

What We Do : ConTextos uses the tools of literacy to promote social emotional learning in contexts heavily affected by violence in El Salvador. Our trauma-informed programming focuses on key change-makers like teachers and justice officials: we train them in best-practices to use literacy to promote healing, dialogue and creativity, essential abilities to build a more peaceful future in El Salvador.

Research tells us that perpetrators begin as victims, and victims as witnesses. **We work in environments where violence is ubiquitous and young people are underestimated and underserved.** Text-based dialogue and the Authors' Circle are powerful methods for transformational change: for individuals, institutions and society at large.

Our Story: ConTextos began with the belief that to improve education in El Salvador, we needed to change how teachers thought about students and learning. It was about more than resources, though we also knew that quality children's books were key to inspiring a culture of reading. After piloting a teacher-training program based on dialogue and lifting the level of thinking, we saw meaningful changes: kids were reading and borrowing books, and asking questions. Notebooks were no longer just for copying off the board, they were deposits for students' authentic thoughts and ideas.

Their thoughts and ideas included haunting stories of poverty and violence. It was clear that it was time to explore further literacy tools. In 2013, ConTextos launched the Soy Autor writing program, first in public schools and after school centers in gang-controlled areas, and in the following years in prisons and juvenile detention centers. Internationally recognized psychologists Dr. Selena Sermeño and Dr. Jim Garbarino guided us on trauma-informed practices to develop pro-social behaviors and a love of learning. We witnessed how the process of becoming an author created necessary spaces for reflection and positive self-projection for people who have experienced some of the El Salvador's most horrific realities. Beyond the classroom, these stories are a powerful awareness tool to creating a more welcoming, supportive society for these youth.

Our work goes beyond our borders. In 2017, we brought the successful Soy Autor curriculum to Chicago's Cook County Jail and neighborhoods like Roseland. We create literacy leaders across the region through partnerships with organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, Panamá and beyond. The transformative power of stories is universal and we continually search for ways to expand our impact. .

Impact

"I used to think that my life was worthless, but now I think differently. I love reading and writing, and my life has changed because of that," said Aldo.

Sharing stories transforms lives. In ConTextos libraries, students like Aldo explore different worlds and characters through the books they read in school and bring home. Teachers, librarians and leaders trained and coached by ConTextos create safe spaces where students share their ideas and stories through dialogue and conversation. Here, children and youth are free to explore their identities and start the healing process. Despite an uncertain world outside and in their homes, students learn to be authors of their own stories and caring citizens.

From 2011-2017, we have served:

700 (694) young people affected by gang violence
1200 (1236) k-12 teachers
47,000 (47,346) students