

## Authors of Our Future

At the beginning, the opportunity given to us felt extraordinary. Each of us came together in November, fueled with passion, to form *Authors of Our Future*.

After days of contemplation, we inclined towards addressing the sustainable development goals of reduced inequalities and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Through early stimulation and development activities, our project aims to enhance the neurological, emotional, and physical health of children who grow up in Mexican prisons and cultivate a sense of hope and power within their mothers currently serving a sentence. Because only by taking care of themselves is when they can take care of their children and when they can fully live in the realization that the formation of a capable adult partly resides in their hands.



Furthermore, we believe it is critical to raise awareness and reduce stigmatization so **these children can be the authors of a future of their own**, rather than being held down by where they came from and what they were given.

We are convinced that it is only when we consider the invisible and forgotten children that a prominent future for our country can be built. As Frederick Douglass expressed: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

### January

We contacted two experts in early development and received training twice a week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

#### María José Duarte

During this month, life at home became a great struggle. The effects of the pandemic felt all too tangible, and I thought that everything was falling apart. However, it was crucial to remain positive, primarily when many family members relied on me. This project, at times, was the only thing that represented constancy, and to me, feeling grounded was very important given that everything was changing. Through this experience, I learned the value of independence and self-reliance, but I also became highly grateful to my team members. It felt as if we were all rescuing each other.

### February

#### Valentina Trujillo and María Alarcón

We had had around two months of preparation, and we still struggled to contact the penitentiary system. During several moments, we felt we were walking in circles and eventually stopped walking at all. This struggle led to contemplating the time invested in preparing workshops and materials as futile, mainly because we did not know if the authorities would accept them. We grew a little desperate, but we chose to fixate our view that we could make a difference, a real impact. We learned to designate time to refocus and allow ourselves to talk to our family and friends to find reassurance.

Overall, we learned to work towards this goal as a team and find the balance between work and mental health.

### March

#### Rebeca Silva

March came, and we as a team struggled with communication and equal division of work. After days of not feeling so connected, an honest conversation between all our members served as a unifying force.

In retrospect, I know that the moral support is given to me by my team members never seized, even when I was too preoccupied to take it in thoroughly.

After this conversation, I was reminded that I remained surrounded by a strong net that allowed me to manifest a strong character. Because if I ever dared to step over, to go deeper into the water, to be bold, to dream of working within a jail, I had the reassurance that I would always be caught.

You see, this is the beauty of teamwork—the beauty of friendship and family.

From this notion derived the understanding that millions of hands are willing to work for change to unfold just like me. Everyone moved by a different purpose and a different vision. For this same reason, we should never compete against the ones we should be working alongside, or otherwise, nothing monumental will be accomplished. We should see ourselves as only a wave (as mighty as it can be) in an ocean.

I cannot fully express the proudness I felt for my humble team members, who poured their hearts into this project, who dared to be guided, and who held my hand in the journey towards what now feels like a triumph. You, above all, make me believe that the possibilities are endless.

## April

### Paloma Corzo and Patrick Zavala

The process of contacting the penitentiary system took months (and involved numerous meetings with lawyers and workers of the organization Reinserta). Yet, finally, we were given a chance to give a pitch to the most populated Mexican State Director of Social Reintegration.

After 30 hours of training in early development, 4 hours of meetings with lawyers and the organization Reinserta, and 24 hours of team meetings, we received approval to enter and work in the Mexican prison of Santiaguito in May of this year, and grew proud with satisfaction, but also grew full of new ideas and plans.

We have now established a program denominated child development that will be imparted in person (under the margin of the sanitary measures in the jail). Within this program, we will offer five workshops or areas of development: the development of the fine motor, the gross motor, language, emotional development, and sensory, cognitive development. We will deliver 15 items of each of the 25 different types of materials (approximately) for the activities, most of which we made with our own hands.

As a form to measure our impact, we will receive direct feedback from the mothers (through questionnaires) and the Mexican authorities. We will also complete an evaluation of the children and mother's progress at the end of each session.

Finally, this project is flexible, and we would love for it to be extended to other Mexican prisons.

As said at the start, we came, and we continue to come forward with passion as our fuel. We thank you fondly, Global Social Leaders, for the opportunity we were given: we never thought such a project would serve as a great source of enrichment to help us create a meaningful and significant change.

Contacting the penitentiary system presented itself as the most significant challenge, but with it also came to our greatest victory.

When we thought we were making no progress, we could have explored other ways to advance, for even if something ruptured does not need to be repaired, it is essential to submit oneself and a project to a constant process of improvement.

In the end, we learned the importance of committing oneself to trust others and ourselves and to not only see something for its broken pieces but for its potential to become a greater whole.

