

PROJECTS ABROAD ARGENTINA

LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT



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Hola!

Though it's winter here in Argentina, that hasn't slowed down the volunteers of the Law & Human Rights office. The months of June and July have been the busiest months so far in Argentina, as 13 volunteers arrived in June and we will receive about the same amount in July. Our dedicated volunteers have been busy in their various projects and learning a lot about human rights in Argentina, while at the same time, learning a lot about themselves!

In May, Martin Mas Casariego joined the Law & Human Rights team as the Legal Coordinator. He helps a great deal by bringing the legal knowledge needed to help more in the community of Córdoba. Bienvenido Martin!

SOCIAL PROJECTS

CeCAM

CeCAM, (Centro Correccional para Adolescentes Mujeres) is a correctional facility for young girls aged 14 to 20, who committed or were involved in serious crimes. Usually the institution houses about fifteen girls.

Volunteers at CeCAM have been involved in the girls' art classes, paintings and ceramics; lending a hand in finishing the artwork that will be sold in an upcoming fair. The money raised in the fair will go towards the purchase of more materials for the classes. Both the volunteers and the girls of CeCAM enjoy the art classes, as it is a quiet and creative moment for everyone, concentrating on their work and they are very proud of the artwork they have created.

Volunteers use free time during and between activities to chat with the girls to build trust with them and to learn more about their lives. They also teach them small lessons, and most recently, focused on teaching the girls the dangers of smoking, in the hopes that they will smoke less when they are bored. To keep them busy, the volunteers played volleyball, and also the girls of CeCAM taught the volunteers how to dance a traditional Argentine dance, the *chacarera* as well as a well-known dance in Córdoba called *cuarteto*.

They also watched a movie called 'Pitch Perfect' with the girls, an American film that demonstrates topics such as self esteem, confidence, trust, and team work that are relatable to the girls of CeCAM's lives. After the film, volunteers lead a small discussion where the girls asked questions and share their point of view on the movie, and how it has related to their own lives.

For future volunteers, it is a good idea to try to involve music in the activities you do with the girls. They love the arts and music, so this is a great way to keep them interested. Be creative to try to use music while trying to teach them something related to human rights!



FELISA SOAJE

Felisa Soaje is a residential care facility for girls aged between 14 and 17. The girls living there have been ordered by the court to reside there as their biological parents have been deemed unfit or incapable of caring for them. The girls are provided with meals and accommodation and attend school 5 days a week. Volunteers meet with the girls on a weekly basis.

The volunteers prepared educational materials to teach the girls about sexual health and protection.

They also organised an activity aimed at teaching the girls the importance of self empowerment. The activity started as a simple 'cup game,' where the girls created a beat/rhythm using only the plastic cups.

The girls then added in music – finding the Spanish version of the hit song 'Titanium,' whose lyrics send a powerful message. Once they coordinated the music with the rhythm of the cups, they added in the song. Afterwards they discussed the lyrics and the overall powerful meaning of the song! The girls really enjoyed the activity!



HUMAN TRAFFICKING & TRADE

BASTA DE TRATA



At the end of May we started a new partnership with a local organisation called Basta de Trata (BdT). It is a Córdoba-based organisation with the aim of informing and raising awareness about the issue of human trafficking in Argentina. They focus not only on raising awareness, but also on breaking taboos, and informing the community. They hold campaigns, workshops, discussion forums and prevention and assistance programs for trafficking victims.

Volunteers participated in a training workshop held by the members of Basta de Trata, where volunteers learned how human trafficking is a form of modern slavery and is a direct violation of human rights – regardless of gender, race or age. They discussed human trafficking in Argentina, the severity of the problem in Argentina and what is being done to prevent and control it.



In the first week of July, volunteers had another opportunity to work with Basta de Trata as part of an anti-mafia conference. BdT is partnering with other NGOs such as Newen that fight human trafficking, drug trafficking, and arms dealing to form a network of organizations to fight the mafia in Argentina. Both the speakers and the audience were incredibly passionate about the issues. Topics ranged from the anti-trafficking campaign in Córdoba and its perceived ef-

fectiveness to the role that the United States and the United Kingdom have played.

Several statistics that are interesting to note:

- Argentina is the #1 consumer and #3 seller of cocaine in Latin America.
- 30% of the working population is working in poor conditions.
- There are 8,000 brothels open in Argentina, where around 60,000 women are being treated like sex slaves. One of the biggest brothels in Buenos Aires earns 150,000 pesos every day.

These events with Basta de Trata were an incredible opportunity to learn about human trafficking. For someone without previous knowledge of the issue, the amount of information was likely shocking and slightly overwhelming. For those who had studied trafficking before, it was a way to better understand the situation locally in Argentina. For all of us, it was a sobering experience that left us better informed and energized to fight for change.

We made the news! Here is a news clip from the conference <http://bit.ly/1bj2leU>

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

BLAS PASCAL

Blas Pascal is a peripheral community of government and makeshift housing built in 2009. Prior to the existence of the slum, the residents were living in shanties along the river; however in 2003 they successfully petitioned for proper accommodation arrangements. There are approximately 100 families living there. The Law & Human Rights Office has started a community project, with the goals of educating and empowering the neighbours in their goals to help improve their community and improving their quality of life.

The weekly meetings in the Blas Pascal community have continued for the past two months and with each meeting there are coming positive results.

The issues being addressed at past meetings are:

Formation of a Neighbourhood Association – Martin was introduced as the lawyer who will be helping in the formal formation of the neighbourhood association. Volunteers stressed the importance of the community engaging their fellow neighbours to get involved in the proposed projects and the community meetings. The role of Projects Abroad is to empower the community to run itself, not to run the community. Members agreed to begin taking the lead and will work to motivate their fellow neighbours to get involved.



- The Municipality of Córdoba explained that the Blas Pascal community needs to be recognized by the government in order to be taken seriously as a neighbourhood association so that they can receive the services (water, light etc.) that are needed. In order to do this the neighbours want to bring awareness to the public about their situation, and they thought of doing so via the media – TV, radio, and perhaps making a demonstration.

- While a formal association has not yet been formed, each weekly meeting attracts a large number of neighbours with a common interest to improve their neighbourhood. This is a positive sign for all involved.

Electricity Issues – the neighbours are still upset that the members of neighbouring slums are illegally connecting to their electrical supply.

- At a June meeting, 20+ members of the neighbouring slum joined the weekly meeting in Blas Pascal to discuss this issue of the electricity. Historically these two slums (Blas Pascal and the neighbouring) have been rivals and never met to discuss the problems between them. However at this meeting, the neighbours of both came together and agreed that a resolution needs to come of the electricity situation. The neighbouring slum agreed that they need to get their own electricity connection and sought the advice of Projects Abroad to help guide them. In the meeting they managed to communicate with the electric company who agreed to visit the area to see what needed to be done.



Repairs and Improvements at ‘Copa de Leche’ – On-going repairs are being made at the Copa de Leche dining hall (held in the same building as the weekly meetings). Many of the windows were broken and/or stolen, so Projects Abroad has agreed to purchase the new polycarbonate windows that will cover the openings. At the same time, three men who are regulars to the weekly meetings have plastered and sanded the walls inside to prepare for painting. They have asked for more help from members of the community in order to finish faster. The volunteers have pitched in to help coat the room in the final coat of paint!

EDUCATIONAL OUTINGS

LA PERLA

Volunteers visited the former clandestine detention centre in Cordoba known as La Perla. Though it was not the only clandestine detention centre during the dictatorship of Argentina from 1976 to 1983, it is the most famous because it was the most important in the area at the time. Some 3000 people were detained in this centre from 1975 to 1979. The centre was opened before the coup to overthrow the government of Isabel Peron on March 24, 1976. The coup marked the beginning of a 9-year military dictatorship in Argentina, led by Commander Jorge Videla.

Volunteers were welcomed by a guide who explained the history of the dictatorship and how La Perla first came to exist. The tour takes visitors through the various buildings of La Perla, and explains in detail how prisoners were blindfolded, tied up and tortured within those walls.

Prisoners of La Perla were kidnapped off the streets or from their homes by the military police, chosen because of their political affiliation or because of their fight against the dictatorship. As a result, the majority of those taken in were young students or journalists. Upon entering La Perla prisoners ultimately lost their identity, given an identification number and as they were told, held for ‘questioning.’

The visit to La Perla was very interesting and emotional. It was a powerful glimpse into a reality in Argentina 30 years ago, and of a fight that is still going on today in Argentina.



FEDERAL COURT PROCEEDINGS

Relating to the visit to La Perla, volunteers attended the Federal Courts of Córdoba to observe the trial of 23 former military officials involved in actions carried out between 1975 and 1978 at La Perla

These proceedings unite 16 causes of action and 417 victims who 'disappeared,' (most likely having been kidnapped, tortured and killed) during the dictatorship.

That day the human rights volunteers observed submissions from the defence lawyers and defendants themselves, rebutting the credibility of previous witnesses. Some of the witnesses worked alongside the defendants and are likely to be granted leniency for their own participation in La Perla in return for their testimony against the current defendants. The volunteers also had the opportunity to meet and speak with one of the prosecuting lawyers, a defence lawyer, and a mother of one of the victims also attending to observe the trial.

The trial raises a number of competing human rights issues. While there is a strong need for justice and for those responsible for the systematic torture and killing of victims to be held accountable, the defendants also have the right to a fair trial, to be presumed innocent until proven guilty (which is difficult given the long passage of time and scarcity of evidence) and law should not be applied retrospectively – i.e. a person should generally only be held responsible for crimes which actually existed at the time they were committed.

The trial began last December and is likely to extend until the end of 2013, hearing testimony from over 700 witnesses.

