



SUCCESS STORY

A Voice Full of Hope

Helping youth become more involved in improving their communities is a major part of USAID's SolucionES violence prevention project in El Salvador.



Photo: FUSAL, 2014

"Thanks to SolucionES, people now see me for who I can actually be: a leader."

—Douglas Cruz, 21, local referee, who found new goals in the SolucionES community soccer league.

Douglas Cruz is a 21-year-old resident of San Martin, El Salvador. Since he was a little boy he has helped his mother, his greatest role-model, with her business. A quiet young man, he always had difficulty attending school because of his family's limited resources. Although he is optimistic and has many goals, he had trouble discovering all of his abilities.

"I was always shy. I never asked questions or got involved in activities. I've always been locked inside my own world. My voice was never heard, nothing really interested me," remembers Douglas. To augment his family's income, he explored the possibility of becoming a referee with the SolucionES community soccer league.

The league provides community members with different possibilities to participate. One way is becoming a referee for the league's matches. SolucionES provides training and pays half of the daily wage, while the other half is paid by the players. Little by little, and without realizing it, Douglas started to feel supported and more confident. His voice began to be heard at meetings, but most of all, his voice began to be heard in his community, gaining the respect of the children and the other referees.

"Now I walk down the street and everyone calls me by my name. I would have never imagined this to be possible. SolucionES helped me achieve new goals I would have never set for myself before: I was recognized as the best referee," he explains. Douglas is now Referee Coordinator and one of the most outstanding youth leaders in San Martin. "Now I want to continue studying. I have more goals to achieve. I know now I can shoot for the moon and I want to build my own business," he adds.

Douglas has become a true community leader and aspires to help his community unite: "I want my community to know there are more possibilities. We can overcome our violence problems. SolucionES gave us the first push, now it's up to us to continue with the work. I know we can have a better future."

Telling Our Story

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