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MEXICO

SUCCESS STORY

Shaping a Peaceful and Caring Future at Rap Rhythm

At-risk youth in Monterrey become role models in their communities, using rap music as an outlet



[Photo: Jennifer Renquis]

Edgar lives in Monterrey, Mexico, and his young life has been impacted by growing up in a violent home and in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence. He laments that he suffered physical and mental abuse and endured a violent relationship where his father abused his mother. Violence and pain hardened him at a young age and drove him away from home into the streets where he became addicted to drugs and turned to violence, by joining gangs.

Inspired by USAID's Crime and Violence Prevention Program (CVPP), implemented by TetraTech and its partners, including SUPERA, a Mexican non-governmental organization, Edgar wrote a rap song that discusses his personal challenges and how he turned his life around. He is proud to take center stage and share his story at CVPP events that take place in neighborhoods that are severely affected by crime and violence in his hometown. He raps, "I couldn't accept that my family was broken. I became a criminal who could not be stopped." Since joining the CVPP, which targets at-risk youth, he is working hard to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Edgar knows that his story is shared by many young people in his neighborhood, and he wants to generate hope so that others will learn from his example. Through his songs he eagerly shares his experience, talks about his life and dreams of possibilities for his future. Edgar ends his song, *Triste Realidad*, on an upbeat note: "I don't want to suffer anymore, I want to forget the pain and how those horrible drugs made me heartless. My eyes have been opened; I know that someone cares about us and will look after us; drugs lead to sadness and pain; and now that I have learned to face my problems; I understand the mistakes I have made and am thankful that this has eliminated my suffering."

Edgar, together with 788 young men and women, ages 14 to 29, from three communities in the metropolitan area of Monterrey participated in USAID's CVPP-supported Youth for Equity Program, implemented by SUPERA. The Program is modifying violent behavior that stems from societal notions that men should be powerful and dominate by using force and creating fear. Traditional concepts of masculinity can contribute to the generation of violence within individuals, families and communities affecting the security of households and public spaces.

Telling Our Story

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Societal norms tend to discourage men from being caring, non-violent and responsible partners. Positive role models of men who embody these characteristics have been largely absent in Edgar's and other young men's lives. The concept of "new masculinity" builds on positive masculine attributes and values in a holistic way that encourages personal development, discourages violent behavior and fosters gender equality, collaboration and peaceful communities.

Edgar's peers Diomedes, Mario, Emir and Raymundo have participated in the program since 2014 and share similar stories of domestic violence and dysfunctional family life. They share a common passion for writing lyrics where they rap to express their feelings and speak out about the importance of gender equity and non-violence. Their new aspirations have evolved into tangible goals. The young men want to develop a rap academy to positively influence other peers and to serve as positive role models for young men and women, and promote a culture of nonviolence. They are passionate about sharing with their families and peers positive gender behaviors and the importance of addressing domestic and gender-based violence in their households and within their communities.