



YOUTH-LED PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN COLOMBIA:

A Transformational Approach



Monthly newsletter about the progress of the project

WELCOME!

In this special “Quarantine edition” we want to stress the value of the steps being taken throughout the country, in order to reach the project’s goals. We will be presenting information on the various strategies that people and institutions have been implementing in order to reach out to their communities by different virtual means—considering the challenges we are facing with in-person meetings.

We will also be sharing details on the new tool that will be available this month, and that will help us continue to support the communities during this contingency.

Finally, we will bring our attention to a new life story containing themes of connection, resilience and enthusiasm that will start a flight to elevate your soul.

Thanks for reading and for being part of this project!

"Forgiveness says that you have another chance to start again".
- Desmond Tutu -

WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS EDITION?

Project summary

Valuable contributions:
Virtual Multiplication trainings throughout the country.



Returning home:
Launching of a tool to continue the work with communities during the COVID-19 contingency.



A life story to tell:
Taking a flight to elevate your soul.





PROJECT SUMMARY

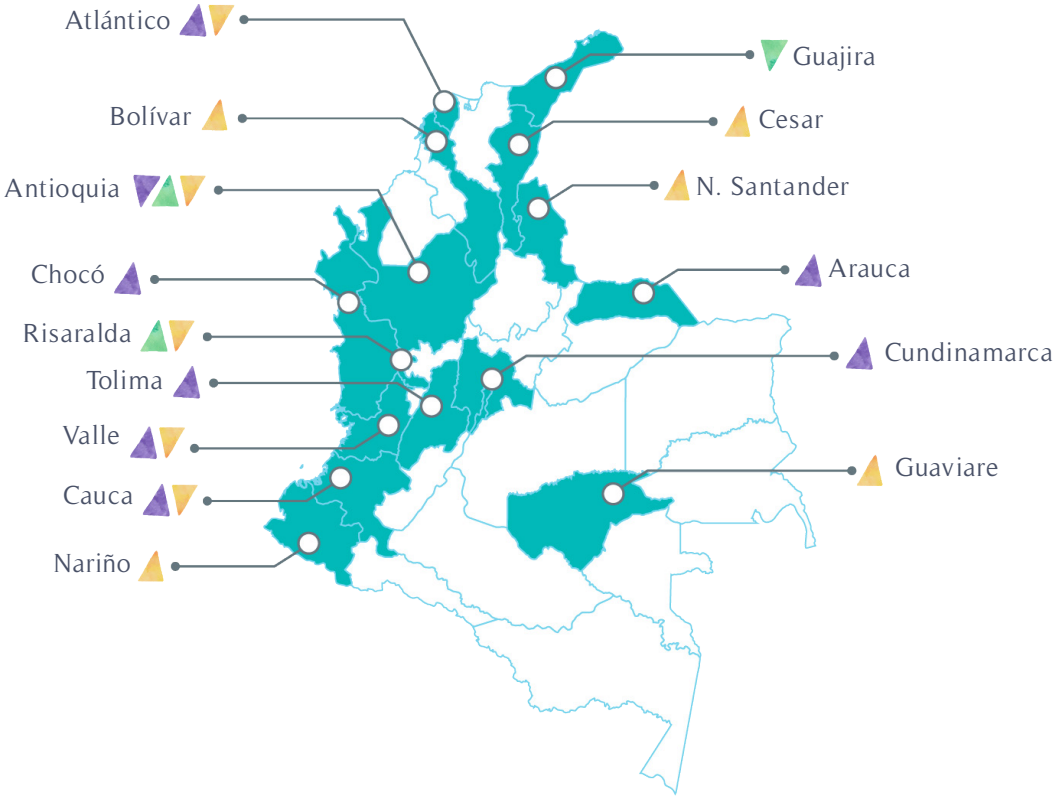
This project aims to contribute to the ongoing **paz y reconciliación** process in Colombia through the strengthening of resilience and conflict prevention capabilities in youth and families living in vulnerable and conflicted affected communities. The program is split into **three components**; all of which complement each other and the main goal.:

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Painting the future.
Preventing the (re-)recruitment of at-risk youth to illegal armed groups.
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The Superhero's journey
Strengthening the capacity of young people in marginalized communities.
- 

Perspectives of peace.
Supporting the reconciliation process in the Colombian society.





VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

What makes this project very special is the enthusiasm, proactiveness and generosity of the people who have been joining our project these past few months. We can see these positive traits spread throughout dozens of workshops that have taken place throughout the Colombian territory. We had more than five hundred trainers who were willing to share their knowledge, time and experience with communities that they either inhabit or assist.

We want highlight and thank the valuable actions that some of these people and their respective institutions have been carrying out, in spite of all the health challenges faced during the COVID-19 contingency . This unforeseen emergency has brought us to confinement and social distancing in ways that were certainly unexpected.

Multiplication trainings of Component II “The Superhero’s Journey” in the municipalities of La Ceja and La Unión in Antioquia

Our project has a very special ally in Antioquia, the **Corporación Dimensión Génesis**. With the help of this corporation and under components II and III, we have been able to reach 390 people during these past eight months. The areas that were benefited are: The municipalities of: La Ceja and La unión and the veredas Piedras, Colmenas, and San Jose from the La Ceja municipality. It is also important to mention that component II is now reaching rural students in La Unión.

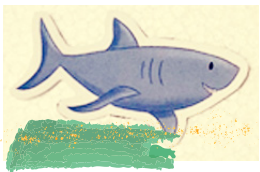


Some of the teachers who were trained last year in the Superhero’s Journey component, had the chance to start Multiplications in their institutions before quarantine. Unfortunately, the halt on school activities affected the further implementation of this component. In spite of this, the



desire to continue to offer students the chance to move ahead with their education, was greater. So teachers decided to implement the following strategies:

Ethics and Democracy’s teacher, Eduardo Albeiro Hincapié, from the Alfonso Uribe Jaramillo Educational Institution, decided to forge ahead by sending emails to parents (using the school’s platform that had been facilitated by the coordinator) containing exercises that were part of the training process that had started before Covid-19. In these emails, Eduardo explained in detail, the goals, resources, activities and proposed reflections, with the intention to keep sixth-grade students connected to the inner-work that they had previously been working on. A great beginning, but the teacher expressed feeling concerned with virtual learning and confinement, because in many instances there was no response from the students or their parents. This occurs when there are family and social challenges present and could lead students to start dropping out of school.



It is important to mention that this institution entered into an agreement with the Parque Educativo de La Ceja, a municipal institution which is located in a central and easy-access point. The Parque Educativo was to serve as support in case families had no access to internet services at home. This way, they could go there and get copies of the proposed exercises. Once the exercises were completed, they could be sent back to the institution via email.

Ethics teacher Johana Páez Rodas, from María Josefa Marulanda Educational Institution, kept in touch with her ninth grade students in order to continue with the Superhero’s Journey. Due to the fact that not all students had computer or internet access at home, she connected with students via WhatsApp as they all did have access to cell phone data.

The method that this teacher is using, consists on sending detailed information on the exercises and also attachments with examples. This way instructions on how to perform the exercises are very clear and easy to understand. She also asks the students to save the files in the Ethics folder as they solve the exercises. Once saved, these files are collected a week prior to the end of the school year. This is done so she can mark them all at the same time.





Multiplication of Component II Superhero's Journey in the city of Pereira in Risaralda

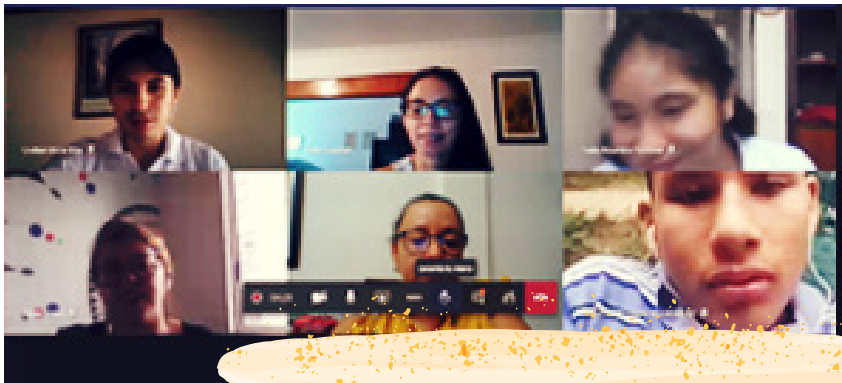
The directors and teachers of the **Colegio Salesiano SJB de Pereira** have had to design strategies to walk hand in hand with their students and their families during this contingency. One of them is called **Conexión Don Bosco**, a space assigned for students from preschool to eleventh grade where the teachings focus on development, building a good Christian life and raising honest citizens.

Teachers **Carmen Helena Betancur** and **Viviana Cardona**, trainers of the **Perspectives of Peace** component (focused on families and historical memory), decided to review all the UNITAR material—which their institution has been working with for several years and with various teachers. Carmen and Viviana found that the Superhero journey's material had content that helped establish a closer connection with students; and that it helped not only the students, but also their families. So, they decided to extract some of the activities from this content and work with students from first grade to fifth grade. So far, they have been getting very positive and fulfilling results.



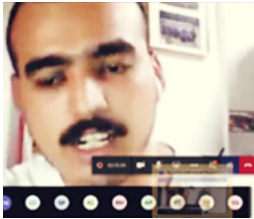
Virtual training of trainers of component I Painting the Future in the municipalities of Ataco, Chaparral, Rioblanco and Planadas in Tolima

We have another valuable ally for our project in the city of Bogotá: the **Fundación Escuelas de Paz**, who in partnership with the en alianza con University of Tolima, are making an impact on a diverse youth population from different communities in the country.



By the end of last year, twenty youth from the **Voluntariado de Paz de la Dirección de Proyección Social de la Universidad del Tolima** were trained under component Painting the Future, by Escuelas de Paz in the city of Ibagué. These volunteers are providing permanent support to the Escuelas de Paz; and, with the help of the USAID Human Rights Program, they are also facilitating a virtual training of trainers to more than thirty youth leaders from the municipalities of southern Tolima, Ataco, Chaparral, and Rioblanco y Planadas. It is hoped, that these young people, will bring messages of Peace and Reconciliation to their respective communities—as long as the circumstances, make it possible.

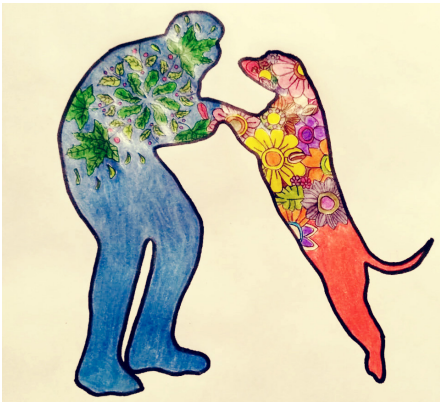
In light of the child recruitment’s situation in the South of Tolima, meetings have been scheduled to accomplish the following: “to analyze the context surrounding child recruitment; determine, in each municipality, the latent risks that are hindering the development of children, adolescents and youth; get acquainted with the role of the Convention on the rights of the child and the institutional framework surrounding the issue of recruitment, and the use of children and adolescents; and lastly, to present the methodology on component I.



Virtual training of trainers of component II Superhero's journey in Bogotá and the municipality of Barbosa in Antioquia

Due to the health emergency, the trainings for the **Superhero journey's** were cancelled. UNITAR team decided to offer virtual training due to the interest showed by **Fundación Escuelas de Paz**. We know this training will help them strengthen their capabilities when working with their communities. We invited **Carolina Restrepo from Hogares Juveniles Campesinos** to join the trainings, in order for her to get acquainted with guidelines surrounding the implementation of the **virtual trainings**. The aim of this training was to prepare her to lead the upcoming virtual training on Painting the Future in her organization.

This process is being held in virtual sessions, and in blocks of two and a half hours each. Aside from this, we have implemented activities using different communication channels such as **WhatsApp or email**. By using different types of tools and activities, **we maintain a fun atmosphere where we can all connect, reflect and learn.**







RETURNING HOME

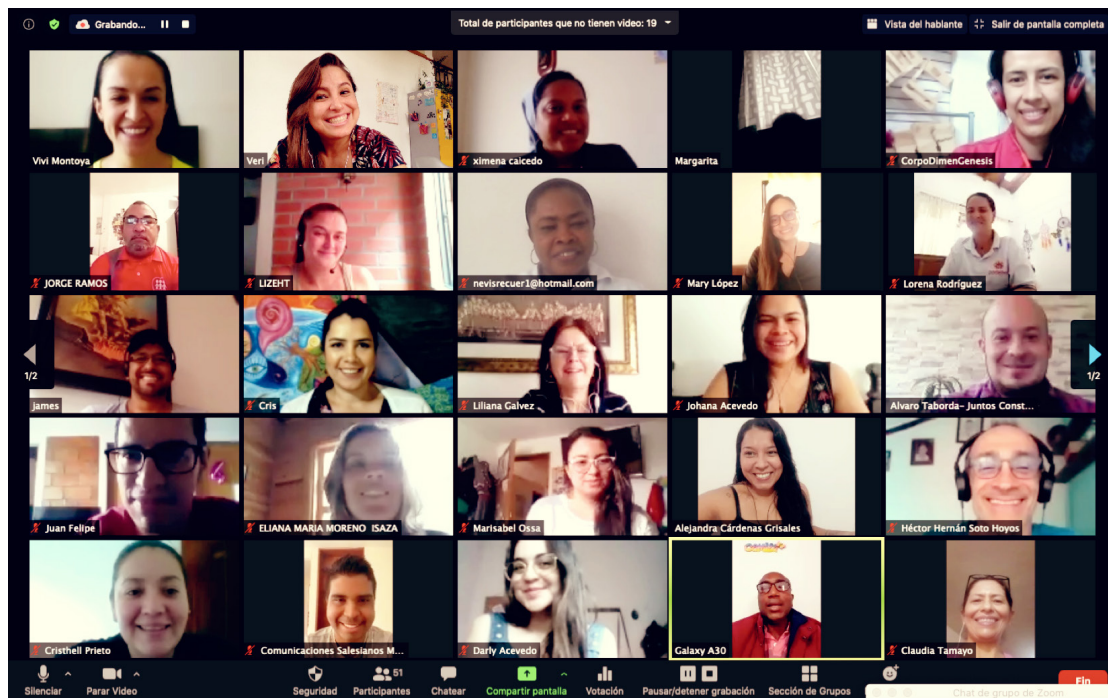
Following the COVID-19 health emergency, the teams of trainers from the territories, where this project takes place, expressed their need for pedagogical material to do virtual work with their communities during this period of time. Out of these needs, a variety of virtual proposals were developed, one of them being: Returning Home.

De Regreso a Casa es una herramienta creada Returning Home is a tool created so that those who apply it, can become aware of what it means to reconnect with themselves and their home, during a time when human beings, all over the world, had to make a stop and confine themselves to the space they inhabit.

With this tool, we want to offer communities, an experience where children and adults can

become aware of how they are interacting with life. They can do this process, one step at a time. By becoming aware of specific behaviours, they can start making the necessary changes in order to create harmony with themselves, their environment and those around them. By Identifying their strengths, they will easily develop resilience and emotional intelligence, which in turn, will lead them to build stronger relationships with other members of their community.

Lastly, the philosophy behind Returning Home aims to effect long lasting changes in the behaviour and attitude of the participants, as well as to promote personal development and healthy community living



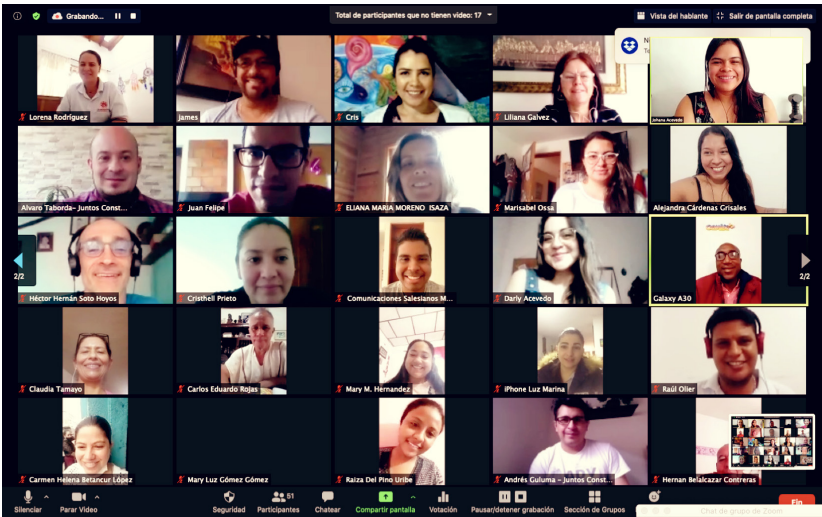


This tool was launched the first week of June, and 70 trainers and representatives of 39 organizations across 17 municipalities who are part of this project, had the opportunity to connect in a virtual session. During this session, they were able to discuss the philosophy, methodology and all the challenges they found with the tool. The goal was to launch Multiplications in their communities as soon as possible.

The reception of this tool was very positive. The trainers expressed their gratitude for the quality, depth and relevance of this tool. They’ve recognized in it, a very valuable opportunity to reach different communities and types of populations in the midst of this contingency. This tool is also a resource that energizes the work they’ve been doing so far, and thus, will lead them to achieve better results.

The trainers also highlighted the methodology; the high level of detail; and the availability of information which made the learning of the material easier. As a consequence, they were able to start its implementation quickly. In addition, the “magic” metaphor that was used, caused a very positive and strong effect on them. It captivated those who were willing to undertake challenges, and inspired them to believe that they have the power to transform their lives.

We hope you enjoy it, as much as we did creating it! — UNITAR.



A LIFE STORY TO TELL

The beauty of spontaneity, is that it somehow introduced Jose Gabriel to our project in July 2018. Right at the Salesian's Balcones branch, we waited for the first group to arrive—we would be training them on the subject of building historic memory. A wonderful group of volunteers arrived, eager to contribute to the reconciliation process in Colombia. And there he was, this tall, bearded young man with warm smiling eyes. Jose Gabriel's level of commitment and interest, made him increase his involvement with this project: His kindness and professionalism transpired through his work. It was easy to trust Jose, people would feel drawn to him. In Amagá, inside a dark coal mine, he listened to Oscar's story, a miner who had dedicated 30 years to his work. In another occasion, in the rural area of La Ceja, he met Doña Inés, an elderly woman who wanted to share with him a little about her life, because she felt comfortable sitting close to this kind man. This is José Gabriel, a transparent soul with a sensitive heart. I invite you to learn a little more about his story, where resilience has been the central axis of his life.

Viviana Montoya Giraldo
Project coordinator in Colombia



With a happy smile and deep eyes; beautiful words
and hair, so dark.

He decided one day, to bet on his future; and of his
own world— the rules change.

A world that almost falls, because of children's
endless bullying and hostile words
It made the walls close in, and felt that not one, could
save him.

Save yourself? What from? One day he was told,
looking him in the eye and inviting him to let go...
To let go of the tears, and look at the things he knew
he could do

He knew how to laugh at himself, how to succeed. He
knew who he was, and to conquer his dreams.

This is how José's inner work began,
with questions and answers—
he could not even conceptualize.

With time, the value of something—
he suddenly learned:

that it was worth to teach others,
to help them discern.

Discern and help them understand.
So they can experience the process,
and transform at last.

This is the reason, a psychologist
he became.

And dreams that one day,
a better world, he will help create.



TAKING A FLIGHT TO ELEVATE THE SOUL

If José Gabriel could be an animal, he would be an eagle, “Because of its ability to set his sights on a goal” he says. Eagles are impressive animals that have extraordinary strength and large wings, which enables them to fly at very high altitudes and great speed. José’s life journey has been like “taking a flight amidst order, weaknesses, people and experiences”. A flight filled with turbulences that he had to overcome, even when, some troubles lasted longer than others. One of these turbulent times, was during school years, when he had to live with “a broken heart” due to the bullying he endured, because of his large nose. “‘Beaker’ they called me ... I did not understand why ... it was definitely a sore point for me—this name-calling, and also, my gentle character. I was raised with principles of unity and love, which I used to solve all my problems. Unfortunately, high school was a war zone. If I didn’t stand up for myself or destroyed others in order to earn respect, I would not get it—so I never got it”.

But, how can you win a battle, if by doing so, you have to go against your principles? How to break your family’s golden rule: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”? A rule that shaped me into the person I am today. To José, “Family is an essential pillar in the life of a human being, because it sets the foundation of your future character, values and the way we face life”. As the matter of fact, his life is a clear example of this belief. His parents built pillars that could keep alive the principles of unity and connection among its members; and also encouraged them to foster: “the creation of bonds in society to build a more united world”. These were the seeds they planted in his heart.

Because of these principles, Jose found very difficult to solve his affliction. At such a young age, he tried to encourage the use of dialogue with his classmates, but their negative responses, only discouraged him further. “At times, I’d feel so helpless. I’d bundle up all the punches I wanted to throw, swallowed them, and kept going”. This would continue on for many years, but he learned to accept and laugh at himself. This new perspective, was the result of long conversations with a psychologist, who was a friend of the family. He encouraged Jose to focus on the positive aspects of his life in order to appreciate his potential, and his ability to do anything he wanted in life.





This healing process continued to develop until he joined Grupo Juvenil Salesiano, in the last years of high school. Here, the challenges began to take on new forms and meaning. A wise expression he had previously heard somewhere, and was engraved in his soul: “Elevate your spirit so high, offences will never reach you” started to bear fruit. He began to take off.

What is interesting about this story, is that, the physical characteristic that caused his affliction during school years, in fact, represents his favourite animal’s empowering trait: Its pointed and large beak. Some legends tell the story of a golden eagle that when it reaches a certain age, it must go through a painful process. The eagle must let go of its old beak, talons and feathers in order to grow new ones, extending its lifespan by 30 years. Is this real or fiction? Perhaps to José, it was a reality that invited him to begin a process of acceptance and transformation; and also inspired him to bring out his best during any circumstance in life.

It is also said that, when there is a storm, eagles take advantage of the winds, to rise above

the challenges during this period of his life, but learned from the experience, and came out stronger. A story that, as he puts it: “[Rooted his process of resilience](#)”. Jose transformed his shyness and powerlessness into feelings of great love toward others which motivated him to contribute to society. His involvement as participant and facilitator of UNITAR is proof of this commitment. Each meeting and conversation he participates in the project: Youth-led Peace and Reconciliation in Colombia: A transformative approach, makes his eyes twinkle and brings joy to his heart. There is too much love in him, so much, he could dedicate entire days to his work.

José felt this warmth, the night he fondly remembers leaving a project-related training session he had led in the municipality of La Ceja in Antioquia. He was riding the bus home, enjoying this “[pleasant solitude](#)” while listening to the Juanes disc, a gift his sister gave him when he was 11-years old. It was one of his favourite discs because one of the songs: Minas Piedras and Bandera de Manos, contained lyrics referring to Colombia’s war and conflict,



but also stories of hope.“ ‘While I listened to the song, I started to connect everything’. Some of the lyrics were: ‘No wonder I’m right here, right now!’ When I was little and listened to the lyrics, I’d feel something inside of me that made me want to listen again. I resonated with them, but I was not aware of the reasons. My sister gave me this album just because I really liked Juanes, but I never realized its influence in connecting me, at a much deeper level, to the conflict in Colombia. Now, I know why”

Fifteen years ago, Steve Jobs delivered a few inspiring words in the middle of a moving speech, he gave to Stanford University graduates: “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future”. That night, José was certainly able to connect his dots. Every word he says when he talks about his future, shows the strength of those who trust that the points will continue to connect over time. They know with certainty where their next steps are headed.

“Elevate your spirit
so high, offences will
never reach you”



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Ciudad Don Bosco



Auswärtiges Amt