ANNUAL REPORT 2020

EDUCATION for Life

DEVELOPING WORLD CONNECTIONS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November of 2017, I had the opportunity to travel to Peru with USF members Shannon McQuillan and Peter Coxon to introduce them to different DWC projects. The trip had been preceded by many meetings and conversations over the previous year about USF's values, how it could best contribute, how we could foster meaningful engagement with employees, and a host of other nuances that would make for an impactful partnership. Having never worked with the company before, Peter and Shannon hinted to me that because it strove for consensus, USF's decision-making process could move slowly, but once things were aligned, the impact would be incredibly meaningful.

We crammed a lot into that five-day trip, seeing various DWC projects, meeting many different stakeholders and exploring parts of the country few Canadians ever get to see. On our way home when I asked them what project they thought would best align with USF, the work at the San Jose Obrero school was a no-brainer.

San Jose Obrero school is situated in Villa María del Triunfo, a very poor, rocky suburb south-east of Lima. 27% of the population in this district live in extreme poverty without basic services. The district ranks amongst the highest in child and youth malnourishment. Domestic violence is a dire social issue.

Education for Life was born out of that trip. A uniquely Urban Systems initiative, Education for Life strives to meet not only the immediate nutritional needs of kids at the San Jose Obrero school, but also to impact their long-term trajectory through improving the quality of education they receive and providing various life skills and training opportunities.

Prior to COVID-19, the community and children at the school saw three annual teams of Urban Systems employees come work side by side with them, play with them, visit their homes and learn about their lives. That a group of Canadians would travel all the way to Peru to do this displayed a level of caring far greater than what many had ever experienced before.

Today, Urban Systems is known by hundreds of children and their families in a small, dirt-poor community in Peru. If I had a few words to sum up the impact that Urban Systems has had on the children and families in this community, they would be, ‘incredibly meaningful.’

Thank you USF,

Joshua Molsberry
Executive Director
Developing World Connections
San Jose Obrero School is located in Villa Maria del Triunfo, a barrio outside of the city of Lima.

The Education for Life program started 2020 with excitement concerning the progress that was being made in the lives of the children at the San Jose Obrero school. For three years, with the support of Urban Systems Foundation (USF), the program had seen key improvements in the health and education outcomes of the kids attending the school. Training teachers and providing children with nutritious food, busing to school, counseling and leadership training had resulted in marked improvements in several health, education and social well-being indicators.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 however, the Education for Life program had to radically adapt. Peru faced one of the highest per-capita rates of infections on record. Cramped housing, poor sanitation, and packed markets all led to the drastic spread of the virus. In March of 2020, Peru entered one of the longest running lockdowns in the world.

Many of the families of the children at San Jose Obrero earn an income in the informal economy, selling goods in markets or as construction labourers, for example. When parents were not allowed out of their houses to find work, there was no income to buy food.

Some families were putting food to the table with the help of assistance from USF. They purchased food with small loans and repaid the money over the course of the following year. While the pandemic has been tough on everyone, the Education for Life program has continued to work hard to aid its community.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Emergency food assistance has helped keep families from going hungry.
With approval from Urban Systems, partial program funding was redirected to provide emergency food rations for families who were under lockdown. USF graciously provided additional funding the following month that allowed for the expansion of emergency support measures as the pandemic and harsh economic conditions continued. Over 200 families received food, clothing and cleaning supplies from April through August.

With no end to the pandemic in sight, parents at the San Jose Obrero school requested that we adapt and resume the Education for Life program to support their kids. While school facilities were officially closed, Peru’s Ministry of Education mandated virtual online learning in an attempt to keep students from falling behind. Teachers created lessons and posted them online for kids to watch and then download their homework.

**KEY FINDINGS**

A household survey was conducted to better understand the impact the pandemic and ensuing lockdown were having. The findings of this survey helped steer the adjustments to the program for the year.

Key findings included:

- The average family size in one home is four people. In some instances, the number of people in the home reaches 14. The majority of homes are small, single rooms and very confined. Makeshift dividers are created using plastic or light wood. Isolation of family members who contract the virus is impossible. Families work in the informal economy. Jobs are temporary and there are no social benefits. Acute food shortages are a reality for many during the pandemic.

- The survey revealed that 80% of children and teenagers did not have internet access in the home.

- 91% of children do not have a phone, and if they have one, they share it with their parents and siblings at home.
“My dad works as a plumber and because of the quarantine, he’s not working. My mom sells knitted clothing, like sweaters, through Internet. We are experiencing a lot of problems but we are facing them together and thanks to this program, we’ll have food some days. Thank you.”

~Sánchez

“I’m a single mother, nowadays I’m unemployed, because the market where I used to work is closed due to the pandemic. Our most difficult challenge is feeding our family. This program is helping us with food, it will help us to survive the quarantine, because we need a lot of support. As a mother, sometimes I don’t have enough money to feed my children. Thank you so much.”

~Bernardillo

“We are a family in extreme poverty. I used to work driving a tuk tuk but now I can’t do that because of the virus. We are having a hard time, sometimes we don’t have enough money, even for one piece of bread, there is nowhere to get money. We haven’t received the social assistance from the government. This program is helping us a lot with the food that we received, especially for the children because they cry and ask for food. Sometimes we only eat once a day.”

~Pinchi
From the 300 children who were surveyed, only one had a computer and two had a tablet.

Online classes were not helping children to achieve their core learning competencies for their grades. Using WhatsApp, children were required to copy their work onto paper, do their homework, then take a picture and send it to the teacher. In many cases, children were struggling to understand their lessons, and when they could not understand the instructions, they often got frustrated and no longer wanted to study.

Another challenge is the access to the Internet, the signal is low and, in some places, there is no signal at all. Because of that, children had to go in search for a place where they get enough signal.

In summary, the survey showed the dire social conditions that children and their families were facing as a result of the pandemic. Moreover, it highlighted the challenges that children from low socioeconomic households face when trying to follow the government’s virtual learning strategy during a lockdown.

Education for Life had to adapt. Goals for the year included helping keep children from going hungry and supporting them with their studies.

**PROGRAM ADAPTIONS**

Key components and adjustments to the program in 2020 included:

- A satellite location on the mountain above the school was created. A local resident donated the use of his yard as a classroom and eating area. As travel is limited, having a satellite location allows the feeding and tutoring to happen for kids who live too far away to walk to the classroom.

- The feeding program was expanded to serve 70 children breakfast and lunch. This represents nearly a doubling in size, as in previous years, only breakfasts were served. 45% of children in the feeding program were involved in Education for Life in previous years. 55% were new to the program. Over a five-month period, nearly 7,000 breakfast and lunches were served.
• The busing program was temporarily canceled. Funds were redirected to the feeding program.

• Because of the challenges children faced with virtual school, a tutor was hired to work with kids in small groups of five or less. The tutor, an experienced primary school teacher, spends time with each child to help them understand their lessons and help them with their homework. The tutor will visit both locations throughout the week.

• The classroom at the school that was built by USF and DWC was outfitted with a computer and strong internet connection. Children can come to the classroom during scheduled times to use the computer, print their lessons, access wifi, and receive tutoring. Approximately, 60 children use the wifi in different hours and days. Even though the signal is low at times, it is really helpful for children who do not have data or phones.

• Data and cell phones were provided to some children from extremely poor households to allow them more regular access to their virtual learning program.

• A virtual support group was created for students. Through this forum, children were able to play games, connect with their friends and receive group-based workshops from a professional psychologist on topics such as mental health, emotional intelligence and fear management.

• Counselling services were also provided to children and their moms, both in groups and individually, virtual and face-to-face. Frequent topics addressed included loss of loved ones through the pandemic, domestic abuse, violence, discrimination, neglect and parental absence.

Cell phones give students regular access to their virtual learning program.

The moms who prepare the school meals participated in workshops about nutrition and have been putting this knowledge into practice at home too.
Jhayro (11) is a student at San Jose Obrero School. He participates in the Prominnats workshops and is a helper with the school bus. He lives in the barrios of Villa Maria del Triunfo with his mother and father and two brothers, Dharya (6) and Jose (15).

He is also a student volunteer helping with the lunch program before returning home with a meal for himself and his two brothers.

“For the food delivery, we organized ourselves and took some responsibilities as children. The ones that arrive early have to take out the chairs, and the ones that arrive late have to return everything to its place. One of us stands in the entrance as people arrive. We take their temperature and put some sanitizer in their hands. Another helper receives the plastic containers and disinfects them, and another takes attendance. We all wait in the Cultural Little House’s yard for our name to be called to pick up lunch, and then we go to our houses.

Participating in the Lunch Program has allowed me to learn how to take care of myself. I use a mask, sanitize my hands and respect social distancing all the time.”

Jhayro adds, “Lunches are important because there are many families that do not have groceries or food, and the program allows saving money to pay other expenses, for example, in our case, my mom’s bus fee when she has to go to the hospital to continue her treatment.”

The 11-year-old recently picked up some additional skills. “At a workshop I learned to fold paper correctly to create origami. I have sold my products and I gave my family the money I received to buy groceries.”

Consuelo (10) lives with her family in the Ecologicos barrios. She appreciates both the breakfasts and learning support Education For Life offers. She explained that she did not understand division well, now she does. These school supports are very important to her.

She noted “It is easier to learn in-person and now I have many friends that I had not met before. At home, we do not eat like we do here. Here, the breakfasts have vegetables, fruit and vitamins. It is really balanced, you do not eat a lot nor a small amount. I also like that I have an exact time to have breakfast, at 7:00am.

Consuelo is a student in the Prominnats bakery and handicraft workshops, is part of the group of children who carry out lunchtime COVID-19 prevention protocols and has helped organize a group to learn how to play chess.

Consuelo’s mom, Hayde, attended the workshops with the nutritionist. She has learned more about nutrition and helps to prepare the daily school meals. She and other moms are putting this knowledge in practice at home too.

“I have witnessed some changes in my children,” Hayde commented. “Before, I used to give them breakfast when they woke up. Now, they wake up early to go to have breakfast. They are more organized and they wash and put their dishes and towels in their place.”

Xiomara (9) lives with her mom, stepdad and two sisters. She receives lunch and school support through Education For Life. She said, “In-person we pay more attention and learn more. When we use a cellphone [for online classes] we do not understand that well. I have learned a lot and my little sister already knows how to multiply, add and subtract. My mom helps once a week as a volunteer, during the school support classes.”

Xiomara expressed that she gets worried about her stepdad getting COVID-19 as he is the only one that goes out to work.

During 2018 and 2019, Xiomara was a participant of the breakfast program. This helped her to feel better, not be so sleepy and to pay attention in class. “We became stronger and more developed,” Xiomara noted.

This past year, she receives a school lunch and is really happy that she can continue eating healthy meals of vegetables, legumes, meat, fruit and juice. “We have learned that the meals we receive have proteins and we must eat everything because it is good for us. Xiomara feels the lunches help make her stronger and give her energy.

“We do not eat like this at home. My mom says that she could not give us meals like that because we have some economic difficulties. Receiving a lunch allows us to save money to buy school supplies and pay for cellphone data. Most of the time we do not have enough money and I do not have an internet connection. It also helps us to save money to pay the electricity bills, which costs 70 soles [24 CAD]. When we cannot pay, the company cuts off our electricity and we can not recharge our phone, turn on the TV or the radio.”

She says, ”It would be important that the lunch program and other activities continue. It helps more people to eat well, study, be stronger and healthier.”
LOOKING FORWARD

When the Education for Life program was created, its objectives were to make a long-term impact in the lives of children in Peru. Increasing quality and access to learning is a powerful means to improve kids’ abilities to break cycles of poverty. With the onset of the global pandemic however, the focus of the program has had to broaden to incorporate the short-term survival needs of children and their families. Food, water and clothing are core livelihood necessities. Thanks to USF, the Education for Life program has been a lifeline to basic necessities for many children and their families over this last year.

While Canada and the U.S. seem to be turning a corner in the fight against COVID-19, Peru, and many countries in the developing world, will take a bit longer. Vaccine supply and distribution, and the speed with which the economy can recover, will determine how quickly Peru can turn the corner. When Peru has found its new normal and the short-term survival needs in Peru are less dire, the Education for Life program will resume a more targeted approach that focuses on increasing children’s long-term capacities through education, mentorship and training. ☀️

As Peru begins to recover, post-pandemic, and students return to in-person learning, Education For Life will resume its aim to improve outcomes for students at San Jose Obrero school.