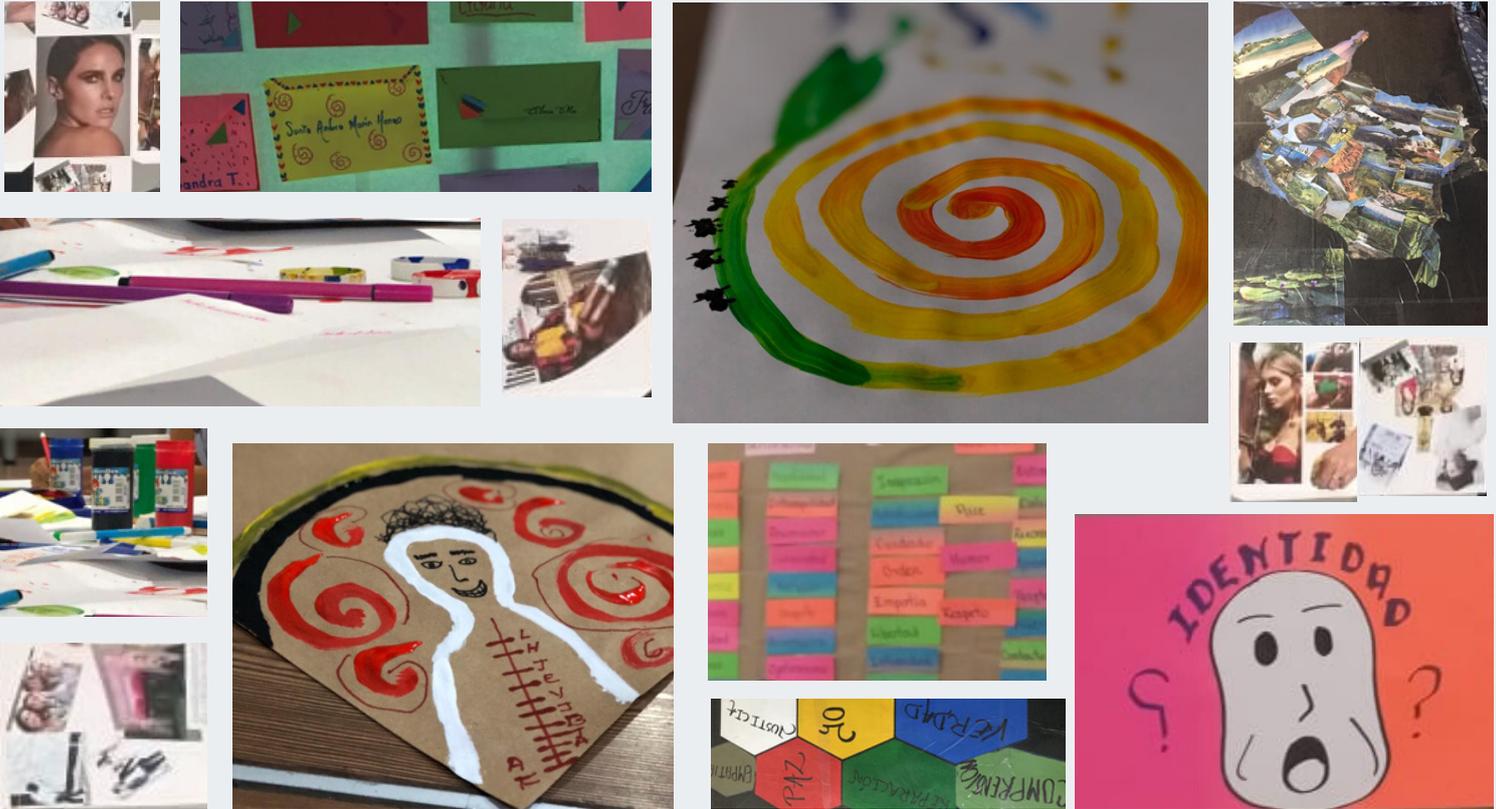




YOUTH-LED PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN COLOMBIA: a transformational approach

Monthly newsletter about the progress of the project



HELLO!

In this **fourth edition** of our monthly newsletter, we want to share with you the progress we have made until **March 2020**.

In this edition, we will focus on the Multiplication trainings held in the departments of **Valle del Cauca and Antioquia**. Counting this new addition, we reached **463 trainers throughout the Colombian territory** trained with UNITAR's tools, who are willing to bring what they learned to their communities. In addition, we have included **a life story that demonstrates hope and shows the contrasts of a life that will touch your heart** and also bring awareness to the importance of choosing the path of **Peace and Reconciliation**.

Thanks for reading and for being part of this project!

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS EDITION?

- **Project summary / Overall figures**
- **Multiplications trainings from August 2019 - March 2020: Progress, Multiplications and Moments.**
- **A life story to tell**
Stories of hope and contrasts

"We don't need weapons or bombs to bring peace, we need love and understanding."

- Teresa of Calcutta -



PROJECT SUMMARY

This project aims to contribute to the ongoing **peace and reconciliation** process in Colombia through the **strengthening of resilience and conflict prevention capabilities** in youth and families living in vulnerable and conflicted affected communities. The program is split into **three components**; all of which complement each other and the main goal.



**Component I:
Painting the Future**

Preventing the (re-)recruitment of at-risk youth to illegal armed groups.



**Component II:
The Superhero's Journey**

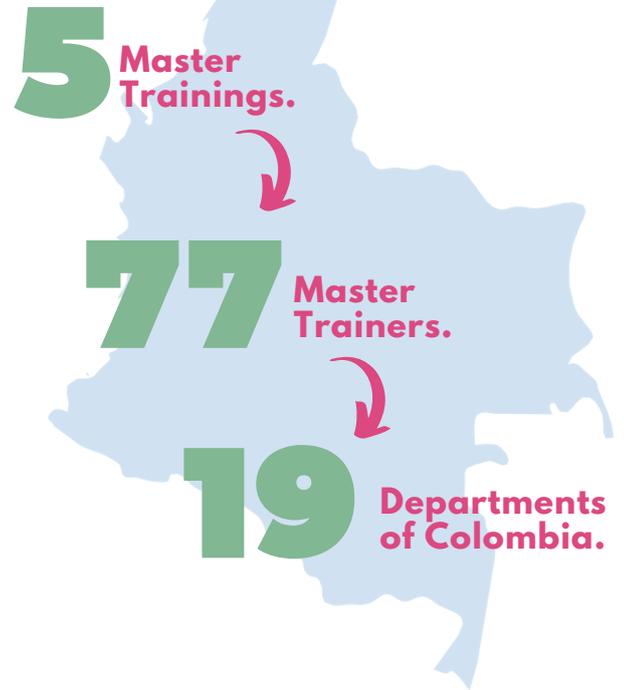
Strengthening the capacity of young people in marginalized communities.



**Component III:
Perspectives of Peace**

Supporting the reconciliation process in the Colombian society.

OVERALL FIGURES



MULTIPLICATION TRAININGS

August 2019 - March 2020

Progress

9

Multiplication trainings
Component I

+

5

Multiplication trainings
Component II

+

19

Multiplication trainings
Component III



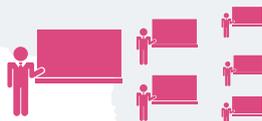
463

Trainers trained
by the Masters

Completed:

33

Multiplication trainings



Throughout:

15

Departments of Colombia



Led by:

47

Master Trainers





Multiplication trainings

Between August 2019 and March 2020, **33 multiplication trainings** were completed. These trainings have been focused on all three components of the project and have taken place across **15 departments** in Colombia. These multiplication trainings were led by **47 Master Trainers** who shared their knowledge and experience with the next generation of trainers, **making all this possible**. For the work they have done thus far, **we would like to thank and highlight:**



Component I: Painting the Future.

- Antioquia:**
 - Rodrigo Echandía and Yessenia Rivas/ Ciudad Don Bosco.
- Arauca:**
 - Keydi Pérez and Luis Bolívar/ Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo.
- Atlántico:**
 - Álvaro Aja Avendaño/ Centro Social Don Bosco.
- Cauca:**
 - Sor Ximena Caicedo and Vivian Mancilla/ Casa María Peregrina, Hijas de María Auxiliadora.
- Chocó:**
 - Dayana Mena Mosquera/ Fundación Te Abrazo Chocó - Peacemakers 360.
- Cundinamarca:**
 - Jaime Puentes and Óscar Delgado/ IE Departamental Miguel Unia.
- Tolima:**
 - Paula Forero and Fabio Pérez/ Escuelas de Paz.
- Valle del Cauca:**
 - Jairo Guluma and Álvaro Taborda/ Corporación Juntos Construyendo Futuro.



Component III: Perspectives of Peace

- Antioquia:**
 - Edison Valencia and Leidy Ríos/ Corporación Dimensión Génesis.
 - Catalina Carmona, Lilian Cristina Ríos and José Gabriel Ramírez/ Corporación Dimensión Génesis and EAFIT Social.
 - Pedro Beltrán and Ximena Sierra/ Ciudad Don Bosco.
 - José Gabriel Ramírez and Brian Ferrer/ EAFIT Social and Ciudad Don Bosco.
 - Beatriz Elena Betancur Betancur / Colegio San Antonio de Prado.
- Atlántico:**
 - Olga Macías and Hernán Belalcázar/ Centro Social Don Bosco and Alcaldía de Pasto.
 - Guillermo Cano/ Scouts.
- Bolívar:**
 - Yuber Rodríguez/ Scouts and Servicio Educativo Arquidiocesano de Cartagena.
 - Mauricio Garcés and Guillermo Cano/ Scouts.
- Cauca:**
 - Piedad Parra and Shirly Briceño/ FMA Sagrado Corazón and FMA Cristo Rey de Popayán.
- Cesar:**
 - Jorge Quintero/ ONU.
- Guaviare:**
 - Fernando Conde Suárez/ ONU.
- Nariño:**
 - Hernán Belalcázar/ Alcaldía de Pasto.
- Norte de Santander:**
 - Viviana Suárez and Darly Acevedo/ Colegio Salesiano SJB de Cúcuta.
- Risaralda:**
 - Carmen Helena Betancur, Luis Alfredo Acevedo and Juliana Ramírez/ Colegio Salesiano SJB de Pereira, ETDH and PJS Provincia Mazzarelo.
 - Sara Jiménez, Sor Adriana Osorio and Maria Isabel Quintero/ Pastoral Juvenil Salesiana del Eje Cafetero, Casa María Peregrina-Hijas de María Auxiliadora and PJS Provincia Mazzarelo.
- Valle del Cauca:**
 - Hernán Belalcázar/ Alcaldía de Pasto.



Component II: The Superheroes' Journey

- Antioquia:**
 - Leidy Ríos and Lilian Cristina Ríos/ Corporación Dimensión Génesis.
 - Lizeth Correa/ Asperla.
- La Guajira:**
 - Claudia Martínez and Katherine Martínez/ Scouts and Colegio Salesiano.
- Risaralda:**
 - Néstor Pachón, Katherin Estrada, Daniel Rivera and Alejandra Quintero/ Colegio Salesiano SJB de Dos Quebradas, Oratorio SJB de Dos Quebradas and PJS Provincia Mazzarelo.

Two of the Multiplication Trainings that took place in March and were mentioned on this page (in Tuluá and San Antonio de Prado), have been suspended due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

For this reason, the scheduled multiplication trainings and community work have been suspended in Colombia. Re-starting dates are still pending until further notice.



Important

Thank you

We want to thank **Peggy Atoche** for her contribution with the translation of this newsletter.



Moments





“A life story to tell” is the new section of our newsletter. We will use this space to share life stories of people who are part of this project. In these stories, resilience and the willingness to reconcile play a key role in transforming the protagonist’s lives. Today we will start with William, a young man with a great vision for the future, and an endless passion for youth-focused social work.

I met William in 2013 while volunteering at Don Bosco City’s Protection House, a place where demobilized minors began the process of restoration of rights. His kindness and willingness to participate in any activity, caught my attention from the beginning. William’s charisma stood out in the midst of a group of boys who -as he did- experienced armed conflict. With just a few kind words, he would managed to get his classmates attention. Months after my departure, the program coordinator tells me that William had come of age and had soon to leave the Protection House. He was offered the chance to become an educator, this would enable him to continue to live there as part of the technical team. This decision became a life lesson for many and a multiplying factor of hope for these minors, whose environment diluted the possibility of developing a complete childhood and who, once of age, will have to face the world on their own. Today these young people only demand, is to be given more opportunities.

William has been an important part of our project since 2015. He was part of the creative team who developed the Comic Books and attended some of our trainings with great enthusiasm. This is the journey of a hero who has painted his future and today he wants to share his story with us. Today he wants to give us his perspective of peace.

Viviana Montoya Giraldo
Project Coordinator in Colombia



From black to white. From war to peace. From
laughter to fear. Stories filled with contrast.
Life stories filled with hope. A life story to tell.





A LIFE STORY TO TELL

Stories of hope and contrasts

His favourite colour is black, but his dreams are white like an empty billboard, always ready to house all kinds of doodles, writings and ideas that would later on manifest into reality. A reality made possible because of William and the people around him who help give colour, sense, and structure to each dream.

There is a sense of peace and harmony in his home. His home consists of himself and his family. A family that he cannot visit as much as he would like to, because of the war. A war that not only took away his family's ownership of their land, but also the possibility of walking on it again, "at least for now", as he says between sighs.

One of the funniest moments of his life ended amidst bombs and gunshots. With less than fifteen years of age, a weapon in one hand, an umbrella on the other, and a military headscarf around his head, together with his partner, who was like a brother to him, gave life to the characters of Tola and Maruja during an illegal roadblock, staged to prepare for an ambush. A few minutes later, amidst jokes and laughter, which caused their friends to get distracted, they were the ones being ambushed. They nearly lost their lives, but months later they still laugh at the experience. After all, "*fortunately no one was hurt*".



From black to white. From war to peace. From laughter to fear. Stories filled with contrast. Life stories filled with hope. A life story to tell.

His heart has been beating non-stop for a little over than twenty-five years, but his hands tell stories that would seem to embody someone much older. At fifteen, he had already performed various trades to earn a living: picking coca leaves, selling candies, exploding dynamite, chipping stones in mines and shooting weapons. None of these activities had anything to do with what a child would have wanted to learn, but that was the hand that life had dealt to William, and he had to take it when he was seven years old, after his dad was murdered.

Originally from Antioquia and with peasant roots, William was born into a large family. He fondly remembers the solidarity of people around him when he was little. His community was destroyed the day thirty armed men took the life of his father, his brother and a neighbour who was like a brother to his father. His family had to flee. This was the start of what he calls "*this part of my story*".

Sometime later, he and his family returned to the farm. Ironically, in order to live in it, they had to work for those who, not so long ago, had murdered their loved ones. With the money earned, his brothers managed to buy a house in the town for their mother. William went to live with her. While scrapping by, searching for ways to survive, at twelve years of age, he found himself threatened with death because of a misunderstanding. The only option to save his life was to accept the boots, the hills and a rifle. He had to leave his home without being able to tell his mother. From that moment on, with the welcoming words "*you are no longer a child, you do not come to play, you are a man and you have to behave with responsibility*" the guerrilla became his new home. To this day he still evokes those words in moments of insecurity, to remind himself of what he is capable of doing.



During his four-year stint as a guerrilla, William learned to survive and to develop emotional strength, particularly during times when he felt profound pain and sadness, emotions that were later transformed into rage and resentment sometimes. He learned to endure and not to give up. He learned to be loyal and to trust his new friends who had become his new family; they had to support and take care of each other. He learned that his word was a sacred commitment, that agreements were to be respected and the importance of being cautious. He learned about leadership and how to be a team player, though these were not the exact words they used to label these terms. He was taught to give his life for his ideals, although today he knows that they were not right. He also learned to forgive.

William has the word resilience deeply tattooed in his soul. At fifteen years of age, with a defeated running mate, his feet seriously injured, and peasant's clothing as disguise, he managed to escape from a situation that could have perfectly been the inspiration for an action-thriller movie. **At fifteen years of age, William decided to change weapons for classrooms. He decided to risk leaving a life that was defined by others, and built his own.** A new life in which he could create his own dreams, starting with the first one: learning to read. Up to that day, William hadn't really been to a classroom for more than 3 months which is all the time, money could afford back then.

"It wasn't easy, but I did it", says William, referring to the first three years of reintegration into society. It took greater effort to free himself from the belief system that was forged in his mind around some "ideals", than to effort he invested during the actual time he spent with the guerrillas.

Ten years have passed since that extraordinary escape, which was driven by principles that were kept alive inside, like a burning flame. Ten years experiencing the struggles of stigmatization caused by having belonged to an armed group; the pain of not being able to have his mother or his family nearby, because the war still had barriers placed between them; the pain of loneliness; and not being able to openly own his story due to the ghosts of stigmatization.



They have also been ten years of great learning and continuous discipline. Years in which he has received all the love and guidance of those who guard the spirit of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness in Colombia. Such is Don Bosco City, the house that welcomed and offered him all the possibilities to heal, grow and train as the person and the professional he is today. During these years, William has also used his leadership skills to give his best in every place he has been to. In Don Bosco City, he had his first opportunity to work as an educator, "*Here, I discovered my passion for social work*"; and he also volunteers for UNICEF. This is the reason people relate to him, and the reason he has become a source of inspiration for many young people, who like him, have left the battlefields in order to build a better life.

He has a strong passion for serving and doing things to benefit others and enjoys the simplicity of moments in life, such as dancing with a broom to the rhythm of a song. Even though, he already has degrees in Marketing and in Industrial Mechanics, he dreams of becoming a professional in Community Development and Social Planning so that he can manage projects that can contribute to the development of rural and urban communities. **He dreams of reaching out to children, to give them the gift of listening and show them that the world is one filled with possibilities.** He dreams of returning to that river with crystalline water near his farm. A river that to this day, still holds beautiful memories of his childhood; it was there where he learned to fish and swim. **He dreams of peace.**

From town to hills. From weapons to classrooms. From "ideals" of war to ideals of peace through social work. Surely, these are stories filled with contrasts. Stories filled with resilience. A life to admire.

