

A TABLE SHARED WITH YOUTH

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At a moment in which society today gives youth a place in consumerism, a source for immediate satisfaction and from a masquerade of identity, the Foundation **recognizes in them a great potential for creating bonds which can bring about other ways of being, belonging and doing in their country.**

1. STRUCTURE OF THE “SEEDS OF PEACE” FOUNDATION AND THE PLACE OF YOUTH

The foundation is an institution in which persons and groups intervene and fulfill diverse and complementary functions in the building of a democratic nation.

Volunteers: They help in economic and administrative questions related to the management and use of resources. Some of them are members of the board of directors.

Promoters: There are two or three young people living in each city where the foundation is active, (7 in the department of Antioquia.) Their role is that of leadership, questioning and helping the process move along in their locality. They are given a significant place, guidance and a preparation in various aspects that allow them to discover their potential, grow as persons and develop abilities and knowledge to carry them out.

Sponsors: They participate in the Seeds of Peace Camp (prior to the celebration of Christmas.) They accompany the children and youth, throughout the entire experience. During the year, they have the opportunity to participate in other complementary activities.

Professionals: Psychologists intervene on an individual and group level. They are involved in part of the research process that takes place in the towns or camps.

2. THE FOUNDATION AS A PLACE OF GROWTH FOR YOUTH

Seeds of Peace is a place that welcomes youth and gives them the opportunity to join in the experience.. They render an important service in the Foundation and at the same time it offers them the opportunity to:

- Grow in solidarity with others in their pain and with the reality of the country, through service, communal experience and the changing of reality.
- In committing themselves to bringing about better conditions in their country they develop abilities and competencies that permit them to help others.
- Find a place in the world, recognize one’s own worth, know oneself, make a decision that will help them create new ways of living together.

Youth have always been called the future of a country, one day they will appear as important beings who will carry the nation on their shoulders. The dream of the future does not depend so much on giving them hope for the future, **but rather giving back and placing in their hands that present reality that contains a never ending source of vitality and creation.** Each one is aiding in creating the experience and is making possible its support. Likewise, they are nourished with new ways of living, helps in discovering viable paths in organizational propositions for their professional future.

2.1. Approaching the other side: the one that reveals the face of pain

The Seeds for Peace camp is a proposition that combines different elements and varied experiences. The young sponsors, many of whom are from privileged sectors of society and initially consider it an opportunity to share and “to give of what they have”. However, paradoxically, they discover a significant change in themselves: *“I wanted to be of service to society and give a gift to Colombia, but it was I who was surprised when I realized that Colombia gave me an even greater gift. She showed me the beauty of life; she helped me to see that the simple act of writing about this is of great benefit to me. It placed some little ones along my path to show me that there is hope.”*¹

The camp becomes a never ending source of opportunity. It brings the sponsors closer to a totally unknown reality; they discover the magnitude of the problem, the pain, the enormous needs; they are “touched” to the extent their own lives are changed.

*“There were so many sad faces, so many looks filled with distrust and fear, so much fear and resentment that I could not manage to understand why a child needed to go through all of this; it was too much, too much for a child...”*²

*“They are innocent children who should not have to know what a machine gun or any other type of weapon is. They are children who should have their souls pure and clean but sadly enough, they have com face to face with war and that has remained in their hearts; the saddest thing is that it is not only one, nor ten, they are hundreds; the powerlessness one feels is so great when a child less than 7 years old tells you the most tragic and violent stories; the knowledge that I can only help a small percentage and that there are thousands growing up with that hatred and sorrow in their hearts, growing without life, growing with rage.”*³

The painful face they see, they integrate into their own lives; it produces in them the necessary uneasiness required to project themselves into transforming actions that imply commitment.

2.2 Together build a legacy. We are all responsible for our land: The sponsors and the discovery of a truth

If they occasionally feel that this reality is overwhelming, **undeniably the experience opens up part of a solution.** They see that **each individual’s action creates, influences and opens new paths for the nation.**

Its function is very specific, to accompany the children in the Camp, help out in daily activities, therapies, leisure time and spiritual activities; this helps them understand that there are many small activities which when coordinated in a in a group, in an attitude of openness, give efficient results. *“...this experience of service to others can change your world and many of the worlds that surround you without making an exaggerated effort, only extending your hand and lending it to be a support and help to those children affected by very sad and violent life experiences. Although my hands may be more worn out, they are not empty, but rather filled with love and gratitude.”*⁴

They verify that the sad and hard reality that seems far off, reaches us, and at the same time becomes a call to attention to the importance of taking charge of one’s own surroundings, realizing that one is part of the good and bad that inhabits our nation. The pedagogy is what takes place in the encounter with someone and something

¹ Cita tomada de dto. Sobre la experiencia, presentada por los jovenes madrinas participantes del Campamento 2006.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

entirely different from oneself, the learning of a truth that can only come from the heart. The process begins with the preparation for their role as sponsors. It is there that a place is opened making room for acceptance, awareness and formation through:

- A reflection on the history of the nation and the location of the violence
- The sharing of experiences: Interchange between the new and the former
- Approaching the world of the poor and the excluded: Case studies
- An analysis of situations which one can encounter as sponsor in relation to the problems, the activities, the concept of the other, the giving, the having, the affective link, the relationships and the teamwork with the psychotherapist.
- A detailed analysis of each activity, the sponsors role and functions
- Youth with experience help in the training process of the new sponsors

Accompaniment in the Camp:

- They extend a warm welcome to an unknown place (the city is for many of the children something beyond their reach and understanding, since they live in far off rural areas; it may create fear, anxiety, etc.)
- They help in the process of adaptation to the experience through different forms of interchange and activities. The sponsor is the principal mainstay for the children
- They motivate the children to participate in the play areas, therapy plays and nutrition
- They exercise authority in relation to following the norms for getting along
- They listen to the little ones and prepare them for the dialogue with the therapists
- They give an affectionate treatment that gives the children trust, security, a desire to go forward
- They serve as channels to strengthen the network; some of them continue in communication with them

Through their functions, the *young sponsors learn to:*

- Foster an awareness of the reality, which many of them, only know through television
- Project themselves into future actions of social commitment
- Affirm the possibility of doing something for the country and for people who need help
- Promote skills that are practical and open future paths

2.3. A shared task promoting avenues towards peace.

Many have themselves suffered the ravages of violence, they have desires: to grow, to improve their lives, to help create a different living experience in the Camp. This starts with a permanent commitment that binds them more closely to their land and their people and with a collective level of change for the better. The process of preparation helps them understand why the violence, the need to initiate programs in favor of peace, and the concrete ways to generate new possibilities for the Camp.

The experience and the process lived emerges as a central aspect in the link with the target group, the desire to accompany them emerges in their endeavor. They discover ways of establishing organizations, links, team work; moreover, they are offered a preparation that permits them to identify personal emotional issues, that can become obstacles in their work and should be separated. Likewise they are helped to find their desire to help the community.

“One becomes aware that there are a lot of things to be done, that one can do, perhaps not by oneself, but as part of a Foundation. One knows that he/she helps his people,

that one can help fulfill a function, one learns to listen, to know when to remit them to the psychologist, or explains to them and give them trust so they can go to the psychologist, so that they also can overcome their emotional wounds, the same as one also has done.”

Each one fulfills her/ his own duty, from their uniqueness and possibilities, some are silent and attentive in their work; others restless, joyful, noisy; reflective and inquisitive. Taking all of this into account they participate in the *training process*:

- Learning about the Foundation: its object and characteristics
- The participation and contributions of former participants
- Share in various aspects of training meetings: in areas of spirituality, leisure, celebration, analysis of their role among the people, in their experiences, concerns, difficulties, programs, observations
- Analysis of themes of personal interest according to suggestions, Ex.: the theme of women.
- Times for evaluation: self-evaluation, group evaluation.
- Competency formation in specific jobs. Ex. Team work

The promoters play a fundamental role in the work of the network: they make the entrance possible and the permanent motivation of the beneficiaries; they serve as a bridge with the Foundation; they contribute the knowledge of their people, their dynamics, their difficulties, the institutions that support them, etc., for better team work. Its role is decisive: become a point of reference for the beneficiaries of the network, who see in them the image and the model of what in some way, they want to be. Thus, the young people, promise of future leaders, have a special bond with them and many of them are something like the seed bed of promoters:

- They engender a great affection and confidence in the members of the network
- They motivate, organize, suggest, call others
- They give access to the Foundation and to the professionals from the recognition and the confidence that people give them as leaders to undertake the processes and to maintain them
- They share on their context, their cultural knowledge, in the service of the processes

From their position *the promoters learn*:

- That they can do something for themselves and for their people
- The importance of participation and leadership to transform reality.
- The competence needed for the direction of the processes.

2.4 The Network, A Future Promise of Young Leaders.

Most of the young people live in contexts of great poverty, even emotional poverty, manifesting itself in incapacity to interact. This leads to a deficiency in the development of social abilities, which initially makes their growth difficult. For that reason the Foundation offers them an opportunity:

- of group experience, in which they learn how to communicate, to express themselves, to relate to others who have similar experiences
- to ask themselves about their future, their dreams and desires to decipher subjects that have had a negative impact on their life
- Present opportunities, first of little complexity: organization of small internal events, such as celebrations, the attainment of resources for more complicated activities
- Learning how to work in teams, in a living and thoughtful way
- Formation in participation and organization.

2.5 The disposition to be a part of history, to leave a sign that indicates a new way

Perhaps the greatest wealth that the young people offer the Foundation, in their different roles, is their desire to be part of history, making a difference. This is how the Sponsors see it when they are faced the hardships of reality in daily life. And in the same manner the promoters realize that it is necessary to do something every day to bring about change from their own participation. Also, the young beneficiaries, that soon will turn around and be serving as collaborators, trainers, promoters and possibly as sponsors, understand that what has occurred in their history can have a turn around, because they have been able to move from being in need, to agents and leaders of Peace.

It is certain that the disposition to be a part of history, to leave a sign that indicates a new way, is the consequence of taking ownership and responsibility *"... if each one takes responsibility for his or her life and assumes the consequences of her/his acts, their actions (and sufferings) will change. They will assume **an ethic of reasoning**, where they will take into account the interests and feelings of others, be it consideration or courtesy. **To follow through, is, indeed, to be made responsible (preferably in a conscious and active way: **morally**) of the consequences of one's actions, maintaining a dialectic between thinking, saying, and doing... "***

3. COMPANY: An INSPIRATION TO SHARE THE BREAD SO THAT LIFE BEGINS AGAIN. Pedagogical elements that make it possible

Insertion into the experience: Becoming sensitive to suffering comes by way of a direct encounter, in an opportunity for mediation because a contact is established, a contact with the experience of those who are or have been there, thus is what constitutes insertion – the immersion experience. This is what wakes up a need for confrontation and commitment that produces a change in the approach to the life for the young people who participate.

Participation: In the different opportunities of the Foundation, the contribution of every one is valued. Everyone is invited to be part of the building process, to share their word, proposal. The contribution of each one combines and ties with that of the others. Also, each one of the activities, the Camp, as much as that of the Network, implies a position as active agents, with a significant sense of ownership. With it, is hoped that they become agents of peace, as soon as they share their experiences and they motivate others of their social means to greater social commitment with those affected.

In the Network, the promoters, from their commitment and personal growth, are multiplying the agents that are also committed children who visualize the future, as they are at the moment, generating from this a greater number of seeds of peace in each population

Team Work:

Each one of the activities of the Foundation is possible thanks to the contribution of many people, thus the variety of activities, implying a lived experience of the structure by many. The promoters motivate the children in the therapy; the psychologists help them face their situation, helping them to grow, to improve. This is taken to their relations as well: family, school, becoming a seed of peace cultivated by many hands.

Organization: A gradual attaining of values and behaviors, based on democratic management skills in order to fulfill the work at hand. Appreciating what each one can offer, themselves, their word, listening, tolerance, service, etc., as an exercise of democratic training, training for the foundations of a future country: Identifying the

specific elements which contribute to a joint effort, and the contribution of each one to making it possible. This soon becomes a desire to work together in undertaking joint projects.

Projection: The children and young people learn to become managers of their life and to think about their surroundings. This means progressively becoming interested in being agents of change for their community. The sponsors, the majority of them women, learn to recognize the importance of their actions in a specific context. They prepare themselves to make their own contribution on the basis of an experience evaluated and conceptualized at other moments of their life. The professionals, the majority of them very young, understand that their action and intervention, is a contribution to the individual and social history of their country. Thus, the Foundation projects itself towards a leadership for peace.

The important thing for the Foundation is that many young people become involved with the belief: "Take care of the seed of peace and when it is a tree you can lie and rest under its shade".