



Calle 39 N°. 21 – 57. Pisos 3º y 4º.
PBX (571) 245-2712 FAX Ext.112
Bogotá, D.C. – Colombia
www.escuelanueva.org
info@escuelanueva.org

Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ **Círculos de Aprendizaje Escuela Nueva Activa™**

"In only 6 months of operation, the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** Program for migrant, internally displaced children, has numerous achievements: a 100% enrollment, an 18.5% increase in children's self esteem, and the highest level of improvement in both language and math, placing children of the *learning circles* 13.9 and 17.3 points, respectively, above the national average."*

*Results of the application of UNESCO test. 2004/2005

The Problem

In Colombia, more than two million people have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict. It is one of the largest migrant populations in the world. Of these, many thousands are children suffering the results of violence- extreme poverty, inadequate social services, and numerous barriers to education.

Several approaches have been developed internationally to educate internally displaced children such as mobile kits, scholarship programs, and infrastructure initiatives; yet more than 27 million children in conflict areas worldwide still have no access to schooling.

Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ as the Solution

In Bogotá, Colombia, the Escuela Nueva Foundation has created the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** Program in response to this national crisis. Since 2001 **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** have provided quality education to children, ages 6-15, who have been internally displaced by violence and unable to enroll in school.

This initiative addresses the needs and realities of these children, providing a safe environment and flexible strategies that are attuned to their transitional status, age and cultural heterogeneity.

The **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** facilitates the transition of migrant, displaced children into schools, attracting them and maintaining them when conventional schools fail to adapt to the needs. In addition, this innovative program contributes to conflict management, developing habits of peaceful coexistence, constructive behavior and social integration.

The **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** Program is part of a continuing national dialogue around the problems of violence and social alienation. ENF's successful strategy has become a national model. ENF hopes to continue to lead open discussions to focus the necessary



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investments in areas with the greatest potential for return in economic development, peace building and educating the nation's future citizens.

How They Work

Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ are places of learning located within local communities. They are comprised of groups of between 12 and 15 students who work together with the aid of “youth tutors” who facilitate learning and provide personalized attention.

- They operate off-site from mainstream, formal “mother schools”, but are officially linked to them through shared academic calendars, grading systems and extracurricular programs.
- Children are officially enrolled in the mother school, but study in “learning circles,” receiving classes in community centers, local churches, and family homes until they are ready to transfer to the mother school.
- This strategy is not a parallel system. It is integrated into and recognized by the Ministry of Education to ease the transition from the street to school.

The **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** are an innovation of the proven Escuela Nueva Pedagogical Model, adapted to meet the distinctive needs of these vulnerable children. They also provide basic skills, counseling and social services for children who have special needs for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In addition, “youth tutors” from the community are trained in the Escuela Nueva system and methodology to lead the Learning Circles. By interacting with their peers, they gain practical teaching experience and develop their potential as community leaders. Youth advocacy groups expand the Program and advocate for displaced children’s rights. The key message is that education can be life saving and life-sustaining through the dissemination of basic skills and social support.

The Program, gains its strength from a cost effective, systematic approach that is flexible, adaptable and replicable. Its ability to create unique connections between the Learning Circles and local “mother schools” provides previously marginalized children a chance for inclusion.

What they promote

- Flexible promotion, based upon modular learning as opposed to rigid grade promotion, allows children to learn at their own pace and address gaps in the educational experience
 - A focus on cooperative learning promotes dialogue, interaction and social skills
 - Interactive educational materials build relevant knowledge and practical skills
 - Stable learning environment help students focus on developing emotional, social and cognitive skills
 - Linkages between families and schools further embed the program into the communities.
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Advantages

- Officially matriculates children and youth into the system, providing the benefits of accreditation and certification
- Reaches children who are outside the educational system due to displacement and poverty
- Provides an educational strategy adaptable to student mobility, and flexible in learning processes and school enrollment requirements
- Reduces the number of youth on the streets committing illegal acts
- Improves the quality of education through a relevant and interactive curriculum
- Increases citizenship and peaceful co-existence between youth suffering educational and social disparities
- Provides protection to displaced “at-risk” youth
- Increases reach, coverage, access and matriculation rates

Where we operate

After the pilot project financed by USAID successfully concluded in 2003, the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ Program gained complete political backing from Colombia’s Ministry of Education.

In a second phase in 2005, Escuela Nueva Foundation invited the Norwegian Council of Refugees and UNCHR to support the experience, and trained other local NGOs as Program operators.

Today, recognized in national educational policy, 87 Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ have been created and successfully operated in 7 Colombian municipalities with high rates of IDP (Internally Displaced Population): Soacha, Santa Marta, Pasto, Yumbo, Cali, Cúcuta and Medellín, serving 87 tutors and 1, 305 students.

Results

- Shaped national education policy for the integration of displaced, migrant children.
 - Improvement in school retention rates and school effectiveness
 - Demonstrable improvement in academic performance demonstrated through increases in English and Math scores on national standardized tests
 - Improvement in student democratic behavior, peaceful co-existence and self- esteem
 - Increases in motivation of students and tutors to further their studies and competencies
 - Decreases in violence, crime and aggression
 - Increases in parent and community interest and participation in student’s lives
 - Alliances with municipal organizations to provide free registration, physical and mental health services, sex education and social services
 - Acceptance by students, tutors, families and local communities of Learning Circles as an effective means of reaching and educating “at-risk” children and youth
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What we provide

The Escuela Nueva Foundation reaches its intended beneficiaries through advocacy at a national level and through partnerships with local education authorities, the private sector and local communities. It attracts funding to organize local teams and build capacity in:

- the methodology of Escuela Nueva, as a base of operation for the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™
- the organization and implementation of the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™
- the evaluation of the Program's activities

The Escuela Nueva Foundation has designed and provides a collection of self directed, self paced learning guides for grades 1 through 5 in 4 core subjects (math, language, science and social studies), and organizes accompanying activities to enrich the learning process.

Through private sector and community partnerships, Escuela Nueva Foundation has been able to find local solutions to address nutritional needs of the children of the Soacha project. The following are some examples:

- Parents at a private school (Colegio La Montaña) make monthly donations to fund a lunch program for Learning Circle™ students. These funds and others provided by local businesses are used to purchase food from local restaurants.
- Tenth graders from Colegio La Montaña and their teachers planned and developed programs for Learning Circles™ children who are bused to private school on Saturdays for art, music, and physical education classes.
- The Rotary Club of Bogotá raised funds from local businesses in 2005 to provide audiovisual equipment (TV, computers, VHS). The Escuela Nueva Foundation also adapted the audio-visual materials from a previous partnership with Citurna, (a private firm) to provide educational content and show teachers how to integrate the new content with the learning guides.

For More Information

www.escuelanueva.org

Fundación Escuela Nueva Volvamos a la Gente

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