



Fénix 2020 Mid-Year Report

This is an extraordinary, frightening, difficult and stress-filled time, causing immense immediate changes in lives and fears for the future.

Fénix members have had to learn how to take classes online, not be able to share time with friends face to face, to live in close confinement, in some cases with problematic or ill family members, and to see job prospects shrink.

But their resilience and creative flexibility have allowed most to adapt well and even to find advantages in lockdown.

For Disney the year began with an event long planned: having a baby. Valentina is a happy child, constantly laughing and giving great happiness to Disney and Juan Pablo. Maternity leave coincided perfectly with the Coronavirus lockdown and the parents could give all their attention to their new daughter. Disney only returned to work with Procrear in mid-June.

Quarantine has been more difficult for some others, for months unable to meet friends, go to school, university, or jobs, while living in crowded homes with suddenly worse economic difficulties. All classes are now on-line, which has meant achieving new IT skills and ways of learning.

Without access to Internet at work or on campus, and little income, several had to appeal for help to pay for the service at home and Fénix is providing grants to cover Internet charges for three girls, not only for their formal classes, but for the Saturday tutorials with Ezana and Beatriz, now on Zoom. These also provide social contact and sharing – recently discussing forgiveness, sexism, poverty and the pandemic, and themes of race and gender. Beatriz notes that for the last class of June “Indira, Angélica Abril, Kenyerlith and Lorena participated, and Sandra was there but couldn't hear us. There is always some glitch with the technology. Sometimes it's exasperating.

The topic was Afrocolombians. We began listening to a salsa song by Joe Arroyo called "Rebelión" about the African slaves who arrived in Cartagena, and we read about the present situation of Afrocolombians. The girls commented on poverty, segregation, prejudice, etc. At the end we read about some Colombian Blacks who have achieved renown in science, the arts, sports, etc.”

Despite the problems of distance learning methods, Lizeth Angélica finished the first semester of her Social Work degree with an excellent grade point average of 4.2/5. Her university fees and subsistence are covered by donations to Fénix.

Sandra has completed the academic part of her higher education diploma in human resource management and, despite the severe effects of the virus on jobs, managed to find a placement with a company for the practicals – also providing much needed income. She plans to apply the credits towards a full degree.



Oriana is completing the third semester of her degree in education and human rights with very high grades and has continued her activism in the peace movement. She says learning online means professors often overload students with work and communications are difficult. *“And I miss the contact with people”*.

Indira also had to finish her high school education and join Saturday tutorials by Internet, and despite the death of her mother and family stresses has done well. She says Fénix’ support, emotional and economic, and sharing with other girls, have allowed her to keep going *“with confidence and enthusiasm”*.

Eunise reports a real benefit from the lockdown, staying in her mother’s house with her brothers and sisters and enjoying getting to know them better.

Angélica Abril had difficulties keeping up with the English classes at the Colombo and so has enrolled in additional online intensive tuition.

She is involved with neighbourhood support efforts for impoverished families during lockdown, to whom promised government support has not arrived. Ezana and Beatriz have helped her buy food for those most in need, and she has brought young Venezuelan refugee Kenyerlith into the Saturday online groups and psychotherapy with Deyanire.

In order not to take the risk of long journeys to the city centre on public transport, she at first suspended her volunteer work with our sister foundation, Procrear, helping vulnerable children with homework.

Counselling and therapy by video call, says psychologist Deyanire, *“has the advantages of speed and flexibility and allowed bringing in other members of the same family who might not travel to a personal meeting. However, this lacks the physical and visual elements of face to face work that strengthen relations. We just have to get used to it and learn a new form of therapeutic relationship.”*

Maribel says she has profited from this system and feels well supported by Deyanire. She has just graduated in Social Work and now plans to apply for a scholarship for a master’s in public policy.

Lady Johana, studying for her psychology degree, says the lockdown let her dedicate far more time to academic work *“which I profited from to the maximum”* and completed the semester with a high grade point average of 4.3/5. In June she started a new job in the regional programme of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The Covid crisis means far heavier work for two Fenix graduates, Viviana as a doctor in Colombia’s biggest health care organisation, where she coordinates care for the most complicated patients (*“I have been able to do a lot in these days of crisis and I like it. I seem to have a magic wand for solving certain problems. . . I feel proud of being able to help these people”*) and Paola, as a social worker with an exceptionally vulnerable Bogotá street population of trans people in prostitution.

The worst hit region of the country, however, is Amazonas department in the south-east, where the predominantly indigenous population has the highest rates of infection and death in the country and severely underfunded and deficient hospitals without a single intensive care bed.

In Puerto Nariño and the surrounding area, although indigenous leaders have organised complete isolation to prevent inter-village transmission, there were 78 confirmed cases in a population of under three thousand before the end of June, and in the whole department, already badly affected by malaria, tuberculosis, hepatitis and malnutrition, there are more than 2,100 cases in a population of 76,000, with a death toll already over 80. Tourism, the biggest source of employment, has entirely dried up, leaving many destitute and at the additional risk of hunger.

Nurse Kilyam, from Fénix, working for the regional administration in case finding, testing and care, has a health care team lacking all PPE, even gloves and face masks, and such basic medicines as aspirin.

In May Kilyam, a Ticuna born in Puerto Nariño, made a desperate plea for help. Fenix, with sister organisation Fundación Natutama that works there in conservation and education, made a joint appeal for support to buy PPE, health care materials and food supplies.

Thanks to a rapid, warm and generous response from friends of Fénix, Natutama and Children of Colombia, we have been able to send regular shipments of gloves, surgical gowns, face masks and shields, disinfectants, medicines, oxygen regulators and a pulse-oximeter for titrating oxygen

administration to the seriously ill. Natutama personnel, together with the Mayor's office, distribute food supplies to the most impoverished and needy families, especially those with small children.

We miss the convivial Saturday meetings, classes, workshops, and lunch, but the Covid crisis and distancing, despite disruption, anxiety, and stress, seem to be bringing Fénix members together in different ways and teaching us to adapt to new realities.

We want to thank David Lloyd, David Veit, John and Marion Dew, Kate Howard, Robin Sadler, Mike Mckenna, Kim Conroy, Hannah Coleman, Tova Solo, Lucía Moncada, Titus Moser, María Eugenia Díaz, Derek Gabriel, Sara Bright, Alison Wood, Malcolm Deas and all the people who so swiftly responded to the joint appeal and contributed to helping save Amazon lives, and who support the education and the growth of Fénix members into strong and capable professionals and constructive citizens.

Warm regards,
Beatriz, Timothy and Sarita

