

PATHS OF HOPE PROJECT



Group of parents in a workshop.

The Paths of Hope Project in Panama seeks a life of dignity for all women by addressing their basic social and economic needs, such as the ability to work and participate in society, to access food and water, and to live in secure and peaceful environments. The project, which is a direct response to growing social conflict and violence, coordinates its efforts with the Ministries of Health, Social Development, and Environment and the National Secretariat for Women, Children, and Adolescents.

The project is able to host its workshops promoting nonviolence and peaceful conflict resolution, thanks to the commitment and dedication of the team of facilitators from the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in the Chiriquí region of Panama. AVP facilitators share their knowledge through dynamic role-playing exercises and joint reflections, providing participants with tools to face everyday challenges in a peaceful and constructive manner.

The ministry serves women deprived of liberty at CEFERE (Women's Rehabilitation Center) once a week for three hours. The workshops emphasize building self-esteem and teaching participants how to solve conflicts and engage in productive decision-making. The project also seeks to address specific problems identified by CEFERE staff, with a view to improving women's situations and helping them participate in their own development and transformation.

Another focus is on strengthening the participation of urban indigenous and rural women in their local economies and everyday life. Most of the women served by this project live in poverty, with high rates of violence and illicit activities. Young women, who often experience escalating violence throughout their lifetimes, are vulnerable and frequently victims of exclusion and abuse.

In coordination with the Sisters of Mercy, Paths of Hope hosted an AVP workshop with indigenous women and youth from the Ngäbe-Bugle region, which was especially remarkable due to the adaptations for participants with special needs, including those with visual impairments. The AVP facilitator demonstrated an inclusive and adaptive approach that was respectful of cultural diversity, provided accessible materials, and used adapted teaching

methods to ensure that all attendees participated fully. This demonstrates the commitment to meeting people where they are and promoting inclusion and nonviolence.



School students from 9th grade in the Volcan area.

The AVP focuses on empowering youth leaders, since the role of young people in building a peaceful society is crucial. Young people are potential agents of change. Focusing on at-risk youth, girls and boys learn that they can live together in relationships of equality, harmony and peace, without discrimination and based on respect for each other and a diversity of opinions. At these meetings, young people are made aware of the ongoing social problems, injustices and challenges faced by their communities and the world overall. They acquire the knowledge and skills to address these issues peacefully and constructively. They also engage and volunteer in youth, civic, and community activities that promote peace.

This article was first published in Mercy Now, the newsletter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. For more information on the work of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, please visit their website at <https://sistersofmercy.org/about-us/>. This article is part of a series about Mercy Fund for Ministry grant recipients and how their funded work lives out Mercy's Critical Concerns and Works of Mercy. This ministry provides perspectives and programs in nonviolence and meets people where they are in a spirit of community.

