

SPIRIT * SOUL * BODY

By Marina Forero, Director, Nueva Esperanza (New Hope)
Programa de Enriquecimiento Educativo (Education Enrichment Program)

Editor's note – In this article, Marina Forero, Director, shares the positive impact of Nueva Esperanza on the lives of children and youth, on their spirits, souls, and bodies. The program's outreach to the families and communities continues to grow as the staff supports, teaches, challenges, and loves the children. It is in their faith and through their efforts, that the community is able to envision a positive future. I offer prayers of gratitude for the work of Nueva Esperanza.

In all our complexity and diversity, we are all created by God with the essence of the Creator in us. Wonderful!

SPIRIT: Because we have a great need to connect with God...

For all our programs, each day begins with a welcoming time when each girl and boy considers that our time together is in God's hands. After play and rest and before enjoying snacks, we pray in gratitude for the hands that brought us delicious food. Then, once a week, we dedicate group-time to recognizing our devotional growth and personal growth. This is how we nourish the spirit and it is as important as eating.



SOUL: A healthy mind is cultivated...

Our life experiences define us and that is evident in the children. For some, aggression is a way of defending themselves; for others, rudeness seems natural, or they act as if they are superior to everyone else. Some children fear relationships and when in contact with people they cling to their siblings for protection. Daily, we experience all this and more with our children; often these behaviors they have learned from the older youth and adults in their lives.

Paul was one of the children who came to this program with his siblings (he is now in 5th grade). It was customary for him to arrive every morning with an angry face. He liked to come, but he didn't like to follow the rules. He liked to play but he also fought. He didn't think about the impact of his attitude and his fists, he only thought that this made him strong. Many children have come with attitudes like Paul's and God has allowed us to see the change in them. This paper sculpture is an artistic work by Julián, a child who acted much like Paul. The sculpture is a rendering of his plan to change his attitude—it is a happy Julian traveling with his dog.



Abraham, eight years old, still finds it difficult to relate to other children and he only wants to play with his sister. He has been coming for three months and regularly cries anxiously when his sister does not want to be with him because she wants to play with other children. With patience and kind words from his teachers, he has begun to join in games with other children. You can see on his face that he is happy; he is learning how to be comfortable around different people and even to enjoy their company.

It's amazing when you see changes in children. Our mission is to pray when we know what they are struggling with. This gives us the will to act on their behalf.

Ozzy is a child diagnosed with mild autism. He has been visiting us since October and each week it has been incredible to see him grow and change. When he arrived, his face was expressionless, and he only said “yes” and “no.” He did not want to engage with others but chose to walk alone on the playground. Now, he plays soccer with the children and shouts with emotion—“Goal!” He designs cartoons using chalk and creates masterpieces with his friends. He loves to climb up on a boulder and from there he sings out a sweet song. His mother is delighted with her son’s newfound happiness and abilities; she is grateful. God is present in Ozzy’s young life and the life of his family.





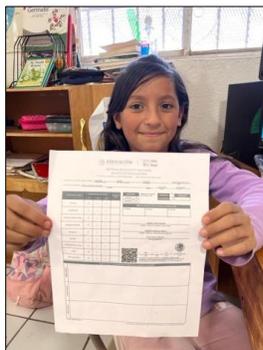
BODY: Although we eat what we like, some-times that is not what is best for our bodies.

During this past year, it has been difficult for some children to get used to foods prepared for them in the kitchen because they already have a taste for chips, sweets, and soft drinks. With time, as their diets changed, their tastes changed, and they began to ask for the food prepared especially for them.

We have started relations with a government organization, DIF (Mexican National System for Integral Family Development), which oversees the care of children and adolescents in conditions of orphanhood, abandonment, and abuse. We designed our program and ministry, called “Life Project,” especially for boys and girls up to seventeen years of age. Twice a week, we meet with the youth to help them consider the past in a healthy way, to think about the present and find ways to cultivate opportunities, and finally, how to shape their futures with assertive decisions.



We also started school accompaniment processes for migrant children staying at CAME (Centro de Atención al Migrante “Exodus” [“Exodus” Migrant Assistance Center]) while they wait with their families for asylum. They join the program in the morning and participate in all our activities. Tavo (short for Gustavo) is fourteen. Here he is writing about his life: his history, beliefs, family, and his identity. He shared what he loves and misses the most from his homeland—the Mexican state of Guerrero—but for him, life is good here despite the difficulties.



In general, we thank God for freedom, for a time and place to recover, for equipping us with important tools for life. We celebrate the many talented and loving people who share their joy and compassion with others. We are grateful for the network of people, all working together for the



common good, especially on behalf of the beautiful children. □