



SUCCESS STORY

Youth Take Steps Toward Peace in San Martin

USAID's SolucionES Project in El Salvador encourages youth to overcome their fears and become agents of change and leaders in their communities



Photo: Loyda Salazar, FUNDE, 2014

“SolucionES has helped me identify my own qualities as a community leader.”

— Quirian Antonia Aguilar, 15, student.

San Martin is ranked as one of El Salvador's most violent municipalities because of the presence of two gangs that rob and attack its inhabitants, especially youth. Nevertheless, the threats didn't stop a group of young men and women, aged 15 to 25, from organizing a march to raise awareness on the need for peace in their neighborhoods. This brave group had recently concluded a training course for young leaders offered by USAID's SolucionES violence prevention project.

The training course for leaders inspires youth and empowers them to reach their potential as key actors in their communities. In 2014, 17 youth from San Martin participated in the training course. Quirian Antonia Aguilar, 15, is one of them. At her very young age, she has seen many of her friends quit school and join the gangs. “All youth have to become aware that there are more possibilities for us. We can become positive leaders, be productive, achieve our goals, and live in peace. With SolucionES I have learned that we all deserve to be treated equal, that we can escape from violence. That is the message we want to send out with this march,” she explains.

The march brought together around 150 people from San Martin. Marta Lidia Orellana, mother of another Leadership Course participant, did not hesitate to get involved. She explains how her neighborhood in San Martin has changed in recent years. “You can't leave children unattended or even walk the streets at night. As parents we have to be very careful watching our kids because there are other youths trying to make them join the gangs and use drugs. That is why this kind of initiative is of great value to our community. It shows that we don't want to continue living in a world full of violence. We want peace and prosperity,” she says firmly.

But not only parents and family members joined the initiative. Schools also participated. Luis Gustavo Escobar, principal of Canton La Palma's public school, said the march marked a milestone in the area. “Youth had never organized something like this in our community, taking to the streets to express that they want to live in peace. It's a very strong message that has united all of our community.”

Telling Our Story

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