



The Santiago Partnership

Interview Segment

“You never go into a community saying ‘what can I do for you?’ It’s always like what needs are there, but what are you already doing, how can we come alongside and help? It’s what are you already doing and how can we partner?”

The medical clinic was opened in 2016 to the public. That has increased from one or two rooms to a fully functioning clinic with 15 different specialties. We do multiple medical caravans throughout the year. It started out doing caravans with kids in compassion centers and doing their medical and dental check-ups. It’s now turned into just going into communities and doing medical caravans. From that we saw a marginalized group of women that were not being cared for, so now we do women-specific caravans that are just women providers that provide care to only women. We know women— a lot of times women take care of everyone else and not themselves.

The second to open in 2017 was the home for at-risk children, the Casa Hogar. The goal of the Casa Hogar is not just to collect a bunch of kids and adopt them out. The goal is actually reunification back with their families which takes a lot more work and is a lot more intense. Children are unfortunately removed from homes or situations of abuse or neglect, all forms of abuse, usually sexual abuse being the highest. They can also be survivors of human trafficking and things like that. Vulnerable children are the same in Ecuador as all around the world. They are brought to us by the government, so we work with government officials and the legal system with our own staff of social workers, psychologists and lawyers to be able to not only work with the kids but to immediately start working with families to find out what is happening and find out what the break down actually is in bringing the child into the home. We have currently reunified 70-80 kids with their families.

From the home there are two community based, government funded programs. A prevention program and an intervention program. Those are now kind of combined in how we are doing it. Basically the idea is this project is going into the communities and into homes directly addressing the issues of why the kids are being taken out of the home in the first place. We work primarily with indigenous Quechua communities. And again a lot of indigenous communities are the same around the world, so lots of alcoholism, which leads to sexual abuse, which leads to all of the things. It’s a very complex thing that causes kids to need to come out of the home. It’s not just poverty. It’s not just ‘X’. It’s usually a layer of things that cause that....

Prevention works at a community level, whereas the intervention program works with 30 specific families. And again these are government identified families that are considered to be at-risk. We, along with their direction, intervene with these families and the idea is to create healthy homes. So

the staff is doing community based workshops but then also going in with families and talking about specific issues that are happening.”

Introduction of the Partnership Program

The Santiago Partnership is a Christian nonprofit working in Ecuador. They partner with the Covenant Church of Ecuador to serve underprivileged communities by transforming lives of at-risk children and providing medical care.

Joel and Kim are from the United States. They initially went to Ecuador on a short-term mission trip, but they went with big dreams. After their return to Ecuador full-time as missionaries, they began a conversation with the national church to see if there was a need or a desire for the kind of services they were passionate about, namely serving at-risk children and providing access to medical care. Joel and Kim had a unique start in Ecuador in that the local church responded to their desire to establish programming in a wholesome, well-thought-out, and helpful way. The Covenant Church stated they did not have those ministries, but they did have a desire to develop them, and they believed they had other ministries that would be complementary. However, they first directed Joel and Kim to work with FACE (Fundacion Adelanto Comunitario Ecuatoriano) to see if there was a need for these types of services. FACE is the foundation within the Covenant Church of Ecuador that manages all social projects. FACE started with a statistical report and found that there was a need for these types of services and ministries.

Upon returning to the national church, the church then told Joel and Kim: now go see for yourself, go visit each of the church conferences (there are six throughout the country) and have the church tell you what needs they see and what they are currently doing about it. This type of community involvement and diligence when beginning a ministry or project is a vital step in the process.

At one of the church conference sites, in Cayambe, they already had a partnership with Compassion International, and were therefore already serving underprivileged kids. They also had the desire to begin medical services.

The Santiago Partnership was born out of this connection. Joel and Kim had no desire to come in to “fix things.” As they stated in the interview, they were not approaching saying “What can I do for you?” but rather “What are you already doing and how can we partner with you?”

As discussed above, the medical clinic began first, then the home for at-risk children, with its goal for reunification and prevention and intervention programming. Out of the community involvement, “Sumak” was born, which is a program for women who are survivors of domestic abuse. This provides them with a safe space where they can bring their children if they choose, with access to holistic care including counseling, trauma care, self-defense, financial training, and trade school. Here women learn to create artisan jewelry. They are taught by other indigenous women and in this way hold onto their culture and are empowered to be self-sustaining.

As the Santiago Partnership aims to be self-sustaining, they began a program called Forever Flowers where they grow and distribute flowers for sale. They currently distribute domestically with the goal of international distribution.

A beautiful thing about the Santiago Partnership is the way they are providing holistic care. Kim attributes that, at least in part, to the local church stating, “It’s just how they do it in the Covenant Church in Ecuador.” Joel adds that while the Santiago Partnership comes alongside the church to provide many of the needed social services, the Covenant Church brings the spiritual element. It is a beautiful example of partnership the way the Covenant Church of Ecuador, FACE, and the Santiago Partnership have been able to partner together from the beginning. Additionally, they have solid government involvement and are able to work alongside the government in meaningful ways.

They told us the story of Olympia, a single mom of eight children who joined the Santiago Partnership community. The organization heard about Olympia who lived in a cave with her children. She lives up in the mountains so this cave is cold and wet, with dirt floors. She worked washing clothes but could not keep up with the needs of her large family. The Santiago Partnership staff heard her story and asked her about her dreams. She became part of the Sumak community, began to see what she could do with her future, and was helped in reaching her goals. Olympia now works for the project on occasion. Many pharmacists and pharmacy students come to the area to learn from Olympia as she has great knowledge as a naturopath and midwife. Additionally, as the Forever Flowers program will soon begin to look for individual growers, Olympia is on the list of people who will become a partner.

In this story, we see the way the Santiago Partnership comes alongside people of the community, meeting needs, but also inviting them to dream and empowering them to follow those dreams. It also reflects how the work of the Partnership gives back to the community. Now Olympia is able to build back her own community better, to teach and to serve.

Kim and Joel discussed how it can feel so hard to make a change within cultural contexts. There are so many systemic and cultural challenges that are ingrained into the society. But the goal is to empower communities to empower themselves to change. With Olympia we see this goal being actualized, even in a small way.

As they look to the future, the Santiago Partnership is looking to shift more into a sustaining mode. Over the past several years they have been growing and developing new programs, but now it is time to shift into sustaining what they have built.

Despite, or maybe in conjunction with, this goal of sustaining what is already in place, there is also a long-term goal to work in all six of the conferences of the Covenant Church of Ecuador. This would involve having centered ministries serving through the local church in each conference. However, as Joel states, this does not mean replicating the exact ministries they have in Cayambe in each of the six conferences. Given the way they started and partnered internationally, this would involve meeting the needs seen in the local community.