

Can We Talk?

Olivia Young, the Community Director at the Working Boys' Center - A Family of Families, was scheduled to come to Milwaukee to talk about the mission of the Center and the need for local support from our parish, St. Catherine of Alexandria, on the far northwest side of Milwaukee. This was exciting for two reasons: 1) the parish has long been a supporter of mission work around the world, and certainly the WBC is an extremely worthy recipient of parish donations, and 2) Olivia is my daughter, and to have her home for even a weekend was a huge blessing to our family. But at times the best laid plans go awry. On Friday, as Olivia was waiting to board a flight to Milwaukee, one of her flights was cancelled, and she learned that there was a problem with her visa. If she left Ecuador, she might not be able to return to the Center she loves so much, and to the year-long volunteers she mentors. This wasn't acceptable. Our parish Mission Appeals were in jeopardy and I quickly volunteered to present on the Center's behalf at our parish because I didn't want the Center to miss this opportunity and I didn't want our parish to miss hearing about this amazing organization. So, I agreed to be a stand in. I did have the advantage of visiting the Center with my wife and youngest daughter while Olivia was a year-long volunteer, and I had seen first-hand the empowering and life-changing work of the Center.

As I approached the ambo to make my presentation, I did not feel nervous - I felt excited to share the Center's story. You see, the families that are served by the Center, and the volunteers that give a year of their lives, are the perfect example of Christ's call to be his hands and feet on earth. The poverty these families have to overcome to create a decent life is daunting and at times seems overwhelming, and yet they



Jim Young and Cristófer "Puzzle Master" Paredes during Jim's visit to the Center in 2014.

are always willing to share whatever they have with others. Despite the lack of basic necessities that we take for granted like clean running water, trash pickup, electricity, plumbing and transportation; the families at the Center are truly grateful for what they have and what they receive. The thing that really struck me when I visited the Center was when my daughter accompanied us on home visits. We had the opportunity to get to know a few families on such an intimate level and,

wherever we went, we were greeted with such genuine warmth and hospitality. There is no other way to say it: my heart and soul were touched by these wonderful examples of Christ on earth.

The Center provides so many resources, nutritious meals, health and psychological care, child care, schooling for both children and adults, technical education such as carpentry, welding, cosmetology, baking, and the "minga" (home building) program. Just as importantly, the Center provides spiritual guidance and leadership with sacramental experiences for all. Without the services the Center provides, many of these poorest of the poor - the most vulnerable - would have no hope, and no future.

And so, I was blessed to talk about the Center to my own Parish; I was blessed to talk to individuals and families after the masses about the mission of the Center, and show the

"slide show" that Olivia had emailed me. Seeing her, and the year-long volunteers she works with, inspired me and I know it touched the hearts of many of our parishioners. The support of people like us, who try to live our faith each day, is critical for the survival of the Center.

Won't you please consider making the Working Boys' Center - A Family of Families your mission? I know you will not be disappointed. May God continue to bless the WBC and the families it serves!

-Jim Young
WBC Advocate & Donor

To Learn and To Serve



The second group of BVM + Dubuque visitors exploring the City Center with Lori

After months of planning and anticipating, the days for our immersion trip to Quito, sponsored by the BVM Sisters, were upon me. It was October 24th and I arrived with my itineraries in hand. I had ideas of what the next days would hold. And then, for me, as I walked through the door of WBC my pre-conceived ideas changed. Once I met Olivia in person I found a passionate, vibrant, enthusiastic woman who demonstrated the pride she had in her ministry to show us around the Center and introduce us to anyone and everyone. I was most

impressed by the four young volunteers (Dakota, Emily, Michelle, and Josie) who would host our groups for the next two weeks and share their lives and dedication of working with the children and families of the WBC.

Once onsite, both immersion groups participated in home visits and helped with a "minga" (community work group) with the assistance of Edison Alvear. Edison's demeanor is that of gentleness, kindness and sensitivity to the needs of the families as he helped them see their reality and encouraged them in their commitments to their children. We met with the leadership team, privileged to a discussion of their goals for the WBC, for the children and for the families. The ten values, long a basis on which the WBC was built, are a stronghold of all the programming at the Center as explained so passionately by Rodolfo, a product of the WBC from its earliest days.

As a retired teacher of 45 years, I was taken with the interactions with the children in the school. You know, kids are kids no matter

where they are! The children are creative, affectionate, full of laughter and teasing and eager to learn. Viewing sites around the city with the guidance of Lorena helped us understand more about the culture, the history, the city, and the Ecuadorian economy - gaining all the more context about the families who are members of the Center.

All too soon the final day of this immersion experience was upon me. I was touched by the lives of those I met at WBC. Most importantly, I was changed by meeting the children and families who are the center of all at the WBC. Those smiles, the hugs, the hard work, the stories; they changed my life. In the words of Mary Frances Clarke, foundress of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), I will go on "steady and quiet" with my life forever changed by those I met at the Centro del Muchacho Trabajador - someday to return!

- Lori Ritz
Director of the Office of BVM Life and Mission - Dubuque, Iowa

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WBC NEWS

NEWS FROM THE WORKING BOYS' CENTER • QUITO, ECUADOR • CHRISTMAS 2019



A Letter from Padre Gustavo



This time of Advent invites us to prepare our homes to receive Jesus with fervor and excitement, as he will soon be born into our hearts. It is a perfect time for us to sit and meditate about what we have done throughout the year. Let us remember the faces of the people we have connected with, the situations that we have lived, the joyous

moments, the moments filled with sadness, our successes, and the things that have challenged us. God invites us to travel inside our hearts, in the silence of our soul, to reconnect with Him and with our true selves - to be filled with grace and continue on our path in creating a better world.

Here at the WBC, we have had a beautiful start to the academic year, when we began another year of service for our "Family of Families." In September, more than 20 new families coming from extremely vulnerable situations joined the fold. At the Center, these families are provided with a stable environment for learning and growing together. The economic situation in Ecuador is quite difficult and there are a lot of people without jobs. Our financial resources are scarce, but the human resources that work here at the Center are great and make every effort to help transform the lives of our families. We are very proud of the team at the Center. They truly give their all to provide quality training for both children and young people, as well as their parents.

Recently, we had the heartbreaking news of the death of our dear friend Patricia Jean Conway Parks. Pat, as we all knew her in Quito, for many, many years showed her immense love for this work by dedicating much of her life to seeking the financial sustainability necessary to fulfill our mission. She, along with her husband Jim, who passed away just a few months earlier, have been an integral part of the WBC. We thank God for Pat and Jim's dedication and testimony of Christian generosity. We continue to keep the Parks family - all of Pat and Jim's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, extended family and friends - in our thoughts and prayers.

This December, the WBC celebrates 55 years of service to the most vulnerable in Ecuadorian society. We are celebrating with the family, with the simplicity of everyday work, but also with the achievements of our students, the entrepreneurship of many parents and the start-up of the sewing workshop that we hope will be an interesting aid for our parents and of the Center on a greater scale.

Thank you all for your permanent presence and support for our work, which is everyone's work. We have your prayers and you can be sure you have ours. May Christmas be a time of peace, harmony and hope!

Most affectionately,

Gustavo Calderón Schmidt, S.J.
Jesuit Provincial of Ecuador
President of the Working Boys' Center -
A Family of Families

55 Years of Service

On December 5th, the WBC celebrated its 55th year in serving the most vulnerable in Quito! Throughout the day's activities - a delicious french toast breakfast, school presentations, games, mass celebrated by Fr. Gustavo and Fr. Rubén, a scrumptious lunch, BINGO, and a dance competition - more than 600 people were here celebrating our rich history. Fr. Gustavo shared in his homily that during this festive anniversary, we must look at where we began, be in the present, and also look into the future.

From our humble beginnings accompanying shoeshine boys in the Plaza Grande to now accompanying 162 families on their empowerment journey, much has changed but our foundation remains. Padre John "Juan" Halligan, S.J. and Madre Miguel Conway, BVM, based their social work on 10 core values: loyalty, personal formation, family, religion, education, health, work, recreation, economy, and housing.

Over our 55 year history, these values have formed the basis of our integral family programming and services. Here are a few words from our veteran staff and Center members:

Loyalty

"My two children were brought up in the Center, learning through the 10 founding values. Although my children have grown and left the Center, I have stayed to help collaborate in its mission, and in July, I will celebrate 25 years of working at the Center. For me, my loyalty to the families and my loyalty to this work of God are what drive me.



The Perugachi Farinango Family representing the Center's 10 values.

The Center is the future for the working families of Quito, especially the kids."

- Marcia Guerrero, former member of 20 years & current WBC employee of 24 years

Personal Formation

"This value is how we are formed as people - from parents to children and, also, the family unit. This value is seen in our members participating in 'voluntarismo'. Some examples include preparing, serving, and cleaning up after the 3 family meals in the Center's dining room. You give and you receive. This seemingly simple but important action - serving others - is the key to personal formation."

- María Buñay, current member of the Center since she was 9 years old & current WBC employee of 25 years

Family

"Family is the most important thing - it's not just receiving support from your family, but it's about being together and loving one another unconditionally. Working together as a family gets you a lot farther in life than working by yourself. Yes, there are cases where a family isn't all together, but that is why we need to rely on our communities as well. We all make up a bigger family than the one we have - we are here for each other!"

- Roxanna Perugachi, 15 years old, one of 10 children & current member of 11 years

Religion

"I think it's absolutely wonderful that the Center continues to have mass throughout the week and I like to come celebrate the Eucharist with the children and adults. Having this emphasis on Christ's love intertwined with accompaniment is so important for our families!"

- Padre Rubén Carvajal, former member of 8 years & WBC mass celebrant for over 35 years

Education

"Education opens the doors for our students and their families for an even brighter future. We are focusing on trades, so that if our members want to graduate and go out into the workforce, they have an education to back them up. Or, if they would like to continue on with their studies, they have a skill set to help assist their families with any additional cost for schooling. Our team has worked very hard in improving and expanding the WBC's education curriculum and I am so proud of our students for how far they have come. We are helping form people with spiritual values that are autonomous, critical thinkers, reflective, innovative, just, honest, happy, and who work in solidarity with their comrades."

- María del Carmen, WBC Education Director of 2 years & Center employee for 22 years

Health

"Throughout my many years here, we have helped the most vulnerable of families in their health needs. But health is not just 'taking a pill to feel better.' The Center's health program focuses on physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It is our job to listen to and understand our families & to support their growth and their self-esteem. We are here to empower our 'family of families' and encourage each and every member to 'seguir adelante' (to carry on). It's critical that we teach our members the value of well-being and that each person, with our help and guidance, is able to achieve it, no matter their personal circumstance."

- Alex Vallejo, current WBC nurse of 22 years

Work

"One of the most important values, for me at least, is that of work. Why? Because work is one leg and education is the other - with these two values, each one of us can 'seguir adelante' (to carry on). They are

#MenForOthers

Last summer, the students from McQuaid Jesuit High School from Rochester, NY embarked on their service learning experience here at the Center. After hearing about the WBC's rich history and seeing our mission in action, the members of the Arrupe Society realized there was an area for growth. Eight Center members - Anita Lucia, Claudia, Luz María, María del Mar (Marimar), María Mercedes, Marisol, Nancy and Veronica - received loans for their small businesses from the McQuaid Arrupe Society Microfinance Program. Microfinance is a way of providing small loans, with a generally interest-free repayment process, to people who do not have access to the modern credit sector. The McQuaid Arrupe Society spent the last year in devising the program, fundraising the microcredit, and collaborating with the C4WF and the WBC to finance the selected projects.

Anita Lucia, who just gave birth to her 5th child three weeks ago, became a Center member last year. With the design ideas from her 9th grade daughter, Anita Lucia makes hand-crafted baby bibs. Her experience has shown that if you offer more size ranges, the more likely people will buy the product - so, Anita Lucia has bibs that fit babies all the way up to 3 years old. The microcredit financed the purchase of fabric and sewing materials.

Claudia, a Colombian refugee, has been a part of the Center for 3 years with her three children and her husband. With an interest in



Our Family of Families celebrating Christ's love.

the foundation upon which we stand and can move forward. In the early days - when we (kids) were allowed to work - the value of work was extremely important to us. It wasn't just that we had to work, it was an opportunity to help support our families. Work also dignifies a person - if I do a good job with whatever I do, it helps me, it helps my family, it helps the country."

- Rodolfo Chin, current member of 40 years & current WBC employee of 30 years

Recreation

"The Center has and will always be a safe space that we have time together, first and foremost within the family, followed by all the WBC programming. These spaces of community, of learning, of recreation, really do strengthen the connections between members, between families, between everyone - and this is why we are called the largest family of families."

- Myriam Chasiluisa, former member of 30 years and current WBC employee of 19 years

Economy

"The average Center member lives on less than \$2 a day and the minimum wage in the formal work sector in Ecuador is \$350 (after insurance deductions). However, the majority of our families make between \$200 - \$250 per month in the informal job market. So, we can see very clearly that it is the Center's responsibility to accompany and support our families on their journey to prosperity through education, support, and savings!"

- Toni Carreras, WBC Social Director of 2 years

Housing

"I always say to our families, 'Today for you, tomorrow for me.' Because, we have learned and continue to practice here at the Center: everything that we receive here, we also give back to the community."

- Edison Alvear, former member of 24 years and current WBC employee of 20 years

The Center is truly a work of God and through the implementation of these values since our inception, we have had great success in providing the tools and resources to those most vulnerable so that they may break the cycle of poverty forever!

artisanal snacks, Claudia has been making candied peanuts and potato chips to help support her family. With the microcredit, Claudia invested in a larger pot to be able to increase the quantity made in each batch.

Luz María entered the Center almost 14 years ago with her 5 children. What caught her eye about the Center is its focus on the 10 core values and how a community is formed between the family members, "I feel supported and cared for, more than I have in my life before entering the Center. This loan has changed my life because, at my age, people won't hire me; I'm now my own boss and it's going well." With the assistance of the microcredit, Luz María invested in the ingredients for her two plates: "pinchos" (meat kabobs) for people on-the-go and a full plate of chicken, rice, potatoes, corn, mote (andean corn), salad and cola for those who want a heartier meal. Luz María sets up shop right outside the Center gates - so at recess time, you know the kids are running up to her stand.

Marimar became a member of the Center, along with her 5 children, 6 years ago. Before joining the largest "Family of Families," Marimar shared there were times that she lost her job and there wasn't money to buy food for her family, but thanks to Doña Teresa (a long-time staff member of the Center who went out into the neighborhoods to share the mission of the Center), things are getting better. For her family, all of the Center's services have supported Marimar in her time of need. She shared, "My family has grown stronger



The recipients of the McQuaid High School microcredit: Veronica, Anita Lucia, Claudia, Marisol, María Mercedes, Luz María, and Nancy (Marimar not pictured)

since coming here. My children are engaged with all of the interesting things they're learning in the classroom and they also love the 3 daily meals...and I do too, because it is 3 meals guaranteed for my children. I am also so thankful for the psychological support we have received here. I don't want to think where we would be without the Center." Marimar invested the microcredit in materials for her handmade crafts as well as purchasing the ingredients for "pinchos" (meat kabobs), and she is hopeful to be able to expand her enterprise in the upcoming year.

María Mercedes, her husband and their family of 5 children became members of the Center 15 years ago. There are two values, according to María Mercedes, that have changed her family's life forever: volunteering and savings. When asked to share her thoughts, María Mercedes said that volunteering creates equality because everyone is helping out and it also creates community, which is why the Center works so well. Savings is important to María Mercedes and her family because it helps them create individual and family goals. With the microcredit, María Mercedes invested in adding various types of candies and small games and knick-knacks that she sells right outside the Center gates. So, much like Luz María, when the time comes for recess, her stall is swarmed by our kiddos!

Marisol is a single mother of two, and her family has been part of the Center for 3 years. Marisol shared that she found out about the Center through her sister, Glenda, who was a Center member for 5 years with her 3 children. "I want my children to have a different life and more prosperous opportunities than I did and I believe that the Center is helping us create that future." With the assistance from the McQuaid loan, Marisol creates decor from recycled materials and has hopes to expand her hair-styling business.

Nancy entered the Center 2 years ago with her two children. Gloria Mazapanta, a former WBC member and current Center employee shared with Nancy the Center's mission and that's when her family

A Fire Within

When I arrived in Quito in August, ready to start my YLV journey, I already saw Ecuador as something of a second home. I had previously studied abroad here for several months and had a pretty clear understanding of what it was like to live as a foreigner in Ecuador. I came armed with a mental map of many of Quito's barrios, a general knowledge of the public transportation system, and some helpful tidbits I had picked up while studying abroad: 1) Rucu Pichincha is always to your West! 2) Don't take the TroleBus during rush hour! 3) Stay clear of roadside ice cream, no matter how delicious!

However, nothing could have prepared me for the experience I would have at the Working Boys' Center. My previous experience in Ecuador could have easily been summed up in three words--warmth, love, and self-discovery; thus, I naively expected to be met with that same warmth from my new students. Put simply; I was dead wrong. My first few weeks were very difficult. For every test and quiz that I gave my new students, I was tested tenfold. Students would walk around aimlessly during class, seemingly wanting to be absolutely anywhere other than in their seats listening to me drone on about conjugating irregular verbs.



Emily and Jareth are all smiles at the local parade.

joined. Nancy said that it is truly a blessing to be a part of this family of families; "Here at the WBC, the psychological support and the family-focused environment have been key for my family's success!" Nancy's business is custom shoe inserts and she invested the microcredit into additional materials, medical-grade inserts and she added shoelaces to her inventory.

Veronica entered the Center with her 4 children and husband 7 years ago and now has taken into her care her niece, making that 5 children in her household. Through there have been changes in the Center, Veronica shared that "there idea of community and family is abundantly clear!" With the microcredit, Veronica invested in a new (and larger) mortar and pestle for her business making "morrocho" (much like a rice pudding) and "colada morada" (a rich fruit-based drink).

The pride of these women when hearing their stories and their eagerness to expand their business ventures is a beautiful sight to behold. Because of the Center and the support of the McQuaid Arrupe Society Microfinance Program, our mothers have the opportunity to better provide for their family and invest in their futures!



Skyping in with McQuaid to talk about their products and future goals.

One student, in particular, Jareth, really tested me. Jareth is in my Primero de Bachillerato class, which roughly translates to U.S. tenth grade. While his other classmates committed minor infractions - Viviana did her makeup in class, Karen did homework for other subjects, and Mary slept - Jareth was virtually impossible to handle. He would wander around, talk to other students, loudly play music, even make paper airplanes. I felt like the quintessential Hollywood substitute teacher, unable to control my airplane throwing, spitball making students.

One day, I noticed something about Jareth: Jareth was very, very smart. He wouldn't pay an ounce of attention when I was lecturing, but if I went to his desk and explained the lesson to him individually, he understood it immediately. I decided to pull him aside after class and talk to him individually about his performance. "Jareth," I told him, "we have to work on your behavior in class. I need you to pay more attention because, let me tell you, once you put your mind to it you can do anything." Jareth, who had had his head down and eyes on the ground from the moment I said I wanted to talk to him, looked right up at me. "You're super smart," I continued, "I've noticed. Let's work together to bring your grades up." Jareth smiled and nodded, excitement and determination washing over his face. I could tell not many people had called him smart before, and it lit a fire in him.

From that day, Jareth sat at an individual desk in the center of the classroom, entirely of his own volition. He began to pay attention, and now gives me the warmest "Good morning, Teacher!" whenever I walk into the room. He always works hard and studies, and when his classmates misbehave, he keeps them in line. That class, in fact, which was originally one of my toughest classes to manage, has now become one of the best parts of my day. I have really gotten to know my students on an individual level, and whenever I see them in the halls, I am greeted with the warmest of hugs. I'm looking forward to going into this holiday season knowing that my students and I have now developed a rapport, and that when we come back from Christmas break, we will be ready to start a productive and enriching new semester.

- Emily Davancens
YLV 2019-2020