

Programa Fénix: Desarrollo integral y oportunidades para jóvenes en situación de riesgo social y conflicto.

(The Fénix Program: Integral development and opportunities for youth in situations of social risk and conflict)

Summary

The Fénix Program is a social responsibility program coordinated by the Caja de Compensación Familiar (Family Compensation Fund) from Antioquia that attends to youth from the less favorable stratum of Antioquia, Colombia. Its objective is to increase the possibility of the youths' complete development and social inclusion by means of implementing participative educational processes that facilitate individual and collective transformations, and to improve the community.

To fully understand this program, it's necessary to make reference to the context in which it is implemented. In the 90s, Medellín was one of the cities in Colombia most affected by the country's violence. The war between the drug cartels, the guerilla warfare and the paramilitary took, as their main cannon fodder, the youth from the city's marginal neighborhoods.

Recruited by the factions in conflict, the youth gangs (the bands) remained trapped and saw themselves involved in a whirlpool of violence that left behind the death of many young children from families from this city's neighborhoods. In this context, COMFAMA contributes to the pacification of these zones, working with the youth to better their personal, social and economic life situations.

The program developed in the following consecutive phases. First, the communities in which the program was going to focus its work were selected based in the analysis of the socioeconomic and security conditions. Once the communities were defined, the process of approaching them began by making contact with priests, community leaders, representatives of communal action and teachers from the area.

From there, visits to the neighborhoods began in order to make initial contact with the youth in their own meeting areas. During these first visits, the program staff participated in the recreational activities that unexpectedly included informal conversations between them and the boys and girls. Making the most of the situation, they were able to present the Fénix Project and invite them to change their lifestyle, linking it to the program's formative offers in education, recreation, culture and occupational education. COMFAMA's trips to the recreational

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parks were an important activity during this phase, for they tested the seriousness of the project. During this phase, informal contact was made with close to 2,000 youth, of which 1,730 showed interest in joining the program.

Once the minimal confidence, interest and commitment conditions were met between the youth and the program staff, the presentation of the COMFAMA program's offer was carried out, by means of service fairs, which allowed the youth to become more familiar with the courses and to then compare this information with their interests and skills. Later, registration in the different courses began, with the only condition that they sign up for basic education. Parallel to the mandatory basic education, they are free to sign up for job training, culture or sports courses.

On the whole, a foundation was constructed in the different aspects of individual and group development. Next began health assistance by means of educational lessons, health fairs and medical and dental exams. In terms of psychological health, periodic meetings held in community centers and a mentoring process helped the youths' social development. In this process, the program staff members were informally strengthening the social ties with the youths' families and leaders of the community. In this way, in 2004 the formal work with the families started, by means of meetings, as well as family relationships support and strengthening workshops. Later, the training of youth and community leaders began so that they learned how to develop and implement community service projects, as well as learn how to initiate and receive financing for a productive project.

In summary, it is seen as an innovative program, which completely confronts, and with great success, a problem that at risk youth face.