



Fénix 2020 Annual Report

This was a terrifying and tragic year. For the Fénix girls, it meant confinement, fear, the proximity of death and reduced income and hopes, in a nasty echo of early experiences of poverty and trauma.

Despite following precautions, two Fénix members were infected with Covid-19 as well as several of their family members. They have recovered, but the grandmother of another died of the virus.

All have felt the impact of the loss of job opportunities, learning to learn online, no face-to-face social life and uncertainty about their futures.

But core members made good use of the strengths provided by the Fénix group and their own commitment to their education and personal growth and, despite the technical challenges of studying online, have earned excellent grades, as well as providing support for more vulnerable people.

Indira has applied to the National University to study Clinical Nutrition after graduation from high school in November: *“It was the first anniversary of the death of my mother and for a moment at the end of the ceremony I felt that she was applauding and smiling”*.

Her older sister, Lizeth Angélica, equally emotionally affected by the loss of their mother and, two months ago, their grandmother, successfully completed the second semester of her degree in Social Work with an outstanding average grade of 83 %. She has also taken additional courses on Colombian history and writing.

Sandra has graduated from her ‘Tecnólogo’ (Higher Education Diploma) in Human Resources Management and plans to apply the credits to a full degree. The company where she did her professional practice rotation awarded her a certificate of appreciation, of which she is justifiably proud. She found learning new IT skills a challenge, as also the need to find a new job, as the restaurant where she was working had to close because of Covid.

Sandra, Indira, Kenyerlith, Angélica Abril, Lorena and Carmen have been very regular participants in the Saturday classes online: English with Ezana and text comprehension and analysis with Beatriz. This she has developed into something greater and richer, working through texts from, amongst many, sociologist Alfredo Molano, and economist Thomas Piketty, leading to wide-ranging discussions on inequality, racism, justice, revenge and forgiveness, FARC and the peace agreement, and, at the girls' request, on abortion, capital punishment, drug abuse, poverty and the pandemic, slavery, and human migrations – to which Kenyerlith, a refugee from Venezuela, contributed from her own experience.

Before Covid prevention restrictions, the group joined a meeting on human rights and the persecution of popular leaders and went to the cinema to see the new production of “Little Women”, then discuss it and each write her own analysis and appreciation of the film and its themes.

All this has contributed greatly to their knowledge of social issues, and their ability to debate them and to take ethical positions, fundamental to their development as well-rounded youth leaders and professionals.

In one interesting afternoon session César Augusto gave an inspiring talk about overcoming a major handicap: he has been blind and physically handicapped since a fall six years ago.

These classes and meetings also provide a mechanism for the integration of new arrivals into the group, for them to discover how much they can enjoy reading and learning, and to make informed choices about their future careers with help from those already at university.

Indicators of their development are a group conclusion that books are a basic necessity, with food, shelter and health care, and Indira's preference as a graduation present not for a bracelet, but for books.

In the last Zoom meeting of the year, Oriana, who has completed the second year of her degree in community education and human rights, enthusiastically described the various disciplines that contribute to the course, including sociology and psychology, inspiring at least one other to ask how to apply for a place.

Two of the newer arrivals, Kenyerlith and Lorena, were brought into Fénix by Angélica Abril. This is the ‘chain referral’ method, in which members of a group identify potential new members, befriend them,

offer the possibility of participating and bring them to their first meeting with the group, to whom they vouch for the merits of the friend. They then continue to give mentoring and support and encourage them to share with the group.

Lorena says, "*Fénix supported me through depression and anxiety, you opened your arms and listened to me when I most needed it, and even helped economically when I had no work*". She cancelled her plan to join the police and has started a qualification in the no-fee state higher education service SENA in maintenance of industrial machinery! Though not really in Fénix' spectrum, it ensures she will never lack for a job.

Kenyerlith had a very hard year. Being an immigrant without papers or income during a lethal pandemic is so stressful and depressing that in a moment of despair she swallowed a handful of pills to end it all. Angélica was close enough at hand to get her to hospital and full recovery. In October she finally gained a residence permit and next year can apply for a place on a SENA course. Her great intelligence and insight have allowed her to share with the Fénix group, work with the psychotherapist, to receive warm support and to integrate fully.

Angélica Abril has been taking a steadily growing leadership role, mentoring other girls, organising food parcels for needy families in her barrio (funded by Beatriz and Ezana), proposing themes for discussion and coordinating the Zoom meetings, all the while taking English classes, first on a scholarship at the Colombo-American Center then at SENA, where she has also started a 'tecnólogo' in physical education, which she plans to put towards a full teaching degree, and a nutrition short course. She, her mother and other family members all came down with Covid, leaving her quite ill for several days, though she quickly recovered.

More serious was the unemployment and the level of violence in her family. Left black and blue from a beating by her parents, she had to move out. Fenix is helping with the costs of her rent, internet and food while she gets her feet back on the ground.

We have also had to step in to help with internet and food costs for several others. One other expenditure was buying a new computer and printer for Lizeth Angélica when her aged laptop collapsed.

Also infected with Covid were Disney and her baby daughter. Both made full recovery, and Disney can continue in her job as social worker

with the Fundación Procrear, working with highly vulnerable street people and undocumented migrants. She is also taking on more tasks in the direction of Fénix.

Iveth has completed her degree in management, while Eunice, Gloria and Yenifer continue to work on their English skills by immersion and college classes in the USA. Lady Johana continues with her degree in psychology while working in a major programme for HIV prevention, testing and treatment.

Doctor Viviana is working with confirmed or suspected Covid patients and nurse Kilyam is now full time with Covid patients in the main hospital of Leticia, in the Amazon region, where resources, equipment and medicines are lacking, and even more so in the smaller hospital in Puerto Nariño, where there has been a very high rate of infection and many deaths from Covid, as well as hunger caused by the collapse of tourism.

In the middle of the year Kilyam made a desperate call for help to get supplies of face masks, gowns, goggles, gloves, infra-red thermometers, pulse-oximeters for measuring blood oxygen saturation, medicines, oxygen gauges and other equipment. Fénix and Natutama (a sister organisation in Puerto Nariño) made a joint appeal for support with help from Children of Colombia, with a swift and magnificent response that allowed us to send six shipments of medical material and to distribute food to dozens of families without resources. *“I want to express to all my sincere gratitude for your donations that contributed so much to meeting urgent needs at a critical moment . . . The situation in Puerto Nariño is now more controlled, with no new cases in recent days and we can use traditional herbal medicines to reduce symptoms in those already infected”*, says Kilyam.

We give our deepest thanks to everyone who has generously helped to alleviate the pandemic situation in Amazonas and contributed to the education and growth of the young women of Fénix, especially David Veit, Regina Yando, Alan Riding, Rafael Rojas, Martha Lucía Jiménez, Lucía Moncada, Gwyneth Simmons, María Eugenia Díaz, Carmenza Patiño, María Isabel Patiño, Mary Sánchez, Tova Solo, Claudia Rueda, Juan Manuel Castro, Martha Emilia Rueda, Martha Helena Jaramillo, Ana María Rodríguez, Malcolm Deas, Alison Wood, John and Marion Dew, David Lloyd, Kate Howard, Hannah Coleman, Scarlett Wood, Titus Moser, Dr. Robin Sadler, Kim Conroy, Mike McKenna,

Anna Francesca Trelawny, and others whose donations were anonymous.

There is not much else to celebrate about 2020, but we can feel real satisfaction in the growth of maturity and responsibility in members, their commitment to the welfare of the most at risk and vulnerable, and their considerable academic achievements, only possible because of the support of so many friends.

We hope that for everyone the next year proves less fearsome than 2020 and send our very best wishes,

Beatriz, Sarita and Timothy