



Municipal Partnerships for Violence Prevention in Central America (AMUPREV) Program Supports the Implementation of the Gang Reduction and Intervention Project (GRIP) in Schools in Nahuizalco and Sonsonate, El Salvador

Through the CityLinks component of AMUPREV, members of the Nahuizalco and Sonsonate citizen security councils traveled on several occasions to Santa Ana, California. They were impressed with the Gang Reduction and Intervention Partnership - GRIP Program – a secondary prevention program that identifies at-risk youth in Santa Ana schools and works to increase their school attendance, improve their behavior in and out of the school, and discourage participation in gang activity. In Santa Ana, GRIP partners, which include city police departments, the Orange County District Attorney, community service programs and churches, collaborate to educate students and parents about the dangers and consequences of gang membership and encourage and support students to focus on their educational goals.

After seeing GRIP at work in Santa Ana, California, members of the Sonsonate and Nahuizalco citizen security councils decided to select several schools to participate in the program. In Sonsonate, two schools were selected -- the *Centro Escolar San Genaro* and *Centro Escolar Prof. Jorge Alfredo Mendoza*. In Nahuizalco, one school was selected - the *Centro Escolar Los Lucas*. A total of 30 at-risk students per school were selected for the program, for a total of ninety children. The children were selected because of their behavior in school towards teachers and fellow students, generally low grades, and motivation to learn.

The program has been implemented by the schools with guidance and funding from AMUPREV to purchase electronic tablets presented at the end of the school year to the students who have demonstrated the most improvement in accordance with established criteria, such as improved grades and attendance. The program involved parents from



the beginning, with an orientation provided by teachers, administrators, representatives of the National Police (PNC), and the citizen security councils. The students and their parents have taken excursions during the program, in some cases to restaurants or parks, with support provided in part from the private sector and the participation of the municipality and police who have joined the families. Pedro Garcia of the PNC in Nahuizalco (pictured above with GRIP participants), affirmed that the PNC is participating in the program to be able to share the importance of community policing with the youth. The police involvement has allowed students to establish a relationship of respect and trust with the police. This is a multi-sectoral effort, with the Sonsonate National Police providing transportation to and from excursions; psychologists and social workers from Family Court providing support both at the school and in the homes of the students; the University of Sonsonate providing tutors; and the municipality lending the services of its social worker to coordinate the activities.



In the *Centro Escolar San Genaro* and *Centro Escolar Profesor Jorge Alfredo Mendoza* in *Sonsonate*, the program, called “Programa de Atención Temprana,” has made a difference. The children are already improving their behavior at school and home and are changing the way they treat each other. The schools use an index with key indicators to measure student progress, such as language used in the classroom, behavior towards peers, grades, etc. A formal evaluation of the program is currently being conducted by AMUPREV, which will include lessons learned and a guide for future replication and scaling-up of the program.



In Nahuizalco, the school director indicated that violence among students had dropped significantly since the start of the program. According to school administrators and teachers, one of the children in the program, Boris Pérez, has demonstrated a radical change in behavior and in his school performance. He was elected school president and has participated in the activities with the National Civil Police. He commented that “I thought that they [the Police] would come to the school to take us to the Police Station, but this was not true. On the contrary, they are our friends and give us talks and support us in this project so that we don’t get involved with gangs or take drugs.” [English translation of quote from Boris Pérez.]

The school Director, Professor Danilo Candel, has indicated that he is interested in looking for funding to continue the program during the next school year from the municipality and the private sector.