombia*). For this reason, the people who enrolled did so in February of the following year. The running costs for the intervening months were covered mostly by the sale of jewellery.

In February 10 people enrolled for the morning courses. The money from these enrolments did not cover all running costs, but helped towards them. Later, 6 more people enrolled. There were a total of 16 students at different times.

In this zone, jewellery sales were not very successful, and so we started selling in other zones.

The director (Nury Francisca Bonilla) received the students, gave classes, sold jewellery, wrote project proposals, and generally managed the whole operation, almost always without higher wages than those produced by the classes themselves.

During the year local institutions were contacted and we managed to become involved in a process of social management and capacity building, a process which lasted six months.

In June, just before the Subud world congress, we were invited to participate in the *Feria de las Colonias* (Colonies Convention), an event organised by the Bogotá town hall for successful productive projects in the various neighbourhoods. SDGB had offered us money in order to participate in the congress, money that we preferred to attribute to the travel/board costs of the representative of Susila Dharma Colombia, and to the covering of costs during our participation in the convention, and our moving costs.

From this time onwards, all the efforts of the foundation have been concentrated on the project “YouthSmiths” (*Jovenes Orfebres*).

We set up our workshop in the centre of town, reducing our work space to an area big enough for four young people and their production team to work in.

We dedicated our time during October, November and December to this activity, and the results were very encouraging although we experienced difficulties in developing all our potential.

Because we perceive the preventive project to be a necessity, we established the strategy of forging alliances with Communal Action Committees who have houses where the foundation’s infrastructure (tables, chairs, shelves, desks etc.) could be kept and used.

For now we have not managed to agree on what kind of work we could do with them, because they want to charge the foundation for their services as if we were a normal business, with the idea that we look for funding. This remains a good opportunity, but while things are not finalised, the Foundation has to pay for the storage of its assets.

The Foundation currently has no base, and the communications and administration part is functioning from the director’s house, whilst the workshop is functioning from the city centre in the home of one of the young people.

The YouthSmiths project has made a lot of progress, but we need a boost strictly in order to inject resources into the productive part; we have orders from seven stores and an offer to market our products on a dealer’s website. However we do not have the resources to fulfil these offers.

The marketing methods of this business do not allow us to ask for advances on the orders, and my base of primary materials is used in order to pay the young people for their sporadic productive work and the administrative costs for the workshop.

We have been invited to the second young entrepreneur’s convention which will take place in the most important convention centre in Latin America, Corferias, on the 16-20 March.

We are also trying to involve young people demobilised from Colombia’s armed conflict in the productive process.

It is very important for us that the productive branch of the foundation strengthens and stabilises because the results of this process have so far meant that the Foundation and its project has not disappeared, but, on the contrary, continue to be recognised by the city and local authorities.

The city town hall network organised the Non-Profit Institutions Network in order to set up processes of self-evaluation, strategic planning and intervention. Instead of involving the

foundation in this process, given its lack of development, and its current focus on the productive branch, it has been decided to involve the Susila Dharma Colombia Corporation as an umbrella NGO which can meet the challenge of this training process, starting with a well-organized structure committed to replicating the process with all the organisations belonging to Subud members in Colombia.

In this context, the Foundation carries on thanks to the efforts of the young people and the immense possibilities contained within the business part because this is the only way we have to demonstrate the results and the necessity of carrying on with our mission.

I send an embrace to all SDI brothers and sisters, accompanied by the hope that all your efforts achieve the objectives for which they were created.

May God bless you,
Nury Bonilla (Francisca).