



USAID
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COLOMBIA

SUCCESS STORY

Improving Justice for Minors in Colombia

Colombia's minors now have interpreters to protect their rights



Photo: Asociación Creemos en Ti

The average time between reporting an offense and its adjudication has been reduced from seven to two months.

The successes of this USAID supported project range from providing reparation for child sexual abuse victims to protection of their rights.

USAID is increasing access to justice for Colombian children who are victims of sexual and other abuse through its support to *Creemos en Ti* or the “We Believe in You” Foundation and *Bienestar Familiar*, the Colombian Government’s Family Protection Agency.

Prosecuting cases where minors are involved, whether as victims or as witnesses, has been a major problem for the Colombian justice system. Until recently, children were being interviewed by prosecutors and testifying before judges who had no training in dealing with their particular emotional needs. Moreover, psychologists were not routinely made available to provide pre-trial assessments of emotional harm, assist in the investigations, or help children deal with the stress of testifying. In addition, no one in the legal process was specifically charged with protecting the rights of the child.

Working with our partners, USAID developed a program designed to provide legal and psychological support to child victims of sexual and other abuse. The USAID program has focused on ensuring that cases involving children are processed expeditiously, that they are handled according to a more sensitive and protective protocol and that trained professionals are available to assist children. Lawyers and psychologists are also receiving training in how to represent and protect children, whether they appear as victims or witnesses.

Psychologists trained with USAID’s support have worked with minors in 110 sexual abuse cases and 130 cases where minors were witnesses. Since USAID became involved, Bogotá prosecutors report the average time from initial report of the crime to resolution of the case has been reduced from seven to two months and the prosecution rate has increased from 50% to 70%.

Thanks to USAID support, child victims are more adequately represented and protected during legal proceedings, and parents have more trust in the system. As a consequence, more cases of abuse are being reported, and there are fewer instances where the understandable fright and confusion of the child victim help the perpetrators to escape prosecution. Another result of this program is that *Bienestar Familiar* has decided to fund *Creemos en Ti* to continue its work beyond the USAID grant.

Telling Our Story
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