

Social Education Students Inspire Vulnerable Youth from Bolivia

A group of vulnerable youth from Bolivia visited Danish social education students through the NGO International Børnesolidaritet (International Child Solidarity). It was a cultural exchange focusing on the core of the field of social education across continents.

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The distance from the streets of Bolivia's capital La Paz to Holstebro, Denmark is about as great as it can get—geographically, socially, and culturally. But last week, the distance was bridged when five vulnerable young girls from Bolivia and their mentor visited VIA University College, and among other activities, played football with the Danish students.

Five Bolivian girls from the organization Alalay visited the social education programme at VIA University College as part of an exchange project where Danish social education students and vulnerable youth visit each other's worlds and exchange experiences in pedagogical practice.

The girls from Bolivia are associated with the organization Alalay, which works to help vulnerable children in Bolivia move away from a life on the streets and support them in finding a way forward in life.

GLOBUS Project

The GLOBUS fund supports projects where Danish educational institutions collaborate with partners in developing countries, engaging Danish youth in education in development cooperation and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

International Perspective

The visit is part of an exchange project driven by International Børnesolidaritet, in which a total of 12 social education students from Holstebro and Copenhagen participated. They have just welcomed the Bolivian delegation, and in March, the Danish social education students will make the return trip and visit Alalay in Bolivia. The project is a collaboration between International Børnesolidaritet, VIA University College, and University College Copenhagen—a so-called GLOBUS project. A project that can create perspectives and insights across borders and provide inspiration on how to perform social work in a completely different environment.

"International Børnesolidaritet can contribute in this way by sending Danish young social education students out into the world and gaining insight into vulnerable children's conditions internationally. And experience firsthand how to work with and for the children here," explains Maria Palmvang from International Børnesolidaritet.

Play as a Pedagogical Tool

Although the conditions are vastly different, the core of the pedagogical approach is the same. For example, Alalay uses soccer as a pedagogical tool to create communities. Here, the girls get the opportunity to play and express themselves—playing soccer, which is otherwise reserved for boys, in a very male-dominated culture. At the same time, the soccer school becomes a safe space to talk about violence and abuse and a framework for discussing rights and values.

"We have adults around us who listen and support us," says Ruth, one of the girls from Bolivia, supplemented by Victoria Isabella, who is the goalkeeper on the team:

"Through soccer, I have learned to play with values. When I protect the



goal, I think of each ball coming towards me as a problem I can stop, and each ball that goes in as problems I can handle."

Victoria Isabella is 15 years old and is one of the children who have lived on the streets due to family problems.

"Fortunately, child welfare found me, and I came to Alalay. It has meant a total shift in my life. They have helped me forget my past and deal with my feelings. They have taught me how to move forward in my own life," she says.

Mutual Inspiration

The visit to Denmark has offered many experiences for the young girls, who have never been on a plane before. They have, among other things, attended a conference at Campus Carlsberg together with 250 students and experts to celebrate World Children's Rights Day and participated in FOA's congress, where Alalay received the congress award of DKK 100,000 for their work in strengthening efforts for vulnerable children and youth in Bolivia. They have also spent several days at VIA University College in Holstebro, where social education students and teachers arranged a soccer tournament, daycare visits, Spanish lessons, and art activities for the girls. The girls were also treated to cultural experiences such as a Danish lunch, a handball match, a city walk, æbleskiver (Danish doughnuts), Christmas atmosphere, and a trip to the wild waves of the North Sea along the west coast of Denmark.

For one of the Bolivian girls, the visit to Denmark has left a special mark on her future dreams, as she now knows what she wants to study when she finishes school.

"My family has not supported my wish to become a teacher, but because of the visit to the college, I am now sure of my decision, as I have learned that one of the most important things is to make changes for children," says Nicole, 17. She explains that the soccer school has led to much more than soccer.

"At first, it was just to play soccer, but then I joined some workshops. It has been an eye-opener for me that I have rights. It is a beautiful experience to find out that I have the right to express myself. I meet with other young people and talk about our lives. I have learned about how Bolivia violates children's rights and how important it is to have rights to health, education, and an identity," says Nicole.

Strength to Change

The right to express oneself is central to Alalay's work. They teach the children and youth about rights, values, and advocacy, giving them the belief that they





have a voice and a right to speak for themselves. One of the girls explains how this concretely makes a difference:

"I participate in making suggestions about what we would like to see changed in our city. We meet with local authorities and say what we want. I am proud to be here today and raise my voice for many other children and youth."

One of the key achievements Alalay has obtained in this way is the right to an identity card for children living on the streets. An identity card provides children with access to basic rights such as healthcare, education, and the right to vote.

But the girls are not stopping here; there are plenty of battles to fight, and this week they return to Bolivia with many new experiences, inspiration, and gratitude for the support they receive from Danish social education students.

International Børnesolidaritet

International Børnesolidaritet (organization name in English: International Child Solidarity), is a Danish independent NGO that works to empower vulnerable children and youth in the poorer parts of the world, enabling them to demand their rights and actively participate in changing their living conditions. They also work to influence the public and political decision-makers to improve conditions.