

Sistema de Sostén para adolescentes tutelados  
(Support System for Protected Adolescents)

## Summary

It is a model developed by La Plata's judicial system, capital of the Buenos Aires Province, to help youth offenders without their internment, which achieved relapse levels significantly lower than those from the internment model. From its initiation until 2004, it has attended to 982 youths – 70% women and 30% men – with only 4 cases of relapse. This model recognizes the need to punish the juvenile offenders; however, it avoids detention centers since it is known that they convert into the best delinquency “schools,” and the program does not want the offenders to be educated in their crime by other delinquents.

The model works in the following way: with the authorization of the trial judge, the youth's defense lawyers present a solicitation for the entry into the Sistema de Sostén (Support System). The youth is psychologically and socially evaluated, putting special emphasis on the desire that the applicant starts making changes in his or her life, as well as in the psychological and social characteristics that allow them to live independently. After the two evaluations have been studied, the interdisciplinary team decides if the intervention of the Sistema de Sostén (Support System) is pertinent, a decision that is communicated to the defense team and to the judge. Once the applicant is selected, the adolescent is granted a money allowance to support himself and is assigned a mentor. The mentor makes contact with the youth and they establish, by mutual agreement, the meetings that they are going to maintain, their frequency and location. Next, the youth and his/her mentor go to the Sistema de Sostén headquarters to sign the “Convenio de Responsabilidad” (Responsibility Agreement) – an agreement between the youth and the Sistema representative. With this, both parties' obligations and rights and the possibility of either of them dropping the Agreement before its completion without consequences are established.

One of the central aspects of this agreement is the youth's obligation to continue a training process that makes it possible for him to enter the working world and have an independent life. The mentor continues working with the youth during approximately three years, a time period in which the youth has to outline and carry out his life plan. They are also provided emotional support and are helped to strengthen the plan that was outlined, as well as with job

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planning. The mentor supervises the youth once per month, or every two weeks, according to the complexity of the cases.

All the mentor's actions are centered on trying to develop strategies for the youth to build self esteem and a sense of self-worth, in ways that are within the frame of the law. It is worth noting, ability to look for work; use of public health, living, transportation and education services; training to enter the work force and to entirely exercise the rights and obligations of a citizen are important aspects of the program.

This assistance model is financed by collecting public resources destined to justice, health, education and labor training, without duplicating them. Its operation costs are significantly less than those associated with detained youth.

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