



## Scouts Combatting Conflict in El Salvador

PROMISING PRACTICES

### The Results

In El Salvador, a country with a history of violence, there has been an 80% reduction in student related violence since 2001. This has been achieved by helping young people offering them the option to choose 'Solidarity Brigades' instead of gangs, using the Scout Method of working in small groups and giving young people responsibilities.



Young people from different backgrounds come together with Scouts

From April 2001 to May 2004, 3600 young people have attended camps where there is a focus on working together in teams. A wide range of activities are on offer, which help young people find non-violent ways of expressing themselves and where they can meet together, develop their skills, offer a service to their local community and have fun.

### The Reasons

Different factors: like the civil war maintained for many years until the peace treaties signed in 1992; the lost of society values caused by the internal migration from land to the cities and the accelerated urban development from which the formation of youth gangs originated.

Young people in particular are affected by this culture of violence. They respond by organizing themselves into 'gangs'. These gangs are an expression of their self-identity and self-esteem but they also

instill a desire to control certain areas and situations, establishing their own territory and fighting against opposing gangs. With street fights, rape and murder on the increase, the community was particularly shocked when bombs started to be thrown into school playgrounds.

The education authorities reacted by trying to punish those involved in these incidents, but had little success in preventing these problems. The Scout Association of El Salvador felt that they could respond – using the Scout Method.

### The Methods

The El Salvador Scouts Association made a comparison between the gangs internal functioning and reasons why youth integrate to gangs with the internal functioning of Scouts groups; the response of young people to the Scout Movement and the reasons why they stick with us. Many similarities were found.

Students aged 15-20, from seven different schools with rival gangs, were invited to come to a holiday camp with the programme offering adventure, fun and chance to be away from home and their urban environment for a few days. Many of the young people who attended had never been out of the city. A staff team of 350 Scouts was trained to attend the students needs.



# Strategic Priority 2

Adolescents – supporting their transition to adulthood



The World Organization of the Scout Movement

During the camp the young people all worked in small groups called 'solidarity brigades'. They were responsible for working together, and organizing activities. The activities offered were designed to help the young people be creative, develop non-violent ways of expressing themselves, learn about each other and tolerate and value their differences.



Young people from different backgrounds come together with Scouts

The Scout Association of El Salvador developed a partnership with the Ministry of Education to establish the camps and some follow-up activities in the schools. The camp programme is now based on five distinct modules: Integration, Teamwork, Brigade Life, Learning Useful Skills and Community Service.

The camp experience is followed up in the schools with young people then forming their own 'brigades' which participate in social activities, community service projects and inter-school dialogue.

Training teachers is also an important part of the programme and to date 950 academic staff have been trained in techniques of non-formal education (Scouting) and gained experience in conflict-resolution techniques.

## Our Learning

- All young people have a need to develop their own identity and develop self-respect and self-esteem. This is particularly important for young people who live in difficult circumstances or who are marginalized.
- The Scout Method, when appropriately applied to young people aged 15-20, can have a very positive impact on their lives, helping them to develop self-respect, respect for others and identify the need to contribute to their community.



Developing self-respect and self-esteem has a positive impact on the young people

- The programme for young people must be supported and run by adults who have the necessary skills and experience. When new areas are introduced e.g. the techniques of non-formal education and conflict resolution, this needs to be supported by appropriate training and support for the adults involved.

## Our Future Plans

We have succeeded in having a special office inside the Headquarters of the Ministry of Education in every national department to support the formation of Solidarity Brigades, because it is a known fact by Scouts everywhere that the application of Scout Method requires constant training and educative resources to support people in this way of working.

We also hope to support the formation of Scouts Group as another objective of this special office.

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