

## Chela's Written Testimony: "Why I work with Children in Need"

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When my kids were toddlers I used to teach kids that didn't go to school or their grades were not good. As my children grew up, I took care of the babies in church. At that time I was having a recurring dream-- that I was in this place with mud everywhere and rocks; there were many kids in this place, and the kids were reaching out with their hands.

After a while I went to jail to visit and deliver some donations, and to my surprise, this was the place in my dreams. I didn't want to go back because it was a very sad place but I could not forget the faces of the kids, so I went back to feed them and to have a Bible study with the kids. Sometimes the adults would join us. Then at night I would go visit the kids on the streets. I did this for several years. In the mornings I would volunteer in the general hospital to bathe the sick-- those who didn't have family in the city, and I would meet with the pregnant ladies so they would not abort their babies.

Sometime later I met Greg and Kathy Saracoff, and I started working in the orphanage. I was there for some years, but I knew that God was calling me to go back to the streets so I went back. Currently I am at an established place, called "Carretas" and I started there after being invited by some children from the area. A lot of kids come, seeking help to go to school. There is a pastor who sends me kids who are not doing well, or the same school recommends the place for the kids so they can catch up in their studies. Sometimes I think that I am not doing things well, but people come to me and ask me how do I do it, the kids show progress, and I know that it's all because of God.

## Chela's Story

At the age of 8 or 9, Chela was already reaching out to children less fortunate than herself. She lived near an orchard and seeing all the fruit lying on the ground gave her an idea. Why not gather the fruit and share it with the many hungry children that were always around? So she did. And their joy encouraged Chela to extend her hospitality. She started inviting these kids right into her home and feeding them. She probably should have asked her mother first, but then, her mother had always set an example of cooking food for the hungry and taking it to those in need.

One thing led to another. A natural leader, Chela started entertaining the children as well as feeding them. She recalls putting on dramas for them or hanging a sheet in front of candles and creating a shadow play with her fingers. One time she lined up about 50 kids on the sidewalk, some of them probably older than her, and taught them how to dance. They put on a wonderful performance, at least in her eyes.

So it is not surprising that Chela became sort of a pied piper, with children naturally being drawn to her. After graduating from high school, Chela did a lot of things. She played soccer on a team that traveled not only around Mexico but also to other countries. She studied to be a teacher, took courses in cooking, and even was trained as a nurse while in the army. When we met Chela, we were working with an orphanage and Chela became the director of the home for the youngest boys. They loved her and called her "mama." But she wasn't their real mother and though they lived in an "orphanage" they were not really orphans. Too often Chela saw mothers drop their kids off at an orphanage and forget about them. Or when the boys would go home over Christmas or in the summer, all the good things they'd learn under her instruction would be trashed by the bad things they witnessed at home. Chela began to think, "There must be a better way to help families."

When George Arapage started helping with the breakfast at Camino Vivo church, Chela began to work with the children, specifically setting up a room where children could come for extra tutoring during the week. Soon children from Carretas were pleading with her to help them, too. She started meeting with them under a tree, using a tarp for the classroom. One thing led to another and soon the community leaders offered Chela land in Carretas if she would come and help. Finally! A chance to not only work with children, but to be part of a community and be able to influence the parents as well! Chela agreed.

Interestingly, Chela did not become a Christian until her son Napoleon was 3 years old. When Jesus Christ came into her life, her husband got mad at her and wanted things to be the way they used to be. "It's Jesus or me," he threatened. But Chela would not give up her Lord Jesus, so her husband left her to care for three small children on her own. Chela had lived a very comfortable life, but now as a single mother without much income, she learned to make do with less and be creative. Despite the challenges, her children received good educations and learned English as they volunteered with work teams that came down to Mexico.

One of her favorite verses is Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."