

Fénix End of Year report 2023

This year has seen successes, some surprising, and others only to be expected of Fénix members.

We were all surprised and delighted when Indira announced that she had been accepted for a degree in nursing by El Rosario, one of the top-ranked and most demanding of elite Colombian universities. And, not surprisingly, one of the most expensive. But Indira had also gained a scholarship! After graduating with extremely high grades as a nursing assistant, she applied for

Indira with sister, nephew and Beatriz
after graduation as a nursing assistant.



an interest-free student loan which, on condition that she maintains excellent grades and puts in six months of volunteer work, she will never have to repay. She discovered these options on her own initiative and did the massive paper-work without help.

She is very happy with the course, was thrilled at being invited to observe surgical procedures in the first semester, and has made new friends. A very generous U.S. 'godmother' is providing Fénix with the funds to cover her living costs, books and bus fares.

Another nurse, one of the founding members of Fénix and among the first to start higher education is Yenifer. Now, after a year working in a Florida hospital, she has been named the nurse responsible for tutoring new staff and in January starts a Master's degree to train as a Nurse-Practitioner, licensed to perform minor surgeries, to prescribe many medications and to take the place of a doctor when needed.



Yenifer & colleagues' at end-of-year party

First she has had to register her Colombian degree, take college level English (on a scholarship and made the Dean's List of best students), take further training to qualify as a Registered Nurse in the U.S., and jump through all the immigration hoops for resident status. She intends to advance to a PhD in nursing.

"I shall always be grateful to the people who have supported Fénix and believe that girls of few opportunities and in vulnerable situations, with guidance and education can become good professionals and good people".

Zarina made it from care homes, via Fénix, to university and now is a dentist with postgraduate specializations; Viviana is a doctor with a Master's in Public health; Lizeth Angélica has just finished, with a good grade point average of 4/5, the penultimate year of her degree in Social Work. *"When I graduate I want to work with women victims of violence" ... "My aim is to contribute positively in the community from my profession, just as Fénix and all of you have transformed my life".*

The UK charity Children of Colombia (CoC) is an important factor in making possible these transformations, collecting and transferring donations to Bogotá, recovering taxes paid by UK residents, and organizing fund-raising events.

CoC covered the University and living costs for Disney's Social Work degree. Since graduating she has gained deep experience in case-work with girls and women victims of violence, poverty, drug abuse and prostitution. She is applying for a place to take a Master's degree, specializing in gender violence and techniques of intervention for victims of violence. A Master's is also a requisite for teaching and for many research positions.



In November Gwyneth Simmons, a CoC director, visited Colombia and came to tea with Beatriz, to meet star students Indira and Lizeth Angélica (with son Julian), English teacher Ezana, and Sandra and her niece.

One of the central aims of Fénix is to support girls without functional families, brought up in institutions, on the street or in any other situation of vulnerability and exclusion, so that they may turn these experiences into strengths and gain the education to become excellent professionals who can, in turn, give the support needed by other girls to escape similar situations. Fénix encourages members to go on beyond what they need just for a job and economic independence but to become well qualified specialists.

Kenyerlith completed her SENA technical training course in Audio-Visual Production and is looking for a job in this field. Meanwhile she is working in a call center and is proud that she has learned to live by herself and pay her own way.



Lady Johana is working in a health program for migrants, providing testing and treatment for HIV and syphilis and struggling with the obstructive bureaucracies of international funding. She expects to graduate as a psychologist in 2024.

Ezana gives virtual English classes to a small group: *“Kenyerlith and Indira continue to increase their fluency and manage classes held completely in English. We have worked on English for their specific areas of study, media and nursing . . . Sandra has managed to develop simple sentences and transmit basic information via WhatsApp”*.

Angélica Abril is working as a trainer in a gym while she tries for a University place to take a degree in physical education.

Beatriz is giving intensive tutoring to Sandra for the exams for admission to the Universidad Pedagógica, which trains educators and teachers. Meanwhile she is taking casual work in sales, deliveries, waitressing and baby-sitting.

In 2024 Oriana expects to graduate from the Pedagógica with a degree in Community Education and Human Rights.

Many of the other students in Beatriz's Saturday classes in literature, social realities and current events said they now have to concentrate all their time on university work and in future will consult Beatriz when needing help on study-related questions. This year they have learned about environmental and political issues, the situation of girls and women in different countries and as migrants, and sexual violence.

Personal and family problems are discussed in a support group that meets on-line at least once a month, led by psychologist Deyanire.

Earlier in the year Beatriz took a group to the Bogotá Book Fair, the first time any of them had been there or even knew of it. For members' birthday, Christmas and graduation presents all now ask only for books!

We want to give heartfelt thanks for the noble support Fénix has received this year from donors including Regina Yando, Kate Seal, Children of Colombia, Alan Riding, Peter Cousins, Camille Marquand, Simon Roberts and the late Professor Malcolm Deas.

With warm regards,
Beatriz and Timothy