

**A CONVERSATION WITH MARINA FORERO,
DIRECTOR OF THE CHILDREN'S ENRICHMENT PROGRAM**

by Mary Goodwin, FDC Volunteer



Marina Forero has served as Director of the Frontera de Cristo (FDC) FDC Children's Enrichment Program since 2017. She supervises the program and its teachers and volunteers, meets with parents, evaluates children's academic needs and progress, and promotes the after-school program in the community. Marina grew up in Bogota, Colombia, where she received a Bachelor's Degree in Education. Together with her husband, David Bonilla, she became a mission worker of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 2002, with support from the Mennonite Central Committee, serving in a resource-poor neighborhood of Bogota. Marina and David migrated to the US/Mexico border as Mennonite mission workers in 2013, first to Nogales and then to Agua Prieta.

In October 2023, Marina had a conversation with FDC volunteer Mary Goodwin in which she talked about Frontera de Cristo's Children's Enrichment Program, where she sees hope, and what gives her joy.

Mary: Marina, thank you for sitting down to talk with me. Tell me about your mission as a teacher and how you came to Frontera de Cristo.

Marina: When I was a young girl growing up in Bogota, I lived in a bubble of family, school, and church. At school, I was always thrilled when my teachers asked me to help out. At church, I always gravitated to the children's ministry. When I met my husband David, one of our first outings together was to a church in the mountains on the outskirts of Bogota. I was shocked by the extreme poverty in that village. My heart stayed right there. David went inside the church with the adults, but I was drawn outside to the children playing in the street. There were so many who were obviously in need of attention and guidance.

After David and I were married, we became MCC missionaries in Bogota and founded a school in a low-resource neighborhood. Teaching became my life's mission. In 2013, we migrated to the US/Mexico border as Mennonite mission workers and I taught in Nogales. A year later, when Frontera de Cristo had an opening for Director of the new Children's Enrichment Program, we came to Agua Prieta. From the very beginning, I felt at peace with the decision to come to FDC; I knew deep inside that this was right and that we would be well. It was a great decision.

Mary: Marina, tell me about your experience with the FDC Children's Enrichment Program and what you see happening with children in the Agua Prieta community.

Marina: Our FDC Children's Enrichment Program's goals are for children to experience God, to see the opportunities they have, and to make good decisions. Many of our kids have not been able to experience childhood and have been very damaged. They have lived adult lives, often with drugs and domestic abuse. We love building relationships with the children and to show

them that they have the opportunity to live in a healthier way. Even in the darkness, we can help them see a little ray of light.

I love our team of teachers and volunteers. We believe in our mission to transcend and transform. In the process of working with these children, we're not just giving; God is also transforming our lives. We know that God is with us in every situation, and that others also have this opportunity to feel that God is present with them. In my conversations with our team, with parents, and with children, I try to feel and to communicate God's presence. It is a great gift, a great treasure—we should be sharing it with everyone.

Seeing children change over time in our program is incredible. When new children arrive, the ones who have been with us for a while help orient them. This is when we can really see the impact of our program. We see them beginning to understand that they can be someone with a purpose, not just blowing with the wind. We teach them that each of them has the spirit of God in them.



Mary: What gives you hope for the future lives of these children and the community?

Marina: It gives me hope to see a child who at first did not like to study or go to school come to love learning. We worked with a little girl who literally hated schoolwork; at nine years of age, she did not know how to read or write. Coming from a very dysfunctional home, with a mom who had never received formal education, the girl did not have any role models.

Recently, the girl told me that her school teacher had praised her, told her she was doing better in school! She was so happy and proud! I said to her: "Great work! And remember, you're not doing this for your teacher, you're doing it for yourself!" The challenging kids make us better teachers and people! When our kids beg their moms to bring them to our Enrichment Program it makes me so happy.

Mary: Marina, this is such challenging work! How do you recharge? What gives you joy?

Marina: I love to travel to Colombia to see my family. I miss my country, and still love to eat our traditional foods and listen to Colombian music. Here in Mexico, one of the most real ways for me to express my interest in and appreciation for this culture is to immerse myself, so I've taken up Mexican folkloric dance classes. It is a very fulfilling, healthy, and fun way to open myself to this culture! I also love to sing, paint, and draw. One of my joys is to do art projects with the kids. I get inspired and love to think up new projects. The kids love it too.

My family and circle of friends sustain me too. It gives me joy when I get unexpected gifts from God, it can be something as simple as a quiet day at home. At difficult moments, I can turn to God. We often think we are self-sufficient, but we are not! God is always my guiding path. □

