

Report on ICDP's Work In Traslasierra and the Despertar Foundation

By Paloma de la Viña

Translated by Solen Lees Gratiet

Meeting with the ICDP trainers

Monday, November 5th

During lunch, the ICDP trainers María del Carmen Vega and Mariela Skverer, who are responsible for training in the “Las Calles” and “Villa Dolores” zones, near to Mina Clavero, brought me up to date on the work that was carried out between October 2006 to November 2007. A report on this work was sent to SDI at that time. They explained to me the work they are doing right now with the women of the “Las Calles” community. It is essentially based on the manufacture of rag dolls and little horses which will soon be sold in the craft fairs that are held in this region. (See photos)

Laura Lesley of SD Britain asked several questions. Here are those questions and the answers we found.

ICPD Argentina, Traslasierra Cordoba

November 2007

ICDP Questionnaire from SD Britain/SDI

1. How many families have received ICDP training? In how many centres?

The inhabitants of the region of Traslasierra are characterised by their introversion. For many years, this zone, geographically isolated from all major cities, produced people who were reticent about anything coming from “outside” (from the other side of the sierras, or mountain range). Those of us who first proposed the programme come from different towns and from other cultures, and this is why the time limits suggested by the ICDP Programme have been insufficient to fulfil our objectives.

During the year 2007, we have centred our field work in the locality of “Las Calles”. As we have mentioned in previous reports, we have worked continuously for three years in this locale. In this case we work with ten families, each with between three and five children.

This period of working in the community allowed us to see other needs that the women had. The ICDP programme has mobilised the women. At the same time, we started to work in two centres belonging to the National Ministry of Social Development (the Community Centres Programme) situated in the localities of Mina Clavero and Villa Dolores.

In Villa Dolores, we are training 85 people as facilitators to work in eight of the zone's neighbourhoods, starting in January 2008. In this case we have calculated that it will be possible to reach 500 families. This is how we are implementing ICDP, joining up in our work with two Programmes of National Provincial and Local Government.

2. Are the caregivers still implementing the advice in the ICDP programme?

We consider that we, as trainers, have been the first beneficiaries of the ICDP Programme. These years implementing the programme have helped us understand the difficulties that presented themselves in the task. During 2006 we implemented the programme with a group from the staff from the neighbourhood of Cura Brochero. The teachers continue using the training with the groups of parents and the children they work with. In general we have noted that the people who have had contact with the programme carry on implementing it—even those who have not been multipliers.



3. Have the caregivers noticed a change in the behaviour of the children?

We refer to the Las Calles group, which is the one where we have direct and continuous contact with the children. There is a significant improvement in the relationship the children have with their peers and with adults. They seem more predisposed to play, to listen and to interact. The scope of their language has widened, and they are more open emotionally. We believe this is the result of being more contained by their family.

4. Has the programme made a difference to family relationships? Good or bad?

As we mentioned earlier, the most significant change is in the children's relationship with their mothers. But we have also observed changes especially in the relationships of the women and their husbands. As to whether these changes are good or bad, we see them as very positive, including in the cases where they come to the fore within couples as crisis situations, which were necessary.

5. Are there any plans to deliver the programme more widely, or in a different context (e.g. health authorities/ social services)?

We are currently working together with national programmes (First Years Programme which is run by the National Council of Social Policies), as well as provincial and municipal programmes with a view to sharing our experience, coordinating with health and child development teams who work in the region of the Traslasierra valley. We want to emphasize what we have developed in our experience in the field. As trainers, we have incorporated different artistic, corporal and manual activities to supplement ICDP in response to the needs that we detected.

As stated previously, the use of the spoken word is not a characteristic of the zone in question. To arrive at the spoken word, we had to make use of hands and body. Busy hands allow the tongue to be given freedom. There is a phylogenetic interrelation between the hands, the tongue and the frontal lobes which is activated in this way. Besides this, in our culture we have something called the "Minga". In ancestral form, families, but specially women, would meet around a common task (which implied doing) and in these meetings, cultural heritage, including child rearing practices, would be transmitted.



Signed by: Mariela Skverer and Maria del Carmen Vega. ICDP trainers.

Meeting with the president of the Despertar Foundation

Wednesday, Nov. 7th

Regina Biancci invited me to her house to talk to me about the 2006 report which she had already sent to SDIA and the 2007 report which she is finishing. Something we should always bear in mind is that in Argentina the school year begins in March and ends in November.

Regina finds it strange that SDI has not asked her for receipts of her expenses. So much so that a short time ago she sent a message to Rafaela saying that she was sending all the receipts but she never received a reply. (note from the SDI Office: Rafaela is on maternity leave so Virginia will follow-up to get the report from Regina.) The Foundation's accounts are audited frequently. The books are up to date and accounts kept in a very tidy manner. There is no expenditure, no matter how small, that is not noted in the books. All taxes and/or rates are paid on time.

All 2007's expenses are covered by the grant from SD USA. The grant from the Blond Trust will be used in its entirety in 2008. In brief, they will send a small budget covering the expense that will be incurred by the replacement of some story books which are worn out and broken from so much use.

Visit to the San Martin School

Monday, Nov. 12th



Regina took me to visit the San Martin Primary School in Mina Clavero. The children of 1°B have an exceptional teacher who is so good that small children can read and write perfectly, practically without errors. What is even more surprising is the fact that they read Shakespeare and listen to Bach and Schubert. These children, when they found out that a Spanish woman had arrived in Mina Clavero, wanted to meet her and play "Don Quijote and Sancho Panza" for her. Of course I was touched.

The children's parents had made some wooden puppets which represented Don Quijote, Sancho Panza and Dulcinea. Even the windmill was there.

The interest they have in reading and music was very impressive. I had the feeling that I was with very clever and alert children who really wanted to know about all kinds of things. There is no doubt that the support of the Despertar Foundation with their story books has been a great help, as much for the learned teacher as for all these smiling and happy children.





Visit to the “Las Calles” neighbourhood (ICDP)

Friday, Nov. 16th

In the morning I went to visit the “Las Calles” neighbourhood where Mariela Skverer and Maria del Carmen Vega (ICDP) work.

I realised immediately that something had changed when I was welcomed by the smile of a beautiful little girl who had run away from me crying the year before. And the other children, whom I remembered well from the year before, had grown and were laughing with clear eyes full of joy. Comparing last year’s photos to this year’s, one can see that they have new life.

The women too. There are ten mothers who greatly enjoy making rag dolls and little felt horses, guided by a teacher of all kinds of manual work who does it for love, and is not paid for it.

When I was introduced to them last year, they did not talk except to say “yes” or “no”. They looked at me out of the corner of their eyes and with their heads down. I think I managed to get some smiles for the photos. They were completely lacking in self confidence.

This year, they got up when I came in and hugged me one by one. For a moment I thought that I had got the wrong women... They laughed, sewed and chatted amongst themselves, breastfed their babies, and most incredibly, began to ask me about my life and talk to me about theirs. Their self esteem has grown enormously and they are very excited with the idea of earning a bit of money from the sale of the dolls they are making. I have no doubt whatsoever that such an astounding result in such a short time is due to the magnificent voluntary work carried out by Mariela and Maria del Carmen, and the grants they have been receiving from SD Great Britain.

They are now also preparing facilitators in Villa Dolores and approaching the CIC (Community Integration Centre) of this city.

Meeting at the Despertar Foundation,

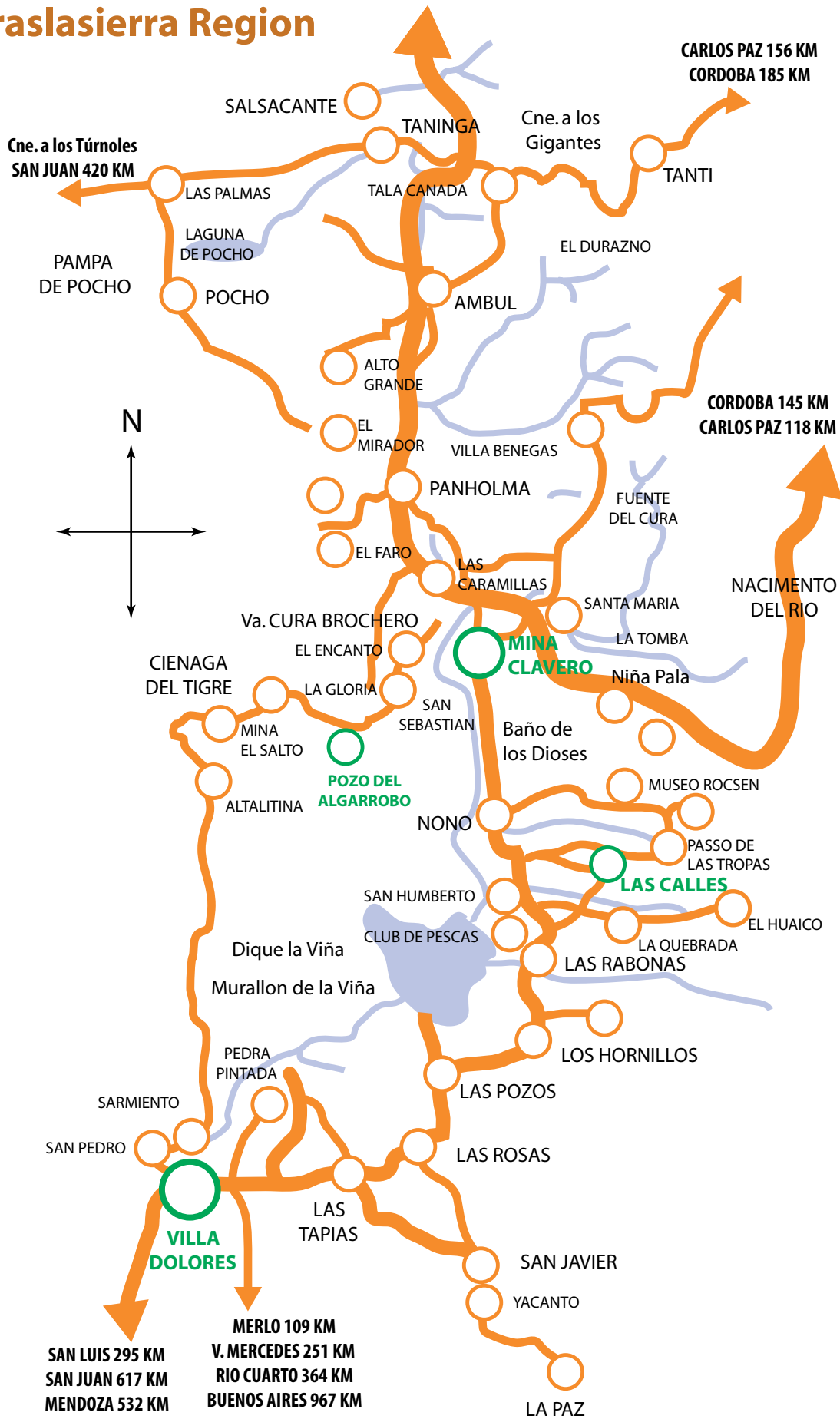
Friday, Nov. 16th, in the afternoon

Regina invited me to take part in a meeting that was going to take place at the foundation involving teachers from the rural schools, the teacher from the “San Martín” primary school and María José, Regina, Mónica and Nilda who work at the Foundation.

At this meeting, the teachers talked about the results of an initiative started by María José, designing an activity to encourage reading. This activity consisted mainly of exchanging ideas and stories to develop for the children in the different schools. For example, a teacher would send a story or an idea to another teacher who would read it to the children and



The Traslasierra Region



ask them to invent or create something related to the theme. The result was a success.

As the school year ends in November, Regina and María José delivered to the teachers the last boxes of the school year containing books, learning games and the second edition of a children's magazine called "Esqueletra Mayúscula" which has the support of the Social and Popular Education Board of the Popular Organization and Training Undersecretaryship of the National Ministry of Social Development.

I believe that the work the Foundation is carrying out is giving very good results in children and teachers. The stories have opened the doors of creativity, excitement and fantasy for these children who now see through eyes which convey the joy of dreaming in colour.

The schools which take part in the Despertar Foundation's project are:

- Lagunas verdes (7 children, 3 of them the children of the teacher)
- Los Espinillos (22 children)
- Santa Rosa (8 children)
- Ciénaga de Allende (Reading workshop for 24 teenagers)
- Los Algarrobos (19 children)
- Panaholma (Reading workshop, special project "school day extension" for 25 children)
- San Martín (28 children)



New visit to the San Martín School at Mina Clavero,

Monday, Nov. 20th

Miriam, the teacher from this school, asked me to come back to visit the children who had also asked for a second visit in 28 letters that they had sent me.

I was officially introduced to the Director of the Centre and in front of 600 pupils as one of the Directors of Susila Dharma International, an NGO which supports educative and social projects. I had to talk a little about the reason I was visiting Mina Clavero and about the love I felt for the children. In truth, these were very emotional moments.

Afterwards I went to 1°B's classroom where I introduced the children to two of my best friends – a duck and a dragon I had rescued from a mound of old clothes, but who did not have a name, a language, nor a home, and who had also lost their memory. By democratic vote they chose "Jonatán" for the dragon (they completely forgot about the duck). Later Miriam gave me 20 stories written by the children, all asking that I not take Jonatán back to Spain and that I leave him with them as they would look after him better than I. Tears fell as I read these beautiful and colourful stories.



Visit to the Panaholma school

Wednesday, Nov. 22nd

A brief visit to this school also showed me the impact that reading is having on the children and young people. How well the children of 6 and 7 years old read and write is proof of this. The parents are profoundly grateful to the teachers and to the Foundation.

Visit to the Los Algarrobo School

Friday, Nov. 23rd

My final visit was to a school with which I was not familiar. María José, the teacher who works at the Foundation and the inventor of the children's maga-

zine "Esqueletra Mayúscula", came with me. "Los Algarrobos" is a beautiful place, reached by a dirt track which goes up and up the mountain some 14 km from Nono. The track ends right at the school. Its name comes from an immense carob tree opposite the school.

This was a surprise visit which touched the teacher enormously, as she had been waiting for a long time for me to go and visit her. This time the children did not forget my friend the duck and, also by democratic vote, they gave him the name "Dionisio".

The stories will be sent by post. The teacher put on record the visit of an SDI representative, and the meaning and objectives of SDI in the school's minutes book which she asked me to sign.

Paloma de la Viña is a member of the Board of Directors of Susila Dharma International Association (SDIA).

This paper was translated from Spanish by Solen Lees Gratiet, who is on the board of SD France.

For more information about the work of ICDP in Argentina and around the world, go to SDIA's website, <http://susiladharm.org>, or email SDIA at info@susiladharm.org.

