

# "Children tell us..."

During the process of their inclusion in education, Latin American children with visual impairment between 8 and 17 years old have shared with us their experiences. This is their Testimony.





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## Introduction

In February 2018, ICEVI-Latinoamerica, regional member of the International Council for the Education of People with Visual Impairment, invited all children with visual disabilities between the ages of 8 and 17 in the region, to share with us their experiences during their school inclusion process. We wanted to get closer to their needs and claims through their own voices. They have revealed many different feelings, such as frustration, sadness, insecurity, combined with their wish of overcoming them, their vital optimism and their self-reliance.

Let us say that, for the present publication, the expression “visual disability” encompasses persons who have low vision, are blind, deafblind and with multiple disabilities, as ICEVI- Latinoamerica's Constitution establishes.

This invitation was sent to all the members in our region and also to related organizations in the area, through our social media and with the support of the coordinators of each one of the 5 sub-regions in which the Latin American region is strategically divided:

- Andean Sub-region
- South Cone Sub-region
- Brazil Sub-region
- Mexico Sub-region
- Central American and Caribbean Sub-region

The papers received were classified in three different categories to take into account the specific characteristics that children show during their childhood:

1. First Category: from 8 to 10 years old
2. Second Category: from 11 to 13 years old

### 3. Third Category: From 14 to 17 years old

All the papers received were considered by a special panel that analyzed them taking into account as a reference scale, among others, the following basic criteria: children's creativity in telling their story, the originality of each story and the consistency and structure in their wording. All of these principles were mentioned in the call for papers. Subsequently, a winner for each category was selected.

The Editorial Committee decided to include in the present publication, all the papers received in order to show our respect for each child's style. As the official languages of our region are Spanish and Portuguese, according to ICEVI-LA Constitution, the original language in which they were written was also kept in the original publication. Besides, as you will note, not all the story authors' pictures are included. You will only find those that were sent in time and with the free consent of their parents and/or guardians.

The structure of the publication that we are presenting today besides this short introduction includes a section devoted to each one of the already described age categories. The first paper in each category is the winner of the group and after that, all the other submissions are included in alphabetical order as per the surname of each child.

We are sure that each one of the stories that have been compiled in this publication will propitiate in every reader more than one feeling of identification or emotion evoked by the experiences of these boys and girls who tell us in their own words how they are living or have lived their process of educational inclusion. They show their great capacity of resilience, perseverance and self-determination.

We are aware that though the papers presented here are not part of a scientific research about inclusive education, they highlight that after ten years of the coming into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and after three years of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals included

in the 2030 Agenda, there still are many barriers that prevent students with visual disability from receiving an inclusive, equitable and high-quality education.

In conclusion, we, members of ICEVI Latinoamerica, consider that after reading each one of these stories, it is necessary that teachers, inclusive school headmasters, psychologists and other experts involved in educational inclusion, as well as parents, ponder deeply and assess the role they have in the inclusive education process of students with visual disability, in order to work jointly and serve diversity in an appropriate way.





**Category I:**  
**Boys and girls 8, 9 and 10 years old**

## Learning is my adventure



Lia Magnolia De Moya Mises, 9 years old, Dominican Republic

4th grade “Genesis Christian School” primary level. Her story got the first prize in this category.

It is fun to wake up every morning because my mum has always done this with lots of love and many times with music for children, even at very early hours.

My first school was “Oriental Children Paradise”. I made lots of friends there. Most of my classmates were nice and friendly but above all, they took good care of me. The teachers paid me a lot of attention to ensure that I had learnt every lesson, just as Aunt<sup>1</sup> Justina, the Headmaster. I enjoyed taking part in handicrafts for Christmas and for Mothers and Fathers Days. One day we made masks, necklaces and drawings with a wool thread.

Aunt Elvira was the first teacher assigned to me by the “Olga Estrella” National Educational Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired. When I was five, we started with Ania, who is my present teacher. She comes several times a month

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. N. In some countries, school teachers and headmistress are colloquially called “aunt”.

and trains me and my school teachers (and also my mum) to do the exercises of all the subjects with new tools like a braille writing frame and a stylus. Besides, I also have my embossed and braille text books.

At school they always put chairs in a circle to allow me to walk freely in that space. At break times, the teacher always said: "Lía, be careful" but I already know every corner of the school building. During the time I spent in this school, aunt Justina helped me learn to read and write and in the third course I got my first merit award. I felt it was an honour and I also got a cup full of sweets.

When I passed to fourth grade, my parents decided to send me to another school. My granny and my mother spent some months looking for a school for me, but it was not so easy. It was my Granny who found my present school: "Genesis Christian School". There, I was received by aunt Adria and she accepted me in spite of my defects. At first, I felt shy, but my teacher Yesica was very nice to me (she still is) and she made me feel confident. My teachers are very nice, they make me sit close to them so that I can understand the class with more precision and, although I do not like mathematics, aunt Yesica writes my maths operations with embossed numbers and letters in order to make me understand better.

My Perkins Braille is a very important tool for me, although it is very, very heavy, but my friends Camila and Ashley share its burden with me.

I like to pray to God and in my school, they guide me to do this much more. Once, the students in the high school came to me to lead their worship and they prayed for me. Besides, I participated reciting the Bible verse Romans 8, 39: "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God."

Aunt Adria is considerate and wonderful, because every time I hear her or she hears me passing by, she greets me or I greet her. In this school I have made very good friends, they invite me to activities and birthday parties (and to prepare slime, which I like because it stretches and is sticky) and I go to Ashley's home frequently, the best of all my friends. Another friend is called Alexa and she was the first one I met in that place.

There are 28 children in my class and I am number 12 in the attendants register. I love breaks because I can speak a lot with my friends and my teacher and I take my favourite snacks.

In this school, I feel I am part of the whole group, without any sort of exclusion. I do the same things everybody does; I do everything I want to. For some months already I have succeeded in entering the “high honour roll” thanks to my marks. I like learning, reading, writing, playing and meeting new people. I am a happy child.

## Samuel's experience

Samuel César Branco, 9 years old, Brazil

4th grade "Adventista Cas" primary school.

From the time I entered kindergarten and until now, they amplify my texts, reinforce the colour of the letters and their size, make thick lines and, in this way, I succeed to read and write. I really like both my school and my teacher.

There is a class assistant who is there to help me: if the teacher doesn't use big enough letters, she reads to me and helps me in other subjects such as Portuguese, Maths, History, Geography. As regards Science and Arts she helps me with thicker lines so I can see the beginning and the end.

I go by myself to the toilette; the director taught me how to do so.

During break times I like to play with my friends. Hide and seek is my favourite game. Most of my friends are nice, but there are some who make fun of me, call me four-eyes, push me, hit me, and then I tell the vice-principal who takes care of the incident, but I don't even join them.

I also like the school instructors, who are nice to me, they talk and play with me and when a classmate comes to hit me they defend me.

A friend of mine is wheelchair-bound and they made a special lift for her, and my mother also asked them to mark the stairs with yellow and black stripes, which we call "zebra stripes" to help me.

In Physical Education my friends help me to do the exercises.

When I come home from school I always have lunch and then I do my homework and my mother helps me. She is very important to me, she always gets a lot of things for me.

## Ana Clara's experience

Ana Clara Izidro Flausino, 8 years old, Brazil

3rd Grade, "E. M.Benedito Cleto" Primary School.

At my school I didn't face any kind of prejudice, nobody ever said bad things to me.

My pre-school teachers were very nice. I took part in the activities and they brought me my snack.

In the primary school I have many friends, who help me, for example, in Physical Education, when there are games that have coloured lines which I do not see, they play with me. The teacher always explains to me the games and sports like volleyball and football and I have already scored.

The teachers made, and still keep making, braille materials for me. I have a braille typewriter in the classroom and one at home. They also prepare relief copies of poems, and quarter and street maps... in this way I am able to understand.

## Diago's experience

Diago Justet Teixeira, 10 years old, Argentina 6th grade, "José de San Martín" Primary School No.3, Tres Algarrobos, Carlos Tejedor, Province of Buenos Aires.

I started in the "San José" School Kindergarten in Tres Algarrobos, where I was in the class of the eldest children. There I played with my classmates, painted with tempera and pencils that the teacher gave me, and also played with the trucks we had in the classroom. I felt good there. And I enjoyed to be with my sister, because we are twins.

What I liked most of that private school was the kindergarten, where I felt comfortable. I remember having many classmates. I remained there from the kindergarten till half of the 4th grade. Since then I am in the "José de San Martín" Primary School No. 3, at Tres Algarrobos town, in Carlos Tejedor, Province of Buenos Aires.

What was new for me in my present school was learning to write and read in braille and using my Perkins brailier. I was not able to use it before that because I neither knew how to insert a sheet of paper to write on it nor even the braille writing system. Till then I answered orally to all the activities we undertook.

Here I feel good, just as the other children do, because I can write and do our mathematics tasks by means of adapted devices. I enjoy the art class, as I can draw and touch with my hands what I do and feel it, and I also draw on pieces of paper and stick them.

Nowadays, I am happy to come to school because besides meeting my old kindergarten classmates, I made a great friend, Germán, who guides me in the classroom, he shares gym classes with me, we laugh and talk a lot and when for some reason, he is absent, I also miss him a lot. My sister comes to the same school and we are in the same grade, but in different classrooms and when the break bell rings, she waits for me at my classroom door to be together. At first it was difficult for me to accept the fact of being in different classrooms, but now I am already used to it and it is good to be able to make new friends.

## **My story of how my education has been since I was a child**

Carla Sofí a Miliani Mora, 8 years old, Venezuela 3rd grade, “Cervantes” primary school, San Cristóbal, Táchira Capital.

I am Carla Sofia Miliani Mora and I am 8. I have got retinopathy of prematurity. My parents were very worried for my special condition. My education started when I was two. Since then I studied in ordinary schools where I am the only blind girl. They educate me very well there.

Well, when I was rather young, I was in a nursery school, called “Friendship”. There, I was helped by a tutor called Coromoto. After that, the school where I studied for five years is called “Calicantina”. I was there up to the 2nd grade, later on I moved to another state of Venezuela, called Táchira, to its capital San Cristóbal. My mother requested for a place for me at 12 schools, till I was accepted in “Cervantes” school. I got a very good education there. In this regular school, I am the only blind child. I participated in the Mathematics Olympiads and I was selected to represent my school in the Recreation Olympiads with some other children coming from other schools of my state, on Friday June 12. Now I am in 3rd grade, section b, and my friends have been very good to me.

In the afternoon I also have activities with other ordinary children: I play piano with my Prof. Jeismar Rujano and sing in the choir “Young Táchira Singers”, with Prof. Kelly Carrillo, and other ordinary girls.



## Victor Manuel's experience



Victor Manuel Moreno Ramirez, 9 years old, Mexico 4th grade, “Jose Maria I. Morelos” elementary school, Gomez Palacio, Durango.

My name is Victor Manuel Moreno Ramirez, I was born on July 2006 in Zacatecas city. I am 9 and I live in Gómez Palacio, Durango.

When I was born, my mother was in the 28th pregnancy week and because of that I have an impairment called amaurosis.

When I entered the kindergarten, my classmates and my teachers were very kind to me. I was in “Ignacio Zaragoza” school, but everything changed during the second year. Children hit me and the support teacher did not help me, besides a child with the same disability, used to hit me and when I started 3rd grade, I was not asked to do anything by my teacher and when she did and I did not do it well, she said “at least you have done something” and she yelled a lot at us. The only thing she asked me to do was to draw something and did not include me in the tasks that my classmates had. As I was doing nothing I brought a book from home to read at school. Once, when the teacher left early, another teacher came and she only made me put some sticks together.

I intended to change to another school, but I was not accepted because we were in the middle of the school year. Afterwards they sent me to the “Jose Maria I.

Morelos” school, where I finished 3rd grade.

In this school where I am now, I have friends, and my teacher includes me in every activity. I have learnt many things but what I like more at school is playing with my classmates, reading, writing, learning how to play chess and playing the guitar. In this school I am very happy. My teacher is Reynaldo Picasso. He has taught me many things.

## Isabella's experience

Isabella Rodrigues Scheibner, 8 years old, Brazil

3rd Grade, "Edvard Frufru Marciano" Primary School.

When I entered school I wrote braille by means of a frame. I hated it because I had to do a lot of holes and it hurt my hands. But then I got a braille typewriter and started writing with it and I was very happy.

The teachers were very happy to have me as a student and we had many reading sessions.

I participate in physical education activities, but there was a nasty teacher who excluded me and I always cried when I was sitting on the playing field bench and my mother got very angry and cried and the teacher left the school. I have a class aide, she helps me with everything at school: with art like folding a paper as a fish, with a furry paper like a drop of water for me to understand its shape and we write how to take care of the water, like taking a 5 minute bath so not to spend more than 40 litres. In Geography, we learnt about different neighborhoods and I took notes with the braille typewriter. In Science I also wrote with it about plants and animals.

## Julia's experience

Julia Ariadny Sanches Alcalde, 9 years old, Brazil

4th Grade, "Leda Therezinha Borguese Rodrigues" Primary School.

At school I follow all the lessons and the teachers like me very much and I like to do the activities by means of my braille typewriter.

My teachers always emboss my tasks to help me understand the texts.

Once, the teacher was telling a story and she had a picture and she described it for me. She lifted me up, made me fly and dance so that I was able to understand how the birds were dancing. It was great. I felt fully included in the class. I felt very good. I was also included when the teacher made me take part in the photo of all the students in my group.

I think it is necessary to have handrails and little ball mats on the floor in many schools. In my school there were some dummy children who ripped the balls off. It is also necessary to have assistants for all the disabled. My sister and I have; she is also visually impaired. And at my school there are more children with other disabilities too, such as wheelchair users, autistic, hearing impaired who have their own assistants, so it is necessary to have aides to be able to learn.

## Valentina's experience



Valentina Vázquez Martínez, 8 years old, Mexico 2nd Grade, “Celestine Freinet” elementary school, Xalapa, Veracruz.

Hi, I am Valentina, I was born in Xalapa, Veracruz and I live in Xalapa. I am eight years old, I live with my parents Victoria and Rogelio and my sister Regina, who is three years old. Since I was 9 months old, my parents looked for a nursery, but my mother says that there they would not take good care of me, because when I cried, they called her to come and calm me. Then my mother preferred to send me to another school.

Then, my mother took me to “Jamli” School. I was 9 months old. I remember the teachers: Gabi, Lucero, Mine, Luz and Paty, the Headmistress. They were very patient and kind. I learnt through the Macarsi Method and also English and they took very good care of me. In “Jamil”, they taught me many things. and the teacher Bety from CAM<sup>2</sup> came to provide support to my teachers. Teacher Bety taught me to use a drawing board and the letters.

After my third year, they took me to another school, because it included elementary level. Its name is “Americas”. I liked it because the teachers were very nice and because the method was quite amusing and there was a magic circle. The method they applied helped me to be independent.

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<sup>2</sup>Ed. N. Multiple Care Centre.

Afterwards, my mother changed me again to another school. I was 6 and she sent me to “Thomas Jefferson School”. I felt it was very strict. Miss Money was the kindest one because her activities were very easy. There I learnt to read by means of mobile letters and my mother made relief cards for me and in that way, I learned how to read. They gave me lots of things to do and they wanted me to write with ordinary letters. My mum says it is a very good school, but their rhythm was very quick.

Then, she changed my school once more, and it is the one where I am now. It is called “Celestine Freinet”. I met teachers Nata and Alina. I like my school very much because the teachers are nice and do not assign so many tasks and they made me sit for oral exams and sometimes written ones. At school I write braille with my special device. For mathematics I use my mobile numbers. My spelling and math books are transcribed into braille by my mother. My classmates help me and I pass my breaks in the swings, as I do not play with them because they are always running. I like my school because there are benches for reference and it is easy to know where I am. And also, because I have amusing workshops as the vegetable garden, ceramics, sewing, physical education and a ludolab. I also do taekwondo but I find it difficult because it requires a good balance, but my mum says it is right for me.

At “Freinet” we have trips. During the first course it was my first experience. I went to a place called Volcancillo. There were big trees and plants. I liked it very much because they had planned various amusing activities, such as walking, building a volcano and listening to the speech of Tacho, an anthropologist. Afterwards, in second year which is my present level, I went to Mancha, where we saw mangroves and everything related to the sea. The trip I liked most was going to Coatepec, because I did practical things like polishing shoes and selling soft drinks, we also went to the Coffee Museum.

I would like that my parents do not make me change to another school, because I feel good at “Freinet”.

I have also been going to CAM for a long time, with teacher Alma Evelia Rodríguez Luna. I have a class with her once a week. She teaches me braille and mathematics.

For me she is demanding and kind at the same time. She is blind and her daily living activities call my attention, and how to find my way with a cane. My mother says she is a very good teacher and she has given me a great support since my infancy.

Teacher Juan Carlos, also at CAM, teaches me to use a computer and I love his classes because he is nice, he has patience and he likes to talk. Teacher Juan teaches me to use a cane and I get lost all the time and he frequently assesses my laterality. Teacher Alina, at “Freinet”, also went to CAM to learn braille to help me at school. My parents say that it is very good and important for me that people at my school want to support me so much.

In the afternoon I learn music since I was 4, with teacher Nania. She teaches me to sing and to play xylophone and flute, but I do not like flute. Teacher Nania is kind and patient. In her classroom there are rugs, chairs and curious instruments. She makes changes all the time. At the beginning the room was smaller and we could not play many games but now it is bigger and we can practice as in a concert. I also take piano lessons in the same school with teacher Lizbeth. Her classes are very nice. I like to play piano because I can invent songs and the one that was most difficult for me was “Hello django” but I like it very much. The piano classroom is smaller but it is reasonable that it is so, because it is only for piano lessons, although we do there some relaxation exercises, but we do not need a big space. During the first classes she taught me the note C. And then we created a song only with C, and then I learnt D and so on.

Three months ago, I started with folklore dancing at the “ESAV” school with teacher Victor. The music and stomp attracted my attention. My first show was in March. My mum has taken me to other schools, but they did not know how to teach me. Teacher Victor gives me individual lessons and he teaches me the dance steps and the technique, and he says I have learnt very quickly. I have danced the “Witch” dance with a white skirt, a shawl, a fan, necklaces, dancing shoes, cameos and a vase with a candle on my head and two glasses in my hands. It demanded a lot of effort because of the vase on my head but I succeeded. My ballet classmates helped me with the choreography.

I would like to go on learning dancing and music at “Freinet”, because I like those very much. I will also go on with CAM classes because I must learn to use the abacus, the Perkins braille that helps me to write faster, the cane, the computer and the refreshable braille display.





**Category II:**  
**Boys and girls 11, 12 y 13 years old**

## Colorín Colorado, this inclusion has started...



Ana Paola Morgado Luna, 13 years old, Mexico.

2nd year, secondary education. Her report is the winner in her category.

I am 13 years old and I remember all the details of the day in which I lost my sight. I was in 6th grade of primary school and when I was almost going out of the class, everything around me was becoming cloudy and it seemed quite strange after a sunny day. Fog covered everything completely, and I started to be somewhat worried. The bell rang indicating the time to leave and I waited for all my classmates to go out. Such a thick fog was unusual! It did not let me see where I was walking. I went towards the court for my rehearsals of folk dancing. The place became stunningly bigger, that is to say, I felt lonely and afraid in the middle of something immense that I could not see. I was awfully anxious, and then, suddenly I heard the voice of a teacher I knew well and I asked her to take me to a safe place. I explained that I could not see and she took me home (luckily, I lived fifty meters away from school). My mother opened the door and she was also afraid and she asked what had happened. I explained the situation, we said goodbye to the teacher and my mother took me to my room. She lied down with me, with a big hug and there we remained for a long while. With love and patience, she explained things to me: the retinoblastoma diagnosed to me when I was a baby was going on with its tricks.

After a week of consultations with my physician, I returned to school. Unfortunately, it was impossible for me to go on with folk dancing, as tapping would originate more damage.

At that moment, I do not know why, this was my biggest problem, when actually what was waiting for me in the classroom was far more difficult as I was not able to take notes and I had not an exact image of the place. The lessons passed very quickly and the break was even worse and I remained in the classroom, awfully afraid and anxious, with a feeling of helplessness and, I am not going to tell a lie, also anger - why this happened to me? Why me?-. I felt my life was coming to an end, my dreams and my goals faded away and at that moment my heart beat at full speed. And when I was just on the point of sobbing and weeping, the sweet voice of a teacher who loves me a lot came with a group of classmates who tried to comfort me. So far, they succeeded, they accompanied me, and made me smile a little. And that very day I understood that whatever happens to us in this life, good or bad, must be lived in the best possible way.

Since that day, my teacher asked for volunteers to help me with note taking, to accompany me everywhere and thanks to the whole universe, there always was someone by my side. Of course, I had to put a lot from my part: I learnt braille, I learnt to use a cane to travel without their help. In my heart I keep an enormous gratitude to each and every one of my primary schoolmates, to all those brave friends who made somewhat more pleasant that last month of the sixth grade.

But, you know, the most difficult step was hardly foreseen: yes, to enter secondary education, wow, I felt real panic. I remember my entrance examination: an USAER teacher read the contents for me and in the answer sheet she wrote what I said fully convinced of being right. Goal achieved: I passed the exam! The door to a new adventure in my life was open. Almost trembling with anxiety, I arrived that first day to my secondary school, with fear, uncertainty, distressed for the fact of having left my mother with her eyes full of tears, tears that she hid till later on, because when she was saying goodbye, I felt her self-controlled and touched. When I said goodbye to my eldest Sister (sister with a capital S as I call her with love), she came closer, hugged me and whispered: "You are wonderful and very brave. Show the world what you are made of. Come on, Paola, I love you!!"

And I achieved my goal: I faced everything because I knew that in my heart, I have my father's courage and strength, my sister's complicity, admiration and support and my mother's infinite love...

So, my friends, here I am, finishing my second level of secondary education with an average of 9.6. Yes, it is possible... I have achieved everything I have set out to do. I feel proud of having participated in the intent of winning the Dancing Guinness Record with the Bamba, that Jarocho rhythm that identifies us as coming from Veracruz. I participated in a contemporary dance workshop and together with my coach, my presentation at IMAC theatre in Xalapa was a success. I have also taken part in the international contest of tales and I got the first Mexican place and the fifth international one with the story "Solidarity against Monsters". I have also got the second place in a public speaking competition at primary level. I took a swimming course and I did learn! It is worthwhile to tell you that I use the social media as well as any kid my age, I use my computer and navigate in internet to do my tasks, I write and read braille, I love reading (listening to audiobooks). At present I take singing lessons and electric guitar playing in a "rondalla" at my school.

And why do I tell you all this? Because I want you to know that you can do all, absolutely all that you set as your goal. These activities help society to get a wholly different image of persons with disability. They realize we can do whatever we set out to. Yes, we can! In my schools I have always received the best treatment, everybody was always ready and interested in a better and fuller inclusion. I love almost too much my classmates and friends. I know there are moments in which you fall, but then, you get up, dry one tear or two, and turn it into energy and go on forward. It hurts, yes. However, one step at a time, you overcome the problem and let it be... With my years of experience on having a visual disability, today I can say that it is a permanent struggle that starts within yourself, because you must first accept yourself and understand yourself in order to ask for understanding, inclusion and society acceptance.

I want to finish this story of school inclusion acknowledging the support of all my classmates, of all my teachers, of all my family. My total thankfulness to my art teacher, who always gets the best from my artistic side, to my mathematics teacher, for having learnt the braille system to be able to explain this subject to me, to the headmaster of

my school, who has made everything in his power to make me feel great and worthwhile, to every day opportunity for offering the best I have; to all my friends that always have the best intention, not only to help me to go forward, but also to make me smile, to put colour in my life, so that I can live step by step, my school inclusion.

I leave you my motto here and I will slowly withdraw: LIFE DOES NOT MEAN WAITING FOR THE STORM TO END. IT'S LEARNING TO DANCE IN THE RAIN!!!

## Educative inclusion

Carolina Álvarez Martínez, 13 years old, Mexico

1st year, "Lic. Jesús Reyes Heróles" Official Secondary School No. 0425

My name is Carolina, I am 13 and I was born blind but that has not prevented me from achieving my goals: I have succeeded in most of my aims. My parents have always helped me to make my purposes work out.

The day I entered an inclusive school for the first time (an elementary private institute), I was rather nervous and scared because I did not know what was going to happen.

At that moment I had too many questions in my mind: How would the teachers treat me? How would my classmates treat me? Would I have friends or not?

When I arrived at school that day, my Spanish teacher and my mother went with me to the classroom entrance. Nerves and fear paralysed me more as I got closer and closer to the door. When I was finally in, I covered my eyes with my hand for a moment, till I managed to adapt myself.

To know that I was going to enter a new school (a public secondary one), again made me too afraid because I did not know what was going to happen and how I would manage there.

One of my greatest fears was the possibility of not making friends, because I do not like to be alone as I am very fond of talking! I like to have someone to talk with, to laugh with and who I can trust in. But on many occasions, that same fear came back when I was changing to another school; it made me close up and become aloof and serious. But that happens only during the adaptation process.

Sometimes, the fact of being distant may be a problem to get friends. Slowly I was losing my fear and started adapting to the change, I started to realize who I could consider my friend, according to their way of being.

The following are some of my experiences about inclusive education:

One of them has to do with teachers, because they believed I was in the classroom just as an observer, just to listen to the classes. Therefore, to solve this conflict, I told my mother what was happening and then, she went to speak with them. It took some time to solve the problem.

Another experience took place in my English class, because I did not know what the teacher was writing on the blackboard and although she dictated the words to me I needed her to spell them to be able to write them in braille. I neither had English braille books nor dictionaries to practice reading and to find the meaning of the words I did not understand.

One last experience had to do with exams. Luckily I have no problem to do that orally as I am good at memorizing things, I can remember a lot of information, I can control my nerves and almost always I finish before the other students.

The best of all my experiences has been when they gave me a reward for my constant participation and learning, with an average of ten during the second bimester.

In conclusion, educational inclusion was very good for me, because we must leave our comfort zone and start to live new experiences just as any other sighted child.

That is why I would like to invite all children with visual impairment who are about to enter an inclusive school to accept the challenge, because, although at first they may be afraid of the change, later on they will adapt themselves and I can assure them that they will enjoy it!



## Ana Luiza's experience

Ana Luiza Amorim Fogaça de Sousa, 13 years old, Brazil.

8 th grade, "Prof. Antonia Lucchesi" basic teaching<sup>4</sup>State School

From the first to the third year, I attended a school close to my house. There was a resource room and on Mondays I attended the ASAC in the areas of Teaching, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Orientation and Mobility and in the Reference Educational Centre of Sorocaba City Hall they had several adapted games, rulers, braille frames, braille measuring tapes and a relief drawing board. At the “Zilá Dias Melo” Municipal School I got adapted materials, as a calendar made with string and sand. I succeeded to get a braille typewriter during my second year, thanks to a teacher who struggled hard to get it.

In 2013, I had to leave school because my parents divorced. My home was no longer close to the school. My mother did a lot of research to find a new school for me, but she did not succeed because none of them accepted me due to my visual impairment. Then my mother addressed a school where my aunt worked and managed to enrol me there. It was a public school and they did not have many resources. Sometimes the teacher could adapt a few materials for me. I had lots of friends and liked very much studying there.

After six months, they accepted me at the Municipal School, which had a resource room. It was a very good school, but some students and teachers treated me in a different way, they treated me badly on purpose, because of my visual impairment: they insulted me and made fun of me. I told this to the headmaster, but she did nothing.

Two years later I managed to get out of this centre and went to “Ari de Oliveira Seabra” Town Hall School. I had to take the school bus because it was in an industrial remote

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<sup>4</sup> N. E.: in Brazil, basic or primary education consists in 9 years, divided in two modules of 5 and 4 years respectively.

district of the city. There was a resource room, but I didn't have any kind of braille materials and I didn't even have a braille typewriter. I only had a few games that the city hall had sent. I got only oral training, I wrote nothing. The positive aspect was that I made many friends.

After that school, I went to the “Ezequiel Machado” State School where I made many friends. After three months they got a braille typewriter and the necessary materials. Then, that same year on Children's Day, I was interviewed by TV Globo. After that the State started sending a lot of materials, but they neither sent me braille summaries nor braille textbooks.

Then I went to the “Arquimínio Marques da Silva School”. I didn't like to study there, although having a resource room and all the materials for visually impaired students, except textbooks and summaries. I didn't like to be there because many students thought they were better than everyone else and treated me badly. I only had one friend who was also from my Church. Besides, the school was also very far from my home, and it was difficult for me to attend classes.

We moved again and I went to the “Antonia Lucchesi” State School. It is a very good school, I like it, I have many friends from my church, but they neither have a braille typewriter nor braille summaries and textbooks, and my own typewriter is not working well. I was very happy to have been interviewed by Globo because I showed the public that we, the disabled, are not different from anyone else. I hope that after this report some school directors and the students will be accepting us, the handicapped.

## Elienai's experience

Elienai Abigail Bauduino Pereira, 12 years old, Brazil

7th grade, Basic school II "Ana Cecilia Martins"

Hello, my name is Elienai Abigail Balduino Pereira, I am twelve years old, I was born on July 9, 2005 in President Prudente city, I am visually impaired since birth due to an illness named neurofibromatosis.

I entered the pre-school stage at the age of five at the “Fernando Rios” school where I was well received by the professionals. My first teacher was Rosana and in the second year, I was Keila’s pupil. She has kept in touch with my mother until today.

It was thanks to this school that I began to have a support tailored to my visual impairment.

After finishing the second pre-school year, I started studying at the “Luiz Almeida Marins” school, where I was welcomed by the school professionals. There I learnt to read and write. Besides the classroom teacher, I had a class assistant teacher. I studied in the afternoon and in the morning I went to the resource room. During the third year in the school I got a Braille typewriter, which helped me a lot with the tasks but, at the same time, I had difficulties with the teacher because he was neither prepared nor able to deal with visually impaired students. He would write the lesson on the blackboard and tell me to copy it without dictating the contents to me.

Then I started to go to “Ana Cecília Martins” school, where I currently study, I was somewhat insecure because I was afraid that someone would discriminate me due to my disability. As I didn’t have an aide, at the beginning it was a bit difficult and I didn't do anything, especially in the mathematics class. My parents had to go to court to have an assistant teacher assigned to me and thanks to the injunction of the judge, they appointed a professional who came almost at the end of the year.

Last year, I also attended the resource room in “Professor Arquimínio Marques da

Silva” resource centre.

Now, Fabiana, my school coordinator succeeded in having the resource room transferred to the school where I am studying now, because for me it is closer to home. I am enjoying my classes with teacher Jane.

At school, my relationship with my friends is good as they respect me and help me when I need it and when teachers ask me to do group work, they include me in the tasks and they take into account my opinion.

On Thursdays and Fridays I have ASAC backing, with psychology and computer science technicians, O.T., Braille and abacus and orientation and mobility teaching. I love all the services, because they have helped me a lot.

## My inclusion experience

Ángeles Silvia Milagros Benítez Espillaga, 13 years old, Paraguay.  
7 th grade, "Defensores del Chaco" Basic School No. 111

In my case, everything is fine, with an exception: the first grade demanded me a lot of effort but the teacher was very good.

I have many friends, they are very good to me, but sometimes, they play in a rather annoying way. For them it is amusing but not for me.

You can realize that some teachers are not interested in me. I feel that they did not get information on time about how they could work with me.

The subjects I like more are Spanish, Health, Work, Technology and Ethics. And I do not like Guaraní and Mathematics.

My classmate Karen is the one who helps me, sometimes she dictates me the homework and sometimes the teacher does.

## My inclusion in my school

Marife Fernanda Chillacce Quispe, 13 years old, Peru.

2nd year "Ricardo Palma" secondary school

Hi, my name is Marife Fernanda Chillacce Quispe, I am thirteen. I was born on September 7, 2004. I am blind and I study at "Ricardo Palma" School. At present I am in the second year of the secondary stage.

When I got the news about my school inclusion I was not very happy. In fact, I did not know what to do, I felt sad because I was going to say goodbye to my classmates of my first school, "San Francisco de Asís". I kept on asking myself what the new school would be like, what it would be like to study with children who can see. I remember being very afraid of the things that could happen and of being considered different by the students. I felt I was getting into a new world.

The expected day arrived. My family hugged and encouraged me a lot, they told me that I was going to have many friends and that I should not be too shy and advised me to learn how to socialize with the kids in my class. I got ready very early because I was excited and eager to learn about what was totally new for me. We arrived at "Ricardo Palma School" and they received me with open arms. I remember that I got in with my mother and I thought that she would remain with me, but it was not so. When the teacher came, she introduced herself and said that it was not necessary for my mother to stay, as she herself (the teacher) would help me. So, my mother went out and I felt like crying, but I held back. In the classroom, all the students were very noisy, they talked and said hello because some of them already knew each other, while I sat and felt afraid, thinking that nobody would talk to me.

After some minutes, my teacher Antonella took my hand and introduced me. She was very sweet and hugged me warmly so that I stopped being afraid. After that, she made me sit close to a girl. I remember I was very shy and

felt that everybody was looking at me and whispered things about me.

I was also awfully afraid of not being able to answer any potential question.

When the teacher started her class, everybody took their copybooks and their pencils. And I took my braille frame and my stylus. It was funny because all my classmates run towards me, to see what I was taking out of my bag. I realized that they had never seen something like that before. The teacher told them to go back to their places and that I was writing what she was dictating. She was very kind. I admired her because she endeavoured to learn the braille system to be able to teach me.

The break arrived. I went down surrounded by my classmates, and sat on a low wall and I remember hearing some of them whispering about me because they wanted to come closer and meet me. I was very happy.

Days went by and after some weeks I had friends, and even recognized their voices. I realised that it is easy for me to remember quickly the voice of different persons and even their smell. I had never expected to come to know them so quickly. They helped me a lot on every occasion to the point of being overprotective, that is why I had to tell them frequently that I was able to go to the bathroom, or down the stairs and my classmates got used to that. I am still studying with them. I have lived many sad and happy moments with my friend's mischief. In fact their noisiness makes me laugh a lot. I have met many teachers that tried hard to teach me in spite of not knowing the braille system. They showed me respect and kindness.

Well, I want to finish by saying that I love a lot my classmates and I thank them for all the support they give me. They are as my second family and I do not regret to have come to my dear "Ricardo Palma" school.

## Adventures in a flower garden



SHERILIN CRISTABEL COC RAMÍREZ, 11 years old, Guatemala.  
4th grade, "Santo Domingo" primary school.

My name is Sherilin Cristabel Coc Ramírez, I am eleven years old and I was born in the capital city of Guatemala and nowadays, I live at Santo Domingo, Suchitepe´quez. Today I want to tell you my adventures and my sorrows in “Santo Domingo” school, Santo Domingo, Suchitepe´quez, my dear school which, after finishing my studies here, I will remember forever.

Well, on the first school day of the year, my life started in this way. I felt happy because I was going to meet my “seño”<sup>5</sup> Maricela and make friends. When I arrived I guessed I was going to have many friends. My “seño” asked us to introduce ourselves to our classmates. I told them that my preferred name to be called by, was Sherilin, of course. I was fascinated when she taught us to pray to our good Lord to take care of us all and also of our dad and mum. Then we played, sang and had a snack. When the bell rang, it took me by surprise and I just thought: What has happened? But our “seño” explained that it was the announcement of the break.

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<sup>5</sup> N. Shortened form of Ms. or Miss, used by children to address their teacher in some Latin American countries.



One day we made puppets with socks and after that, we went to play with them in the yard. I did not like it because it was not funny. On that day, my cousin fell deeply asleep and that, yes!, that was funny for me. Oh, cousin Armando, I don't forget you.

The day I entered the first grade I felt very sad because he was not in my class. Unluckily, he remained in preparatory because he is younger than me. That day I was afraid because I thought that Armando would not be with me. Then my "seño" told me to say my name and I did that. When we went out for the break, it seemed strange for me to have my snack outside and not in the classroom.

I did not like "seño" Marilla because she never made us play as "seño" Maricela had done. I liked "seño" Timotea because she told us stories, she gave me stamps because I did answer some questions. But afterwards I started to like "seño" Marilla as she gave me a little rabbit on my birthday. I was very excited about the breaks because I met my cousins, especially Armando, and we were able to talk. He told me that preparatory was very boring, he was sad because I was not with him and then, this made me sad too.

As every year, in February, we celebrated Love Day. I remember that "seño" Timotea did not allow us to eat pizza and said: "No, no ,no! That is bad for you because it has a lot of grease and it is not convenient for you!" Then we chose "tacos" and horchata soda. I was disappointed because I do not like them. During my first grade, "seño" Marilla always did her best to prepare my tasks, because I had to touch them. That is why I thank God for my "seño" who always endeavoured to make me understand and in that way, I did learn a lot.

I remember that thanks to my own effort and work, which I dedicate to my mum and dad, being integrated in the Distinguished Committee for the Blind and the Deaf of Guatemala, I was appointed "GIRL Elisa Molina de Stahl" . And as always, my cousin Armando accompanied me when I was crowned for the September parade. He was my knight. It was a beautiful day because he was with me.

When I got to the second grade I met new classmates. The best was that on Love Day we had pizza. I exchanged presents with a new friend and he made a very nice card for me

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<sup>6</sup> N. E.: Elisa Molina de Stahl, the founder of the Committee.

because he told me that I was a very special classmate and so he became someone very special for me too.

I do know that I cannot forget all the nice moments I lived that year, because we were a very attached group. When our teacher went out of the classroom just for a moment, we all started playing or singing; at that time SpongeBob's song was in vogue. I was fascinated because I was the one that conducted the choir, and all my classmates followed me and we sang together.

One day, the "seño" told us that we would have an activity and that whoever lost would have a penance. It consisted in going to the blackboard and solving either an addition or a subtraction. We started by singing a song and at the same time, we passed a ball to another student. Suddenly I heard my classmates shouting and they all run from one place to another. I remember that I remained seated on my bench asking what was going on. Nobody answered till at last, they told me that a rat had fallen on Tony's back and then I also started shouting and Romel, frightened by my voice, stood on his table. We all started laughing at him, because, he is plump and it was difficult for him to climb and after succeeding he was not able to go down and the "seño" had to help him down.

That year, many animals appeared and on that same day of the rat, a "culete"<sup>7</sup> appeared. My classmates wanted to kill it but the teacher told us to leave it alone without harming it. So we did. Sometime later, a chicken came into the class, and "seño" said: "A student that has no right to be here!" We all laughed. Second grade was very funny!

On September, for the awarding of ribbons, I sang two songs in front of everybody. One was from Suchitepequez<sup>8</sup> and I liked the situation because I became famous. Everybody clapped and in spite of the damaging of the recorded music, I sang and I still remember the song. After that I sang "Let it go!" and as all the assistants knew the lyrics, they sang with me and clapped. It was very nice and amusing.

I liked Children's Day because a clown came and I participated in a game. We had to touch the parts of our body when she was naming them, and, you know what. Yes, I won!

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<sup>7</sup> N. of Sherilin: Sort of lizard.

<sup>8</sup> N. of Sherilin: Region at the south of Guatemala.

My prize... I felt very happy with it, mmm... The best was that we ate Campero<sup>9</sup> and ice-cream, and they gave us a toy, a little crown and balloons. Oh, my second grade! I will never forget it!

The first day in third grade I was happy, because I said that it was the last year I had classes in the morning, I would be soon studying in the afternoon because in my school, it is so, and then I would not need to get up so early! Well, let's get back to what actually happened that day. Our prof said: "Children don't be afraid of me, because I am not dangerous and besides, you have approved another grade". And he sent us to the yard to play. We introduced ourselves while we played "cat and mouse" and then he showed us all the school. I was pleased because when he changed our places, he put me and Emir close to him. We talked a lot and so we became very good friends; he is my very special friend because we shared many things that had happened to us in the past. I keep a very sad secret he told me.

In June, they celebrated my birthday. My cake was inspired in Elsa and Olaf. That day was absolutely unforgettable, because my deeply beloved cousin Armando was with me. I got many presents and shared a lot of things with my classmates. We were very happy! I thank God for that very special day!

A nice morning, the teacher surprised me when he asked me if I wanted to recite a poem on the ribbons awarding day. Oh, I said yes and he gave me the poem, but the sad fact was that at first I was not able to learn it, but at last I succeeded.

The day in which classes were ending, the teacher told us scary tales and we listened very attentively. He also took photos of all of us.

I did not like my first day in fourth degree of the primary school, because my mother had gone with my cousin Bryan to see a doctor in Guatemala, but my aunt works in my school as an Art teacher, and it happened that at the end of the classes she went home and forgot all about me. Afterwards, she remembered me and came back to take me home. I had strange feelings because being left there was very sad. "Seño" Amy told me: "Wait for me a little, Sherilin, I will see a lady and after that, I will take you home." Then, I sat on the armchair. When I was there, my aunt came back laughing and

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<sup>9</sup> N. of Sherilin: Trade mark of fried chicken

said: “Excuse me, Sherilin! I had completely forgotten you were here. It happens that it is not my usual task.” Amy answered: Oh, “Seño”! “Of course I only forgive you because it is the first day of the year”.

When we were introduced to Prof. Baldomero, everybody was silent because the other children say he is a very sulky person. I was afraid, but although some months have already passed, my classmates are still afraid. But I have realized that Prof. Baldo, as I call him affectionately, is very warm with children. He is severe because he does not like us to talk in class, but in this way we learn more. I do not forget that he told us: “Children, you are older now and you must write correctly!” because he teaches us reading, writing and spelling. After that, “seño” Sofía, as I call her affectionately, was introduced. I liked her because she is very kind. We were told that she would teach us Productivity and Development and also Communication and Language. Then it was the turn of “Seño” Maritza, who said she would teach us Quiché, Social Sciences and Art. Well, I had already met her because she is my aunt. After that, it was “Seño” Any, for Mathematics and Citizenship. We also met the English and Physics teachers. I wondered how we would manage to work with so many teachers. Why so many teachers? But, yes, they explained us how this was going to work. And you know what? My favourite class is Art, because we make arts and crafts and we paint.

Love day was a very special one, because I had to exchange presents with a very special classmate. And, do you know who he was? Well, Emir. He gave me a cup with chocolates and a card. That day we ate Mexican tarts and a soda. I gave a present to “seño” Sofi.

On Mother’s Day I was happy because I gave a cup with my photo on it to my mother. She uses it to drink her coffee. We had an exhibition of typical sweets, and I loved it because every one of us brought something different. I had to contribute with a special one made with peanuts. I had the chance of tasting many of them, but I neither like those of chickpeas nor sweet potatoes. The most interesting point was that we went to the yard and we had to explain and offer the recipe and explain how to prepare it.

A friend of mine whom I call Tono prepared a technology task, but it was wrong and after that he had to repeat it and Prof. Baldo told him that he would receive a higher mark because of this effort. That is why I say he is a good person and we must not be afraid of him.

When we meet a group of friends during breaks, we tell scary stories and everybody participates. When I was going to start with my tale, I told them: Look! Look! I am going to tell you the story of a goblin, but don't think it is Lisael. Everybody burst out laughing. They also tease me and call me Crystal because of my name Cristabel, but it doesn't annoy me to be called that way. When a group of girls meet, we start talking about many things and when the boys come, we say: Silence, silence, it is women's talk, and they go away. With them we talk about music and we sing.

Something funny happened when "seño" Sofi asked: "What is SWOT? A classmate called Jefferson answered that it is the song Bad Bony sings and we all laughed and started to sing it and the teacher scolded us. Then she asked: "What is SWOT about? And Jefferson answered again that it had to do with love. The teacher scolded him again and said: "Silence, because this is a theme and not a song, and then Emir and I sang a song, ah, but during the break.

The saddest experience I experienced took place when I was sitting on a bench in the yard and suddenly a classmate came and told me: "Sherilin, you can't become a teacher because you don't see." That made me feel bad, awfully bad. That night, I was not able to sleep and I asked God why that girl came up to me just to criticize me and I said: "When I get old enough I will build a place for dogs. Then, I talked with my little she dog and told her that she was my friend and that she was able to understand what I was undergoing. My mother heard me, she got out of bed and asked me what had happened. I told her then. She asked me why I had not said that before. I answered that I had forgotten and we prayed for that girl because my mother says that she does not know what she was talking about.

And that's all up to now.

## Luciano's experience

Luciano Di Salvatore Vomero, 12 years old, Uruguay

5th grade, "La Mennais" primary school, Montevideo.

My name is Luciano. I am 12 years old. I am from Montevideo, capital city of Uruguay. I am blind from birth.

I study at La Mennais School (a private ordinary school) and also at the Special School No. 279 for Visually Impaired. It is both for blind and low vision children.

Everything started like this in my life:

At the beginning I was educationally included at "Jacarandá" School. It was a regular kindergarten, where all the children had sight. I do not remember very much about it because I was too young. I do remember that I did not like it very much, because I did not talk as much as I do now with my classmates: I had not so many friends and nobody helped me.

La Mennais School is not in my neighbourhood, but it is not far from my house. It is a private ordinary school. I started there in 2011 when I was a three year old preschool child. Now I am in 5th Grade of the primary sector.

In this school, all the children and all the teachers are sighted, I am an exception. There are other children with different disabilities. What I love of La Mennais is that I am always accepted with warmth, love and joy. They manage to support and accompany me everywhere. During some breaks I have been somewhat lonely. I do not like that. I work with my Perkins Braille and with the computer. If there is much noise in the classroom I must go to the library so that I can concentrate. It is fun to teach the braille alphabet to my classmates.

I started attending the Special School in May 2012. There I began learning the braille system which is read by touch and it consists of little dots that allow you to recognize the letters.

Braille turned out to be useful, as a person with total blindness or low vision is able to read and recognize the letters, just by touching them. It is not necessary to use both hands to read. You can read with the one you prefer. But as there are lines where the text goes on, it is recommendable to use the left hand to go down line by line. This allows you to follow the contents and go on reading.

After that I learnt to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Everything by means of the braille system.

I like going to School 279, because there are blind children like me. But, be careful! This does not imply that I don't like going to La Mennais. Of course I like it, but I like more the other one.

It pleases me to talk with my classmates and integrate myself in the things they are doing, play with them, help them, not letting them alone and I offer my opinion about the subject under discussion.

I do not like to be criticized, to be scolded, to be considered guilty. I am not pleased if they do things I do not like, or ask me questions that either make me feel uneasy or insulted.

Sometimes I am not sure whether a classmate is good or bad. For example, because of his way of talking, for the things he tells me, for his behaviour and for the questions he asks me.

I always have a busy week. I go to La Mennais School every day from 8:00 to 12:30, except on Wednesdays, because I go to School 279. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I have swimming classes from 16:30 to 18:00. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I have English classes from 14:30 to 15:30. And on Thursdays I have music classes from 18:00 to 20:15. And every Friday at 13:00 I go to Psychomotor Skills Education from 14:00 to 15:00. Every second and fourth week of each month I have a hands workshop in Psycho-motility from 15:00 to 17:00. I share this workshop with a dumb low vision girl. The work with her is a nice experience.

I have various activities at Special School No. 279 -music, computing, physical education, crafts and ceramics. In the music class I play different instruments. as regards informatics, I copy texts from braille to the computer. Physical Education covers gymnastics, running and walking. I make things with modelling clay during the crafts lesson and I work with cutting tools and clay in ceramics.

I have informatics, music, mathematics, language, catechesis, geography and history. We also have oratory. This consists in offering group explanations on some information we have searched before.

I like to be blind and I do not mind not being able to see, because my family, my teachers and my classmates love me a lot.



## Sebastián's stories

Juan Sebastián Máximo Fernández Tejedor, 11 years old, Argentina.

5th Grade, "San Pío" Primary School

The nice memory I have of my kindergarten is that there was a park with slides, various devices to play with and we also played with clay. I had an integration teacher called Jorgelina. The teachers were good to me but I was always fighting with my classmates. I had only one friend, because he was the single one that was nice to me. The others were bad, they quarrelled with me and made fun of me.

The sad point is that once, I painted a whole wall with a crayon. It could never be cleaned out, and therefore they had to paint the wall and everyone was angry with me.

I started the primary period in a private school where I went till the third grade.

I am going to tell you a nice story and a bad one.

The nice story is that my friends at that school played football. They thought it was dangerous because they could hit me with the ball and they run very quickly. Then sometimes they stopped the match to play with me. This is a nice story because they did something for me.

The bad one took place during a birthday party where I was playing, they did not want to lend me a toy gun and we were arguing about that. They told me to look and touch and they made me touch a classmate's testicles. It was the birthday party of a classmate.

I felt badly at that school because my classmates made fun of me and said: "You are blind!" And they told me they were going to steal my play station and once they threw my pencil case through the window to the street. Then I started to take things from my classmates' pencil boxes and from the box of my integration teacher: pencils, sharpeners, etc. I took things and put them in my pocket. I do not know why I did this.

One day, the teacher told them: "You may take theirs, it does not matter because he is taking yours."

It was a mess; everybody stole things that belonged to other children. Ayelen, my integration teacher, suffered the consequences because I also took her school equipment. This happened after the first semester of my third grade. The teacher was tired of scolding me and asking me not to touch other people's stuff.

I changed schools and went to "San Pío", where I repeated the third grade. There, they changed my integration teacher by the boring Norma González, but Laura, the school teacher was even more boring, because she wrote on the blackboard and did not dictate to me, and Norma's behaviour was just a joke, hahaha.

It was a problem to walk about the class because the backpacks were on the floor and because the place where I had to seat with my integration teacher was on the last row and this meant that the instructions were not properly heard.

As regards the mathematics teacher, she gave me adapted materials but she did not tell me what I had to do. I knew how to place a sheet in the Perkins Braille but if it got stuck, nobody helped me. I would like that teachers knew how to unblock the typewriter.

What is annoying at school is that I am not allowed to be alone, neither in the classroom nor during breaks. Once I was alone in the yard and a classmate was scolded for leaving me alone. The worst is physical education because the teacher does not want me to suffer any harm. I always ask her to let me do something but her answer is always negative. I can't go alone to the toilette either, my integration teacher is always asked to accompany me and that annoys me.

I feel that teachers think that we the blind are in a different world. They believe that we are made of glass and that we may be easily broken.

I think that I always learnt just like my classmates because they adapt my material, but it bothers me not to be allowed to remain during the extension hours either because nobody accompanies me or because I may get beaten, for example during gymnastic exercises.

I feel different with some teachers because they do not make me do the same things my friends do and I do not like that, for example during physical education classes.

It also annoys me that they think that at home someone makes my homework for me because that is not true. I listen to them talking and saying: "Do this in this way so that at home they don't do that instead of him" or "Don't give this to him, have him do it here."

## **My experience about inclusion**

Lerin Monserrath López Vedoya, 13 years old, Paraguay

6th Grade, "Luz y Alegría" Private Subsidized Basic School No. 4887

I am in 6th Grade. My inclusion experience took place in "Luz y alegría" (Light and Joy) School, where I went from the second grade up to the fourth.

My first teacher in "Luz y alegría" School was called Alicia, she was followed by Bernarda and in third grade I had a teacher called Cristian.

After that, I passed to the "Virgen de Fátima" School, where I have been studying since my fourth grade and now, I am in sixth, and my teacher is called Virginia. She is nice, and helps me a lot, but she is rather demanding.

This year, my classmates are very good and help me whenever I need their support.

## **My experience about inclusion**

Dina Librada Noguera Solís, 12 years old, Paraguay

5 th Grade, "Defensores del Chaco" Basic School No. 692

I am a student in 5th Grade, morning shift, in “Defensores del Chaco” School.  
I have many classmates and I play with them.

My teacher’s name is Leticia and Diana is my classmate that helps me most  
and we do our tasks together.

During breaks, I go to the toilette and to the yard by myself. I like English,  
guaraní language and mathematics, besides theatre.

I hope my classmates will continue being supportive and that my teacher  
will go on being nice and patient.

## Henrique's experience

Henrique Nunes Ferreira de Moraes, 11 years old, Brazil  
6 th Grade, "João Rodrigues Bueno" II Elementary School.

My name is Henrique Nunes Ferreira de Moraes, I am eleven years old and I was born on April 17, 2006. My disability is caused by a syndrome called Stickler. I study at "João Rodrigues Bueno" School, in the 6th grade, Elementary II.

When I started my studies I was nervous: would I adapt to school? But in my first days at school, I saw that nothing was as I had imagined, and I was afraid that I would not be able to get along with my new classmates, and I also felt insecure about the school readiness to face my vision difficulties, so I worried about my friends' and teachers' understanding of my visual problem. At first I had crayons, pencil, eraser, glue and a notebook, later on, the ASAC was very important because it helped my teachers with my materials. After a while, I got used to the school and to my classmates.

During the first and the second year I was with a very nice teacher called Inés. At first I was very afraid of her because she didn't understand my needs, but then I saw that she was a good person rather far from what I had presumed.

In the third year, I got a teacher named Silvana, I stayed with her during the first semester and after that, she left. In the second semester a teacher named Alexandre came. When I met him I thought he was cool and afterwards I confirmed my impression: he taught in an excellent way, including mathematics. I worked with him until the fifth year, I can say he was my best teacher in mathematics as well as in all the other subjects.

Now I'm in the sixth grade, and I must say that I was very afraid of being bullied, of being the only student in the class who wears thick (16°) . On my first day

at school admit that I almost fainted in the classroom because of my anxiety, but I was overdoing the problem. Today I have many friends, and I am not the only one with glasses in my class. I will say that it was better than I expected; my fears proved to be just a delusion.

## My experience about inclusion

Micaela De Los Ángeles Núñez Álvarez, 12 years old, Paraguay  
5th Grade, "Dora Giménez" Primary private School No. 7660

My school's name is "Dora Giménez". I started there in first grade and now I am in the 5th and have a very nice teacher who dictates me my tasks. I have four classmates and my best friend is Yeimi. She helps me a lot with my school work.

Mathematics is the subject I like less because it is difficult. And what I like most is dancing but this year my school has not that class yet. During breaks I take a stroll in the yard with my classmate, and we talk while we walk.

I have fun at school because I play with my classmates. In the school canteen there are tasty meals and my mother tells them what I should have as a snack and my friend goes and brings it for me.

My mum and dad drive me to school in a car. I work a lot and do all the tasks with the teacher.

When we have physical education I also participate. The teacher sometimes shows me the exercises I have to do.

I study a lot for my exams and always behave well. During the arts and crafts classes my teacher helps me so I am able to succeed with my work; I take home and show my mother everything I have done.

## Camila's experience

Camila Lucía Ochoa, 11 years old, Argentina

6 th Grade, Primary School No. 21, Bragado, Province of Buenos Aires

Hi! My name is Camila Lucía Ochoa, I am 11 and I am from Bragado, Province of Buenos Aires.

I attend School No. 21. When I was in the class of 5 year-old children, I started touching lines written with a braille typewriter and sometime later I began to read isolated letters and to form words.

I also know the alphabet in print. Everything is OK for me to play with. At school, my classmates guide and help me; I made good friends.

To do the homework they give me at school, I dictate it to my mother and she writes it for me with a pen.

When I need to read texts or tales that are not in braille, I give them to Graciela, a visual stimulation teacher, and she transcribes them for me. At home, I have a booklet where I like to write poems and other things.

When I want to watch TV, I use sound as a guide and when I draw I put a sheet of Ethylen Vinyl Acetate under the paper and as it is soft, you can feel the relief.

I like music very much, I like to play piano and wind and percussion instruments too.

At school I have very good marks and I also go to anaesthetic school in the afternoon. There are workshops and I participate in four of them: literature, arts, body language and music.



## Erick's experience



Erick Ítalo Soares de Souza, 13 years old, Brazil.

5th Grade, "Zumbi dos Palmares" Basic Teaching County School

I started to participate in the “Beyond looking” project when I was 9 years old, I was still in the kindergarten. Today I am 13 years old and attend the 5th grade, primary school. I have a 14 year-old sister and we live with my grandmother in Recife. Sometimes I visit my mother when we go to her house.

It took me a long time to learn to read and write. In the kindergarten I repeated grades several times and I missed lots of classes. It was very difficult for me to see and read what was written on the blackboard, both being far or near it. It was very hard for me to read my textbook or to copy from the blackboard.



In the framework of the “Beyond Looking” Project, I get visits at home and at school. When we consulted the ophthalmologist of the “Altino Ventura” Foundation, the doctor said I had to wear glasses and I also got information on a magnifying glass. I tried it and with my eyes very close to a book, I was able to read and I succeeded to see at a certain

distance with a CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television). Then, I was able read the blackboard at school and copy in my notebook and read books. I started to sit near the blackboard, so the situation improved a lot too. At the beginning, the teacher enlarged the printed material for me to see better and when I began to participate in the project, I started to use darker pencils. The lines of the notebook were darker and with more space in between because I needed more room for my handwriting.

I learnt how to use the CCTV and the magnifying glass and then I realized how it improved my near and distance sight. Then I learnt to read and write and participated in class: before it was very difficult to stand still and just watch what was going on. I spent most of my time without any tasks, circulating around the class and the teacher complained a lot about my behaviour, because I was always fighting with my classmates and did not do any activities.

When I learned how to use the resources and the 4x CCTV, I used them at school, at home, in the street where I live, I read signs, street names, and my books with the magnifying glass. My teacher knew the resources that I would begin to use in class to comply with both my class and home assignments. With my help, all my classmates tested my resources as well, I told them how to use them to read what was written on the blackboard, books and notebooks. They were amazed when they experienced how the letters got bigger and closer. I taught them how to regulate this device to see distant points, how the letters got blurred when the distance was shorter, how to read with the magnifying glass following the line. It was very cool! They tried the CCTV and the magnifying glass and were not surprised when I started out to read at short and long distances. Also my teacher tried the resources she knew I would use in the classroom. From then on, I learned to read and write, because I could see what was written on the blackboard and in my books.



During the activity we did with my classmates to let them to know the resources in the classroom, they took pictures and also when I was learning how to use them. At school, things improved a lot with my glasses, the CCTV and the magnifier. I also miss less classes and I have never repeated a year. Now all the teachers know the resources I use each year when I change grade and the school itself has improved so that I can learn just like my classmates.



## The story of my inclusion

Miguel José Taveras Benítez, 13 years old, Dominican Republic  
2 nd year, "San Pablo" Secondary Reformed Educational Centre.

Once upon a time there was a young boy called Miguel Taveras. He had studied in “Las Abejitas” (Little Bees) School. My experience in that school was learning to read and write in braille. Thanks to my good behaviour I got good marks. I also learnt to respect my classmates at the Educational Centre, I have always got well with them. Since the first day I was well received by the staff and that allowed me to feel confident. When I left the School for the Blind I was rather afraid, taking into account that I would be the first blind student and the teachers did not know how to work with me in the curricular areas, so that I would beat the same level of the other students. I learnt about values and the importance of learning about disability and the value I already have as a person. I stood out as a leader and everybody respected me. Everything has been easier because I count with my family support, especially my parents’ assistance and besides the Educational Centre provides me with the resources I need to follow all my classes.

I feel that I must be an example to the society and show how to respect teachers, parents and the other persons in the community where I live and participate in church to become a person with social life.

I was in this school up to the 6th degree, and I always saw the satisfaction of the teachers, the headmistress and my classmates because of the work I did there. I left my beloved school feeling nostalgic. In spite of being a small school I felt it as if it were a big one because of the understanding, support and motivation I got there, as they always tried to find the best way to back my strong points and to strengthen my weak ones, and where I learnt that studying is the foundation of my future.

After that, I went with my father to look for another school to go on studying. It was “Sao Paulo” Reformed School, the coordinator, Yoyani, paid attention to my father’s request and

received me. I also participated in the conversation to show him and the rest of the staff that I was able to be there, even without the guidance of the resource centre and their lack of experience about working with blind students. Those were not reasons for rejecting me. I explained that later on, and I also told them that an itinerant teacher would come to offer them a workshop about the necessary adaptations and strategies. After that, seeing my readiness to learn, the mathematics teacher was motivated to help me. She used to come to my class to read me the contents of the lessons and I went to her classroom when she was not able to come to mine. My school is a Christian Evangelical one. I started there to know the Lord's word, and finally I accepted Him.

From the very beginning I was accepted by my classmates who cooperate by reading the classes, organizing groups and other ways to help me; in this way they motivate me to participate in class, as I am as responsible as them. I also have orientation and mobility classes, although at first I did not like this. I even broke my cane in order to have a reason not to use it again. But my teacher's perseverance motivated me to never leaving it far from me, since it is what allows me to travel safely in my familiar environment and at school. I must take a "motoconcho", because the school is far from home, but sometimes I have had difficulties to go due to money problems that prevent me from using this service.

This year, this cycle of my life will come to an end because I must go to another school to finish my secondary studies, as here they only offer up to the second year. My plan is to register in an English one, since in the future I would like to study social communication, my passions are reading, singing, socializing and to go on learning. And I am sure that in the other school everything will go on more than well, as I am more mature and responsible of my obligations. I am sorry to leave the friends I made in this school because they have always been good to me and even when I miss the classes they call me to know what happens and to tell me the homework I have to do.

Finally I want to thank the support of the educational centres where I have been studying and where I have left positive traces.

## Luiz Fernando's experience

Luiz Fernando Victor Vicencio, 11 year old, Brazil  
6th Grade, "Wilson Ramos Brandao" Basic School II

I was born after five and a half months of pregnancy and was kept in the incubator for two months at the Regional Hospital. It happened that the blindfold came out of my left eye and I lost my sight. And, with the right one, I see eighty percent without my glasses. After sixty days I was discharged and for a week I was with my father and mother. And then I got asthma and bronchitis, they took me to Santa Casa, where I remained for another week in the oxygen balloon. Then I was discharged. And I was taking medicines and oxygen early in the morning and in the afternoon. I was having a bad time. I had to go at least five times for the same problem to the Santa Casa during my first two years of life. One day I was rather ill and my grandmother took me to church with her. At the end of the service she asked for Brother John's special prayer, he did so and anointed me with oil and I never suffered another crisis again. God had set me free.

At school they bully me and call me X9, blind and crippled. On the first day of school I wanted to be in the sixth B classroom with my friend Andrei, but I was sent to sixth C. I have good news: my teachers are nice to me, the best are Rafael (maths), Luíza (English), David (English substitute), Neto (history) and Junior (physical education substitute). I always give candies to them. Once Professor Laércio came, he was very, very angry. I managed to be the first to finish the lesson (I always got good marks that year). But I got 1.5 out of 5 just because I had finished. The teacher's explanations came after the test. Another problem was that the exam on the blackboard had been half erased and that was the reason why I got that low mark on this occasion.

## My experience in inclusion

Milagros Guadalupe Villa Aguilar, 13 years old, Paraguay.

8th Grade, "Cap. Agustin Fernando de Pinedo" National School .

During the first day I did not speak at all because I was new.

In March I started making some friends. They asked me many questions and they were very nice with me. The teachers also treated me very well.

I am a student at “Agustín. Fernando de Pinedo” National School and I am in 8th grade, morning shift. My favourite subjects are History and Spanish. Mathematics is the only one I do not like.

My classmates have always been very good with me.





**Category III :**  
**Boys and girls 14, 15, 16 and 17 years old.**

## Omar's experience



Omar Alejandro Contreras Caballero, 17 year old, El Salvador.  
He has just finished the secondary stage in the "Santo Tomas de Aquino" Dominican School, at Santa Ana.<sup>10</sup> His story was the winner in this category.

When I was two months old, I was diagnosed with severe hydrocephalus and I had to undergo an emergency operation to place a shunt system. After that, I was in rehabilitation for four years before being able to crawl and speak and achieve the best possible development.

Thanks God, I was able to live a normal life, although I could not achieve my dream of being part of a football team, because my mother was afraid of my being hurt or that the shunt system might be damaged by a stray ball or a blow. In spite of all that I was a happy child. As I could not be part of a football team, I got into the basketball one and

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<sup>10</sup> Note of Omar: I had started the secondary education at the Santa Ana School and at first they offered me a great support, but afterwards I was told that I would not be able to study there. So I went through the first year thanks to a special virtual program of the Education Ministry and for the second year I was accepted at the "Santo Tomás de Aquino" Dominican School at Santa Ana.

we reached the level of sub champions at national level. I love sports, I watch football matches on the TV and go to the stadium to support my favourite team, FAS. I also go out with my friends, and to the cinema, etc.

But at 13, I started to have frequent headaches and dizziness. We did not know why. At first, we thought all was a consequence of stress, originated by some emotional issues, but in the end, it turned out that the valve I had had since I was 2 years old, was beginning to fail and the same day of my 14th birthday, I underwent an emergency replacement. Due to the surgery, some capillary vessels in my brain were broken, and the bleeding made me feel awfully bad and I almost died. Next day, I entered the operating room again, they added an external valve to drain the blood, but the clots obstructed it and two days later it had to be replaced. Thank God, this new one worked well and though I had to be two despairing weeks without moving to avoid it falling out, since it had been just pushed through a hole made on the top of my head. When it was taken away, I felt relieved. The problem was that two big clots that put pressure on my optic nerve caused my becoming practically blind and almost unable to move. When I left the hospital, I was shaking all over because I had remained in bed for more than a month and the surgery procedures and blood loss had left me very weak.

After leaving the hospital, I was depressed and cried a lot, because of the radical change my life had suffered. It was very difficult to accept the idea of having lost my sight and that then I would neither be able to play football nor watch the games again.

But all these did not prevent me from willing to go on studying: three months later I went to speak with the Brother Rector of the school where I had studied for many years and asked him to give me an opportunity to go on studying there without losing any year, in order to keep my life-long classmates. Luckily, he was very good and accepted to keep my old marks and, in that way, I was able to finish the eighth grade and then, the next year, follow the ninth, with all the necessary adjustments to make things easier for me. At the beginning, it was difficult because I was not totally well. I was able to walk, but my body shook and I was just able to identify silhouettes if they were close, I was neither able to read and write nor walking alone, since I had just begun my rehabilitation at the "Eugenia de Dueñas" Centre, where I went once a week. It was very difficult for me to go there, because I had to get up very early,

as it is rather far from home and there was a lot of traffic on the roads. It was very tiring but there was no choice, because in my country this is the only place where you can find professionals and resources to rehabilitate persons with visual disability.

I adapted slowly and at school I was allowed to record the classes and the teachers devoted part of their free time to explain the lessons to me when I did not understand something and to help me to prepare my tests. My mathematics teacher, who was a Marist Brother, even devoted part of his afternoon time to explain and teach me and test me. My classmates also helped me, especially one of them, who is my best friend, who was taking care of me most of the time. And in this way, I was able to finish my ninth course. My lowest mark was an 8!

I was very happy and proud of what I had achieved, because, in spite of the difficulties, with a lot of sacrifices and commitment, I had entered the secondary school and would be able to go on with my long-life classmates. But at the end of 2015, there was a change in the school authorities, and the Marist Brother who remained named as headmaster a person who did not belong to the congregation. In November, he called my mother and told her they were not going to enrol me in 2016, because I would not be able to study with them, although the lowest mark I had got during last year was 8. He insisted that they could not register me and that it would be more convenient for me to go to another school because of my health problems. He thought I would not be able to go on there as they had neither proper facilities nor competent teachers. This was very strange: I had been there for a whole year without any important problems. My mother did not know what to do. She did not want me to realize what was happening, since I was very happy and ready for the secondary school, and also because I had already suffered many problems. She did not want to add new challenges to all my difficulties. Eventually, after begging a lot, she succeeded in convincing him to let me go on as a listener student only, as my most important wish was to go on with my classmates, and it would not be fair to be denied this after all my efforts to pass my exams. She asked the Ministry of Education to accept me in a virtual program for adults that had not been able to study at the usual age, so that I would not be out of the system. Thanks to have been included in that program I was able to finish my first secondary school year and continue working with my classmates as a mere listener.

At the end of the year, my best friend failed in some subjects and the rules of the school did not

allow him to take the tests again and pass to the second year, so he had to search for another school. Besides, I had already realized that they had not accepted me as a regular student in the school where I had studied my whole life and that my mother had to pay the full tuition even if I was not included in the students list and they did not evaluate me. I went to school only to share a social life, and that is how I arrived at “Santo Tomás de Aquino” Dominican School. My mother asked the Headmistress if they would accept me as a listener. The Mother at the head of the school asked “Why as a listener?” Then my mother told her what had happened in my former school and she answered that she would not accept me as a listener but as a regular student, because it was not possible to close the door to a person who, in spite of all the difficulties suffered, wanted to go on progressing. For her, what they had done at the other school was a sin! In that way I started my second year of the secondary school, as a regular student. She spoke with all the teachers to tell them about me and to explain the way they should help me and prepare the adjustments, and also with all my classmates and all the other students so that they could help and assist me as much as I might need. It was as if I had studied there all my life, and after the first day’s explanations, they treated me more than well, as if I had been there for many years. They even asked me just at the beginning how I managed to study and which was the best way to help me. They were always alert to everything I needed and made me feel at home. They joked to make me laugh. When I was going to pass anywhere, they left space open for me. Even other students from different classes asked me if they could help me and how. The teachers were also attentive and looked for ways to make me sit for my exams. When I had to present what I had studied, at first, I felt nervous as it was the first year I was there, but gradually I was gaining confidence thanks to the support of my classmates; sometimes when I was silent, they encouraged me to speak and inspired me to increase my efforts. They never left me alone and if by chance, they did, because they were late or had a lot of work, they argued among themselves and apologized for having left me alone. The teachers also were always ready to make me feel comfortable and as if I had been in that school since my early years. They also allowed me to record the classes and each teacher appointed a boy or a girl among the most responsible and more hard-working in the class for my mother to make photos of their copybooks to turn them into word documents for me to study with my computer and JAWS. The evaluation days, my

classmates helped me to revise my lessons before sitting for my exams.

At the beginning, we did not know how I would be able to take the Learning and Aptitudes Test for Students who Have Finished their Mid-level Education (PAES). In my country, it takes into account the following subjects: Mathematics, Social and Civic Sciences, Language, Literature and Natural Sciences. My mother and the headmistress had a talk with Francisco Azahar, from the Ministry of Education, and thanks to him, the venue where I sit for this exam was adjusted to my needs, so I would not face any difficulty. They also appointed a teacher who was able to read the questions in a proper way. In this way, I was able to take my exam and got very good marks. In this school, with the support and help of the Mother Headmistress, the teachers, my classmates, my mum and my family, I was able to finish my courses with good marks and I graduated with honours! I hope that I soon will be registering at the University to study Psychology.

Now, I feel proud of what I have achieved, but at the same time, I feel committed to help other people who may be living similar or even worse moments than my own. With my experience, I have realized that most of the institutions and persons who reject people with disabilities, and especially, with visual disability, are afraid of making mistakes and to be prosecuted. Or maybe, they neither know how to relate with us nor our ability to succeed. But I tell them that we do have the capacity and that we are also able to contribute a lot to the community. The only thing we need is to be given an opportunity and the necessary support to achieve what we want. It is a shared job for us, disabled persons with our families and society in general.

I am very thankful to all those persons who have given me their support especially at the “Santo Tomás de Aquino” Dominican School. For me they are an example of how an educational institution must be, because, they do not only accept me, but they accept children with other sorts of disabilities without any discrimination. It is not easy to get ahead, but with faith in God, it is not impossible. I hope that in the future there may be more venues and persons ready to support people with impairments, because just like me, any person may acquire a disability at any time during his or her life without expecting it at all. That is why we

must be sympathetic and offer our support. Tomorrow it might be us or someone in our family who would be requiring support!

## Alamna's experience



Alamna Daniela Batista Acevedo, 16 years old, Dominican Republic.  
4th Year, "The Americas" morning shift, Secondary School, Manoguayabo,  
Educational District 15 05, Santo Domingo.

My name is Alamna Daniela Batista. I am a young girl, 16 years old, and have low vision as a result of a brain tumor that affected my sight.

I am very thankful, first of all to God, and then to the “Olga Estrella” National Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired as they, under the responsibility of the teacher Rosa Cañdida Ortiz Go´mez, offered me the occasion of expressing myself and develop in an effective way, in spite of my visual condition. The teacher serves this centre where I am included, so in this way my teaching-learning process is as efficient as my sighted classmates’ one.

My visual secondary level development might have been difficult, and in fact it was, but with the Lord’s help and the support of my family, the teachers I have here and the itinerant one too, of my classmates and my friends, I am in a position to say that everything is OK or even very good for me. In the classroom I always seat in the first row, following the advice of my teacher Rosa Cándida Ortiz G., because from there I can see the blackboard better by means of a device provided by the National Resource Centre. Without it I would not be able to do my tasks in such an efficient way.



My academic development is very good; I have no problem with my tasks, my work, etc. My teachers know about my visual condition, and therefore, most of the time, when they write on the blackboard they use big characters, following the advice or my itinerant teacher. They also write with very legible traces and sometimes, they dictate me the contents, if necessary.

Before, teachers wrote on the blackboard using colours as green and red, that did not help me. I can see well black and blue and with the guidance of teacher Ortiz, this has improved a lot.

I have very good relations with my classmates, I have no problems and I get on well with all of them. Everybody helps me if I cannot see a number on the blackboard and group activities develop normally. Reading books and dictionaries is somewhat difficult for me, but for this I have a magnifier that was given to me by teacher Ortiz and it helps me.

On many occasions it is difficult for me to cross the street because I live and study in a very busy area with lots of shops and the sidewalks are full of street vendors (they sell cell phones, junk food, groceries, fruit, etc.) and there are many cars that offer their services to people to take them to areas further away than the public transport limits.

It is more difficult for me, because I cannot see well the TV screen. I must sit on the table to see something, and I take it as part of my condition as a low vision person.

I just hope to keep a good level of health this year to be able to go on with my goals.

I am not irresponsible in my studies, I always take care of my homework or my tasks and everything that has to do with them. I want to be an example for those who face similar challenges, so that they do not stop because of their visual condition.

I do not feel that to live with a disability is a problem for me. I am a young able person and want to contribute with something good to my country and to society in general while knowing that it is worthwhile struggling for it.

If God wills and allows it, I will grow and become a professional with a degree or some special skill.

Thank God, I have no issues with people, and they do not need to scold me for my behaviour in the classroom. I feel it is reasonable to consider myself a good and peaceful person.

## The story of my life as an included student



Luis Mario Cuevas Durán, 15 years old, Dominican Republic  
5th Grade, ICM "El Tamarindo" Primary School.

Hello! My name is Luis Mario Cuevas Durán. I was born on April 16, 2003 in the city of Tierra Nueva at Jimaní. My parents are Antonia Margarita Dura'n and Alcides Cuevas Floria'n.

I had not any visual problem at birth, or at least, they did not identify any visual impairment then and therefore, for the first time in 2009, I went to the public school "Martín Cuevas" at Tierra Nueva. I was 6. My uniform consisted of a blue shirt and khaki trousers. At that time, my preferred classmates were Alexander Floria'n and Ravel Pe'rez

My dear teacher Doly realized I had some difficulties when she wanted me to draw. For example, she noted that to be able to work, I had to get very close to the table. Afterwards, with her help, my parents started to have me assisted at the Special Institute for Visual Impairment, at Barahona. Some months passed and I continued to assist regularly to preschool classes in spite of my visual issues, under the special care of my parents, my teacher and my classmates.

At the end of the year, I was promoted to the first grade of the primary stage. On that occasion, my teacher, Fátima Pérez, awoke in me the wish of studying notwithstanding my visual condition, but I was not making as much progress as others in reading and writing.

Despite that, I was able to go on participating till the fourth course. On many occasions I felt that I had been promoted out of pity. I had to stop assisting to my classes because of my sight's deterioration. Then I moved with my mother to the capital city of my country and we lived at the Tamarindo Community.

In 2016, I entered the 4th grade of primary education when I was 11 years old. The school was "El Tamarindo" ICM, and I was well received there by the teacher, by my classmates and also by the authorities and the staff in general. However, I must admit that I was afraid that the boys would show reject or be bullying me because of the glasses I had, and because I was not able to read and what I wrote was not legible. I was scared, but the situation was just the opposite of what I had imagined: they showed affection without pity for my visual condition, and they respected me and offered me their friendship and help. I was delighted with the love, the tenderness, the commitment and welcoming of my teacher and the will to help me progress in reading and writing. This was my main concern, as I was rather anxious just at the possibility of being asked to read in front of my classmates or having to lend my copybook as they would not be able to understand my poor handwriting. But the teacher Patricia Javier, very kindly offered to help me every morning to overcome this shortcoming. I accepted with pleasure because she was showing respect instead of pity. I remember her telling me: "You must be as responsible as the other students. Here everybody has the same rights, but also the same duties".

I endeavoured to learn without letting myself overcome by my visual difficulties. I understood that I had to struggle against the obstacles I would find, especially, because of my shyness.

I always work hard to have my tasks ready, I participate in different activities and go to school regularly. I want to progress, I do not want to remain behind thinking that I will not achieve what I want. Each of my teacher Patricia's motivating words and the trust she has in me encourage me to go on struggling. I know I will succeed. Besides, I have the support of the "Olga Estrella" National Centre for the Visually Impaired, which has been a great help in my life as it provides me not only with the technical resources I need to make my work easier, as a magnifier, a microscope, a reading desk, a copybook with appropriate lines, but also with emotional support. I am valued and they show me respect, they motivate me to go on. Andrea Osorio is the teacher that follows my studies both at home as at the educational centre. She is very sweet and she always tells me

that with my effort I will succeed. I entered this centre in 2015. When many people thought I would not have any chances, this centre opened its doors to light and hope.

I have earned my classmates' respect, not by relying on their work but by doing my best to accomplish my tasks. I love to have oral lessons. I did not take them in my former school. Here I have learnt a lot and this has helped me to overcome my fears. My mother helps me to prepare visual resources for my presentations and this makes me feel sure and calm. My teacher says: breath, relax and let it go out. My favourite subjects are mathematics and natural sciences.

Every day I pray for God's help to go forward and do not let fear stop me. I feel that with my mum I have a great obligation to go on struggling. She believes in me. Her love and commitment and support encourage me to progress. I know that my vision problem will not disappear magically. I also know that I will have sad moments and I will not be able to avoid them, but what I do know for certain is that I will not allow that to prevent me to pursue my goals. I also know that it will not be easy, that I will find many difficulties along the way. But, you know what? I am relaxed because I count with the help of the wonderful people the Lord has put on my way: my mother, my teachers, my classmates, the "Olga Estrella" Centre, all are part of that blessing.

## Alejandra's experience

Alejandra Gissel Dos Santos Martínez, 15 years old, Paraguay.  
9th Grade, "Gabriela Mistral" Private and Subsidized Basic School  
No. 4198.

My experience with inclusion at school has been the following:

I started attending schools for the blind, but during the preschool period I began with inclusion.

I had an excellent teacher. She knew nothing about the way to teach me, but she worked hard and learnt the braille system, which is the one we use for reading and writing, and she taught that to me perfectly. My classmates were kind and nice, and I became friend of a girl.

- First cycle: At the beginning I had to overcome a lot of obstacles. Due to the ignorance of the teacher, the first course was very difficult. She could not endure the noise of my typewriter and she was rough when she guided me. In spite of all this, I was able to establish a friendship relation with a classmate.

In the second course, I had both an excellent teacher and classmates and in the third one, I had the same teacher and almost the same classmates.

- Second cycle: It started very well. My teacher took care of me and my classmates, especially the boys, did the same.

The fifth and the sixth grades were very different, I felt I was away from the others. It was not like it had been before and because of that I wanted to go to another school. And so it was!

- Third cycle: In the seventh course, I went to "Gabriela Mistral". I found a group of excellent classmates and teachers, the headmistress included. I got used to them very quickly. It was not so hard, although it took me longer with the science teacher.

In the eighth grade I was fully adapted and at present I am in the ninth course. I am still in the same school with the same classmates. The director and some teachers change, but I am OK with all of them.

## My name is Piero Franco



Piero Neptali Franco Zapata, 16years old, Perú.

5th Grade, "Nuestra Señora del Consuelo" secondary education school

My name is Piero Franco and, since my birth, I knew I was different. My first surgery took place on my very first day of life, but it was not the last one. While I was growing they realized that there was something more and even stranger in me: I have CHARGE syndrome. It is a rare genetic syndrome caused by a mutation in chromosoma 8 of the CHD7 gen, especificaly, at the 8q12.2 region. The result of this is unilateral blindness by bilateral coloboma in my left eye and low vision in the right one. My intelligence has not been affected. In fact they have always called me genius, little professor, future Hawkins, etc.

My family has always wanted me to go forward and besides, together with the school, they taught me the most complex subject: it was not mathematics, but manners. Besides that, I was able to have a full life thanks to my family's and Camila's -my best friend- support. But I must say that a good teacher makes the difference and I got the best. She never taught at my school, but when I met her in 2013, I would have given my life for having her in it. And so it was: this person called Regina Claudia Arroyo Gonza'lez became my therapist and my second best friend. I explain why I say therapist: she teaches me orientation and mobility, because she likes it, and because I need it, and because I rejected any other form of help.



My passion, or rather, my obsession on medical questions almost restricted to genetics comes from the CHARGE syndrome.

Well, my life has not been easy at all, since the moment I started to walk at four up to having changed schools on multiple occasions. I have even been treated by society in an inappropriate way. I have had to struggle with all kind of incompetent teachers. They had aggressive or scary attitudes because I have had a bad behaviour. But, well, now everything is relatively well in my school. Everybody knows me and they know how to interact with me, although this was also a process. Once I hit a boy because I wanted him to stop harassing me and I was suspended, but everything is already fixed.

Now, let us begin with the most difficult and nicer part of all MY LIFE. Sometimes people, from children to teachers, start considering me a young teacher, sometimes they do not know how to interact with me. But all that made me stronger as a human being. Social inclusion was not easy, let alone nice, because people are not ready yet.

The first time I took a public bus was horrible, nobody listened to me and I was anxious. Afterwards, a boy, Regina's nephew, when we were out with her, kept on making hideous comments about my sight. Due to all these, I have always told myself that I was different and that my life would be different. Nevertheless I always had support. That is why I will be thankful for ever to all those persons who have always helped me and who will go on helping me, because this is just the beginning.

## Experiences in school inclusion

Miguel Elías Fuentes López, 17 years old, Guatemala.

2nd Basic Grade, "Santa Lucía" Educational Centre for Children with Visual impairment of the Distinguished Guatemalan Committee for the Blind and the Deaf.

I am visually impaired since birth. According to the physicians, my disability comes from the optical nerve which does not work properly. I started with my studies at 10. I entered the first primary grade at the "Santa Lucía" Educational Centre for Children with Visual Impairment.

I did all my primary years there. And this allowed me to understand that it is quite another thing to be in a centre that is exclusively devoted to blind persons, from studying in a place where there are only persons without any disability. I felt very well for being in this special centre for visually impaired children because of their way of treating us.

After leaving the "Santa Lucía" Educational Centre for Children with Visual Impairment, in 2016, I lived various experiences, some of them good and others, bad. When I entered the "Santa Sofía" private School for Boys and Girls I did not like so much to be there as I was used to the Santa Lucía Centre. My relations with the people who studied with me were bad. Everyone around me was distant because they had never had a classmate with disability. After some time, the relations began to improve, compared with the beginning in 2017.

The first day, as it happens in every educational centre, I met the teachers who were going to work with me and the classmates I was going to have during the whole year. For two weeks I did not feel comfortable.

After that, I began to make friends in order not to be as lonely as during the two previous weeks. My positive point is that I socialize with people rather easily, both with adults and young persons. I do this not to look antisocial.

My relationship with the teachers has always been good, from the beginning of the year to its end. They knew how to deal with a person with visual disability, because they have been working there for several years and during that time, they have had three students with this sort of impairment. They knew how to explain each topic and they did this in a way I was able to understand.

I had thought that after leaving the Santa Lucía Centre I would not be able to study in another school because I had got used to the environment there, and had only been living with children and youth with the same sort of disability I have. Then, I realized that it is possible to remain in a place I had never been before, since as I have already said, my relation with the Santa Sofía School had improved a lot, even more than I had expected.

I had supposed that my classmates would step away after realizing how a person with visual disability works, but no, it was not so! They always looked for a way to cooperate and learn how to live together with this kind of persons. Thank God, I have never suffered any sort of abuse or discrimination; on the contrary, I was well treated by them and also by the teachers.

I applied almost the same system I had in the Santa Lucía Centre, because I was decided to go on forward without ever stopping. I practiced physical activities, cooking, art, etc. My inclusion was not as bad as I had believed it would be. During the half an hour breaks, I always had someone to accompany me all the time. I was never excluded of any activity and I felt rather happy.

In this school I had a love relation with a girl. Her name was Alejandra and this was a complement to my happiness of being there. I cannot say that I had bad experiences as it was exactly the contrary. This year was the best for me as I lived some moments I had never thought I would get.

My life there was practically similar to that of persons with low vision, as I always had someone close to me. I participated in all the activities, not only the extra ones, but also the curricular ones. Physical education classes took place in a field outside the school because the building was not big enough. I had no problem with guides, because in every class there always was someone ready to help me. The teachers have never needed to appoint guides for me.

I left this school in 2017 and in 2018 I came back to the “Santa Lucía” Educational Centre for Children with Visual Impairment. It was not easy for me to adapt myself again to the change, although I had been for many years there. The subjects are somewhat different. But now, I feel OK again about having come back (to the Santa Lucía Centre). I succeeded in getting used again to the school and to the characteristics it had always had. I feel at home because of all the support that is always offered to me by the teachers and by the Distinguished Guatemalan Committee for the Blind and the Deaf. I have progressed in several aspects of my life. I thank all the persons I have already mentioned because they have always been with me and had helped me to develop and become an independent person.

## **My experience about inclusion**

Liz Johana García Rivas, 16 years old, Paraguay.

7th Grade, "Republic of Bolivia" Basic School No. 1609.

My name is Liz Johanna, I am 15 years old. I was born on May 29th.

The name of my school is "Republic of Bolivia" and all my classmates treat me well. Sometimes, they leave me alone during the break, but they are almost always with me.

I have 9 teachers and they are good to me and I get along well with the students in other courses.

The teacher who I get on better with is the Sciences and Health one. Her name is Graciela. And the subject I like more is Ethics.

We, persons with disabilities, have the right to study. I like to do that and I am responsible.

## Renato's experience

Renato Henrique Gomes Silva, 14 years old, Brazil.

7 th Grade, "Brigadeiro Tobias" II Basic Learning State School

After my blindness was confirmed, the Ophthalmological Hospital referred me to ASAC (Sorocabana Association for Helping the Impaired), to have my development monitored. I understood what they do at ASAC, there I learn how to use a computer and mathematics, and actual cooking with kitchen elements and I am perfecting my braille in the area of roman numerals. In Orientation and Mobility I learned the use of a cane, but I will return when I get older, at about sixteen, to learn the way to take buses, cross the street and go wherever I want. I am learning to write my name with a pen, because I have to renew my Identity Card, as the one I have is from my early years, and there they said that I would be classified as illiterate because I do not know how to sign my name, I think it is not right, it is even unfair, because I am literate, no doubt!

When I was 5 years old, I went to live at São José do Alegre in Minas Gerais, and studied at APAE (Parents and Friends of Persons with Disabilities), in a nearby city, Itajubá, where I learnt braille very quickly, but unfortunately I didn't have any adapted material. I was the first blind person to enter that school, my teacher went to São Paulo to learn braille, and this was very important for me. She worked with me for four years, we used the DOSVOX text editor, but we had neither a braille typewriter nor a braille frame, and a blind person once told me that even though I read braille I was practically illiterate, because I was only able to write by means of a computer and didn't know how to do that with a braille frame. That's when we started a campaign to buy a typewriter as I couldn't afford it. We moved to Sorocaba and we went on campaigning together with a group called "Mothers Courage" so we were able to buy the typewriter and a notebook. I went back to ASAC, I went to "Milton Leite" municipal school where a teacher taught me how to use the typewriter. I was also the first blind person to attend that school in order to go on with my learning.

I will tell you something that happened at “Milton Leite” school that upset me very much: a group of boys and girls made fun of me, they called me blind and they would hit me and make me little annoying things, like putting paper in my food and so I didn't eat for a long time for fear of being teased, and I was very sad. The coordinator talked to the boy's family, but it didn't work out, then, they suspended the boy for a week and he apologized to me because the school had asked him to do so, but I felt that this was not what he wanted to do.

I am now studying at “Brigadier Tobias State School”, and believe me, I was also the first blind student in that school. I was very well received by the board, I have many friends who help me in group activities and other things. There I underwent a strange situation: a friend wanted to guide me and I did not accept because I was able to do that alone, and she was sad because of me, and I tried to explain to her that I was neither getting away from her nor ignoring her. I just wanted to do everything alone and learn. Things are not always good. The students in my class last year made me feel sad and devastated, and my mother fought hard to get an auxiliary teacher who understood braille, and she did, and got a resource room in my school as well. My mother has struggled to help me since I was quite young. It is thanks to her being a warrior, that I have my equipment for my studies.

Yes, I can!



Génesis María González De los Santos, 14 years old, Dominican Republic  
6 th Grade, "Republic of Guatemala" Primary School

I was born on March 16th, 2004. My parents are Yudelka de los Santos and Eduardo de Jesu's Gonza'lez.

My first experience of inclusion was at "Los Cubanos" Divine Infant Educational Centre. Joselyn was the name of my teacher. She had not much experience in working with children like me. Mayra was the Director and she scolded me each time I used an inappropriate word, yes, it was because I used them a lot. I remember that the funniest thing I did in that school was a sleepover and I also played a lot with my friend David who helped me a lot.

Animirca was my first itinerant teacher. She used to bring braille books for me and she started to teach me how to write with a Perkins Brailier. The first word I wrote was "wing" . She came home on Tuesdays and Thursdays, to check my progresses in reading and writing. She taught me the geometrical forms and daily activities like dish washing.

But after some time, I was slow in my studies and I was not able to learn anything. Therefore, I had to attend "Olga Estrella". I arrived there at 8. This is an educational centre for children with visual impairment. I got up at 6 in the morning to go there. I met many friends and the teacher Roy worked on physical education with me, every Tuesday and Thursday. We went out for breaks and after that, we read and wrote with the teacher Juliana. I also met Milena, who taught me reading and writing and the teacher Cándida,



who taught me daily activities.

When I arrived at school, I had arepas for breakfast, chocolate and cookies and oak. I took my afternoon snack with my friends in the dining-room and for lunch we had rice with codfish and rice with beans. After lunch, we drank cold water and took a rest, we slept till 2.00 p.m.

Arismendy, one of my friends, wanted to talk about Jesus. At that time, I also met Johan and Bryan who still are my friends.

The teacher Juliana knew that I was able to go to a regular school and she did not want me to take the other courses there. She asked to have me integrated with sighted children. I told her that this is the only school that works with disabled children and I did not want to leave it, but I had to say goodbye to her with a big hug. And my mother took me to the “Republic of Guatemala School” and there I started the third course.

Then, I met teacher Lucía. She helped me all the time. Also teacher Sonia welcomed me with presents and she asked my friends to help me. I had never imagined that in the third course they would be receiving me like this, with such affection. Daniela was one of my classmates and we did many things together.

She told me tales in the so called “I play and learn corner”. We copied every class and I remember when they celebrated my tenth birthday. I wished that all my friends were supportive and helped me. I passed my exams with 100.

I also remember that Pedro and Pastora brought me the materials to help me to learn. I felt that I could get higher. My books encouraged me to achieve my goals.

I suffered many conflicts in the third course together with teacher Lucía and Yaosca, the itinerant one. They helped me to understand that in spite of all that, I was able to progress. They wanted the best for me.

During the fourth course, Agustina was my teacher. She was rather demanding and I had to do my best to pass to the fifth course. At that level I met Wenyelin, a loyal friend, who helped me with my tasks. It was very nice to meet her.

Yaosca, my itinerant teacher, has offered her support to me from the third course up to now, she has never got tired of helping me. She is a person that the Lord put in my way and I love her as if she were my mother. I feel that I always must listen to her advice, because she encourages me to go forward and with my sight on Jesus, my Saviour and King.

Now I am in the sixth course, and I am very happy because it is the last one of the primary school. I am glad to see my old friends and my teacher Dominga Alcántara and now my only wish is to approve my national tests, with joy and emotion. I want to pass to the seventh course and I will succeed. With God's guidance, I will.

My father has always wanted me to be an excellent girl. I try to follow my teachers' and my parents' advice in order to have a better future. My yearning is to be someone better in the world.

Yes, I can!

## **My inclusion experience in the English School, A.C.**

José Manuel Lastra Cardiel, 17 years old, Mexico.

1st course, "English School, A.C", Secondary Education.

Since the moment I entered at 13 up to the present, and I am 17 now, I have had very good experiences at the English School, both with friends and as regards academic support. My friends and my teachers have supported me a lot during all these years. For example, in the classroom, they have helped me to read and answer some exercises in the books and my teachers have sat at my side to explain what was not so clear during the general explanations of topics and tasks. Especially in mathematics and physics, they guided me to solve a problem after some failures or used relief and objects if I could not understand at all.

How I have been developing both socially and academically in the English School is something I would like to share.

In August 2013, after enjoying very long summer holidays, it was quite new for me to enter a traditional school, after having been at a Montessori one. It was nice to be at a new school and meet new classmates, but it was not so easy to get used to the study adjustments in a traditional school after my former experience, where they had sensory material to study with.

The Asociación Ver Contigo (Seeing with You Association) offered all the teachers and headmistresses a lecture about what severe low vision is and about how much vision I still have. The school staff put on glasses that showed them how I see. There were also explanations about the ways in which I was able to learn more, and what adjustments had to be done at the time of explaining the lessons to me or for me to be able to do my homework, research or tests at the same time as my classmates, in the classroom, and which materials could be sent to Ver Contigo to have them printed in braille or embossed and when I could use my recorder in class. I began to feel at home in this school, I started to like it very much, I met many friends that

were in my intensive English class, and all this helped me to develop a lot. But this happened not only because of my friends, but also because my teachers' support was very good, they helped me a lot to learn English, not only in the intensive course but also during the sixth primary school year.

As at that time I knew nothing about computers, I worked with my slate and stylus, which since my childhood have helped me to learn braille and how to write and read by means of this system; later on I started to use a Perkins Brailier, but it was only to do my homework. With Laura Castañón, my Mathematics counsellor at the Association Ver Contigo, I used an abacus. At that time, I used to read English books, and the intensive English teacher would make us listen to CDs during the oral comprehension lessons and then she asked us if we had understood the texts. When I spoke Spanish or I did not find the words to express my ideas in English, she was ready to help me and to translate what I was saying in Spanish. Now I fully master this language.

As far as computing is concerned, I did not know how to write with a computer because I needed to learn how to type. With teacher Vianey Tuda's help this was possible. Thanks to her incredibly good teaching and her patience, I made progress little by little and mastered computing and English and both have been very useful for me because I achieved a lot from the sixth primary year till the first of high school, as more than half of the subjects I am learning now are in English and taught by foreign teachers.

When I entered the secondary level, it was a very nice phase for me. I got many more friends, I got a lot of support from my teachers and my classmates. The only burdensome thing was to have to change classrooms at the end of each class, but this was not a problem thanks to the help of my classmates and my orientation and mobility teachers from Ver Contigo, where I go twice a week in the afternoon since I was three years old. They helped me to learn where the classrooms were. My classmates took turns every day to go with me to the morning classes, and thanks to that, I was able to learn by heart the school layout and this was my greatest achievement in the field of independence, because I did not need now to have come one with me to go from one classroom to another to attend the next class.

Mr. Andi Dondlson, an American teacher, was the kindest and dearest one at the English

School. He taught me Geography and helped me a lot to understand the lessons with his incredible way to teach, his pleasure in doing so and his calling for this task. He was keen to help me to get good marks in this subject, he made a great effort to prepare the adjustments I needed to succeed at the same pace as the other students; he made my relief maps so that I was able to touch and know where the countries are. He also advised me to have a braille line which has a bluetooth connection with a tablet or computer, something rather groundbreaking for me, as thanks to it, I am living an era in which technology is good because it allows us to study and understand the subjects in an easier and faster way.

That is why I went to Madrid, Spain, in November 2014, to look for a braille line or something that gave me more independence to study. ONCE (the Spanish National Organization of the Blind) showed it to us. I saw it for the first time in Tifloinnova, an exhibition of a huge quantity of devices, software and equipment that help visually impaired persons to access to everyday activities, for example, screen readers for smart phones, QR scanners, the braille line, etc. It was then that I started to realise how useful and beneficial technology is, not only for fun, but for everything you can think about, from fruitful things like reading to business work as data administrator, accountant and many more uses.

I studied with my braille line, with my iPad, and, for mathematics, I had my laptop to write and solve problems with, but generally, for the other subjects I used my iPad with the braille line to take notes, answer questionnaires and do my homework. The teachers helped me to take note of the questions: they dictated them to me so that I was able to write them, and that is why the iPad is an essential tool for me, because forgetting it means that I do not have my copybook.

When I passed to the second year, I had the company of a member of Ver Contigo, Ana Laura Sandoval, my counsellor: I started with her and she was a very good teacher, her calling was teaching and she helped me a lot to get ahead especially in Mathematics. If I compared her with my other counsellors, she was more patient to explain things.

During that year, Mathematics was a nightmare for me, neither because of lack of preference nor adjustments: I was not able to understand in spite of all the explanations of my teacher, Cecilia Talamás, and of my second counsellor, Carolina Hernández, who was with me during

the classes to help me with the subjects. That is why I started to use the screen reader JAWS with Lambda, a mathematics editor that allows visually impaired persons to make the topics easier by means of braille. It has the advantage that all the signs are compatible with the braille line and with the number keyboard in the computer and its integrated calculating typewriter. This helped me a lot to understand “Baldor” mathematics better, even if I could not sleep because I was busy with my homework and could not get a good rest. This caused me stress, but these moments were very positive, because they actually helped me to progress and learn what I know now.

I had two stressful years, due to mathematics tasks. I was not progressing well and because of that I had to repeat Mathematics II, when I was in the third year. Then after another stressful year, I finished my secondary level, subsequent to my passing the extraordinary mathematics test. My best moment was when they gave me the piece of news of having passed it!

I started with the prep school and three boys and I am preparing mathematics with the teacher, Laura Ramírez. She is a very good teacher because of the technique she employs for teaching. She is very patient and she explains things in a very detailed way, so that we can learn more quickly.

I also have two hours of mathematics counselling or to review all the subjects with my counsellor, Mirma Vallejo, from Ver Contigo. All the other users of this foundation and me, love her very much. She knows us since our childhood and loves us as much as we love her. And the truth is that with my age today, I am 17, I am getting ahead quite well. I am progressing in all the subjects because technology and my counsellors and teachers have helped me a lot and my exchange with my classmates has made me develop my self-esteem and I have more friends. Thanks to that, I feel very happy at the English School and I appreciate their long support given to me during these four years up to now. I feel that this time has been very nice and useful and has made me meet many friends. I have grown psychologically and emotionally, not only in my studies but also in my relation with friends and my family. And that is why I thank the English School. I include also the guards that receive me every day and take care that no cars park in the place where I get out of the car to walk by myself to my

classroom. I thank them because I have had a very good inclusion experience with my friends, my teachers and headmistress and so...

Thank you very much, English School!

## Experiences in school inclusion

Carlos Roberto López Menchú, 15 years old, Guatemala  
2nd Basic Grade, “Santa Lucía” Educational Centre for Children with Visual Disability of the Distinguished Guatemalan Committee for the Blind and the Deaf.

My parents were sad when I was born, because they have never had a child with visual impairment and thought: “Which future will he have?”

As time went by, I entered the Santa Lucía School, in the area of early intervention, when I was 9 months old and my mother tells me that there I was taught to move and they made me accomplish many activities.

After some years, when I was in the sixth primary grade, I was finally going to be integrated in a regular school and I was very anxious because I did not know what was going to happen. At the end of the school cycle, all my classmates and I, myself were very sad, because we did not want to leave school, but at the same time I was glad because I felt I was going to live a new experience.

When I entered the first basic course, at the beginning everything went very well for me because all my classmates helped me, they guided me to the place I wanted to go and talked with me. My recreation periods were happy moments because more than one talked to me and helped me.

But afterwards, when months went by, things began to change. My classmates were no longer good to me, they did not respect me and they felt pity for me. They hid my stuff, hit me and disparaged me, etc.

It was quite painful for me, because at that time I did not know what to do and felt desperate. But thank God, in spite of what was happening, I succeeded and finished the course with good marks. At the same time, I felt very depressed because I was getting more and more annoyed.



At the beginning of this year, I came back again to the Educational Centre for Children with Visual Disability “Santa Lucía” because I have been informed that they were going to implement the Basic Cycle. At that time I was very happy and since then, I felt better and calmer as I knew I was in a safe environment and that besides, there were people who did know how to work with a person with visual disability.

Now I feel very happy. I still remember those difficult moments at the other school. Well, there were many situations lived at that place which served me a lot to know how difficult school integration is. It is not easy at all. I also had special problems with the teachers, because some of them did not know how to explain things to me and others were not patient and talked to me in an angry tone.

One of the subjects that demanded me more efforts when I started my integration period was mathematics, as the teacher did not know how to explain me the topics and since then, the integration teacher had to explain to me all the topics we were seeing in class so that I could keep up with the others and not fall behind.

Another difficult subject was the computing class because all the students worked with the computer using their sight and I could not do that. The teacher told me that I had to work with the computer but the problem is that I cannot do that without using JAWS, so I was not able to do anything. Then I told my problem to my integration teacher and he told me not to worry about that, because he was going to solve the question. He had a talk with the teacher and they installed JAWS. I started to handle my computer and felt somewhat better. However, some tasks as Excel, Paint, the Notepad, etc., were more difficult for me. Some classmates annoyed me by saying that I was not doing my task well, but in spite of that, I kept on moving forward.

I remember that one day at school, I was walking with my cane and suddenly one of my classmates asked me to lend it to him. I asked why he wanted it and he told me it was for me to stay a while with him. I said no and did not give him my cane, so he tried to take it away from me by force. Finally the cane broke to pieces. I was

very worried because the cane is very useful for me. That same day they got a new one for me.

Sometimes I talked with my classmates but sometimes I was alone and had no one to talk to, but I did not think it was an important issue.

On the other side, there were tasks that were very difficult for me, as industrial arts, for example. The teacher put me to work on technical drawing, but he didn't know how to explain the matter to me so that I could draw, because there were a lot of graphics for sighted students to see how the designs and other visual objects were organized.

Finally, I did not learn a lot, because he only made me draw lines. He tried to make me draw with different colours, but the problem was that he did not know how to explain the use of each colour and then, he did not ask me to do some exercises because all of them were visual.

Some of the books I used at school were transcribed into braille but others were not. In principle, I got all the subjects dictated at school. But for example, I did not get calligraphy and stenography.

Integration was difficult for me, because it is a complex process and sometimes I wonder whether I will achieve full integration. However, this is a motive to go forward, as I know that nothing is impossible for blind people.

## Hugo's experience



Hugo Eduardo Ontiveros Celaya, 17 yeras old, Mexico.

12th module out of 21, "CECATI" Prep School No. 85

The beginning at the prep school, integrated with my classmates, was complicated, since they had met each other years ago and I was new in the group, but they never disparaged or criticised me. At that point inclusion with my classmates and my teachers started to be more evident.

At first, I had to explain my disability to my teachers, so that they would know the adjustments that had to be done for me to be able to work.

On that basis I got a positive answer from all the teachers as they either asked me about my needs or got information elsewhere. Therefore I was able to get a good education, but even so, I had to prove that I was strong to avoid bad things to happen. As time went by, I was getting integrated by means of tasks or team work. It was difficult at the beginning because they assigned me part of the work and it took me some more time, due to the fact that they did help each other and I was left alone to do my part. And that started to help me, because they began to see that I, even with a disability, could do it by myself, and eventually I did it either with or without help.

## Experience in school inclusion

Brandon Daniel Orozco Fuentes, 15 years old, Guatemala  
2nd basic course, “Santa Lucía” Educational Centre for Children with I  
Visual Disability of the Distinguished Guatemalan Committee for the Blind  
and the Deaf.

At the very moment of my birth, the doctor told my parents that their respective blood types were not compatible. About three years later, my aunt said to my parents that I was not able to see, since when I walked, I bumped a lot against the walls. The doctor confirmed to my mother that I had low vision and that she should register me at the “Santa Lucía” School. Since then, and for nine years, I was a student there.

In 2016, I left the “Santa Lucía” Educational Centre for Children with Visual Disability, because there were no more grades to go on in 2017, and then I started to go to a public school named “A.I.V.P.E.M.” Joint School. The first day I came back home crying because I did not like being there. It was very different from the school I was used to. The second day was complex because they generally used blackboards and other elements and I did not know how to manage them at all.

The teachers were very different. Some were known for having a good character, but some were very bad tempered. The rules were very strict and some attitudes were not allowed. Luckily, I never infringed a single rule as I had a good education with my former teachers.

Some things had changed. For example, there were new subjects which I knew nothing about, they also asked for materials and tasks I had never accomplished and new activities I would never have imagined.

I was on good terms with all the teachers with the exception of one: the music teacher, because she never explained well and she was very strict about everything, and the homework for her class was based on research and never on

practice, and besides, the only instrument we played was the recorder.

There were good persons at school, good classmates and more than that, good friends. At first it was difficult for me to make friends because they saw me as someone bizarre. Some came closer, but only did so to see what my disability looked like and in some cases, only because of their own interest. Then, after a short time, it was evident who were with me for their own interest or advantage.

There were many activities in which I participated with my classmates. On one occasion, we went out to visit a park but nothing resulted as I had expected. It was a quiet day like all the others, everyone was with his own group, and me too! When we arrived at the park many boys went away from me because nobody wanted either to guide me or to be responsible of me, so I managed by myself although it was very difficult because the environment was very different of what I knew. The light was too bright and I could not see well. At a certain moment I felt quite lonely, as nobody was with me, and just then I remembered everything at “Santa Lucía” School and felt quite nostalgic.

After that, all of us went for a walk until food was ready. It was then that I almost fell on a few occasions, but I was lucky enough to keep my balance. I had the chance of trying a swing, but I must stress that it was in a very poor condition because a classmate heard it almost breaking down. When we came back they told us that the meal was ready, so we went to eat with no delay. After that we went to the bus and all along the way I listened to music, while watching the landscape. As soon as we arrived, I met my mother so I went home with her.

One day, on coming out from school, there were two gentlemen who were calling me. I went towards them although I did not trust them, and when I got closer they asked me if my name was John. I answered that my name is Brandon. Then they let me go, and luckily nothing wrong happened.

As months passed, everything became quieter. I passed the recreation time eating and watching the matches that were played or just listening to nonsense conversations.

On one occasion I felt attracted by a girl because she was very pretty and had a beautiful voice and besides, she was smart. But it was a pity she was very indifferent because of my disability. The last months in that school I forgot about her because she was one of those that were with me out of interest and I do not like persons like that.

There were many presentations we made together and she admitted that it was real fun. Everything was improvised but I always liked it because we had fun.

At the end of the school year, everything was rather well and it was not easy to say goodbye because during the last month I had already been on good terms with my classmates. Even though we are not in contact now, I am very happy to remember some good moments that will always be in my heart and mind, despite all that had happened, be it good or bad.

## Experiencias en la inclusión escolar

Sheily Mariany Orozco Fuentes, 14 years old, Guatemala.

2nd basic course, "Santa Lucía" Educational Centre for Children with Visual Disability of the Distinguished Guatemalan Committee for the Blind and the Deaf.

My visual problem is congenital, due to the fact that my parents blood was not compatible: My father's blood is 0 positive and my mother's is A negative. When my eldest brother Anthony was born, he presented a strange mark on his arm which kept changing its colour. My mother and my brother were kept in the hospital for about two weeks in order to examine them. As a precaution, they were injected and that injection altered the problem, and this time, my brother Brandon and I were born with visual disability.

My parents did not realize that we had that condition till I started to walk, because then I bumped against everything. Then, they consulted the physician as I did not fully open my eyes. It was then when they got an explanation and the prognosis that when I would arrive to my teens I was going either to lose my sight or to recover it slowly. Another chance was that I would remain just the same.

My first experience in educational inclusion took place when I was about three years old. The School name was "First of May", it was small and quiet. I did well because my teacher understood that I had a visual problem and offered me her help as it was difficult for me when they were writing on the blackboard and I also needed a guide when we had field trips. I still remember something of that time.

I started to study at an early age, because when my brother went to school I was sad and missed him a lot. Then I also began to go to school too. I made friends that helped me and also my teacher was quite patient as I had to come close to the blackboard to be able to read what was written on it.

My second experience was not so good and I understood that society was not quite ready to receive children with disabilities. The teachers I had then did not understand that there were tasks that I was not able to do and that light affected me in a certain way. That year I had more classmates: we were 21 boys and girls in the class. On that occasion I got along better with the boys than with the girls, the boys offered me their help and were kind. It was not so with the girls, they were only kind to me when they needed something, if they didn't, I felt they looked at me as if I had come from another planet.

I had some problems caused by my girl classmates, who did not remain calm and tried to attract everybody's attention. Once I had homework about a musician, it was a team work, but none of group I had to do my homework with, told me what to search for. That evening I struggled to write all the sources of information by myself. Next day, when I woke up, my right eye was swollen, therefore my mother said I could not go to school and then I sent my 15 point homework with my brother.

Next day, my teacher told me that I had got only 5 points and the others 15, as I had done almost nothing. The same day, my mother went to have a talk both with the teacher and the headmaster, to explain to them what had happened to me. Some of my classmates told me what my group had done and I was angry. It happened that they took my paper and presented it as if it had been theirs and did not mention my name at all. My mother settled the matter with the headmaster and I got my 15 points and they got only 5, because I had practically done all the work.

Something I did not like was that they only were with me for their own convenience and they made fun of me because of my visual impairment. I was sad because I missed the school and the people who had always been with me. I had not much company since I was used to discipline and I felt that it was weird to be in a place where they had not a proper behaviour. Besides my classmates made jokes all the time. But the activities were something new. For example, we organized a ball and an activity somewhat similar to the talent show. There were teachers who worked very well too and others gave as tips for our life.

During that year the routine changed. I went out earlier from school and came back a little later.



But, the school was close to my home, so I did not need to wake up so early. There was a dramatic change: the first days I did not even know which my class was. Little by little I had to learn where I was, as we, the students, had to go from one class to another. Later on, they changed everything and the teachers had to change classrooms. Each level had a specific place because it was a loss of time for us to go from one room to another. For me, some classes were complex because I did not understand much due to the way they explained the items. The teachers did not go into details.

Once we were taken to a concert. I was very happy because it was the first time for me. The singer was the one of “Redimidos”, an evangelical one. On this occasion I had a very good time. There were many activities, some were better than others.

Since my entering the “Santa Lucía” School, they have taught me to do things as a girl with visual impairment, because this is what I am. I have learnt to travel in the street, to cook, to sew, and many other things that will be helpful during my life. From the beginning of this project I was in every presentation of the choir. Some time ago, an orchestra constituted by the choir members was created. Each one was assigned an instrument according to his or her group. There are three groups and I belong to the third: Percussion. I know that now they are setting up a marimba group with four children who are totally blind and three who have low vision. It is a new challenge for me, as I am in that group too. I have always participated in musical activities. When I left the school, last year, it was more difficult for me to participate in presentations since I did not always get authorization to go and besides, the rehearsals took place on Saturdays.

Finally, I succeeded in going to the rehearsals not to lose this practice routine. The worse result was that I had to recover the habit of being with my friends as I spent the week days among sighted children. Now it is different, as there are new basic classes at school, then I got back to the routine of waking up early to go to school and I am again in a centre that, for me, is my second home.

## Astrid's experience

Astrid Araxi Ortiz Palacios, 15 años, Mexico.

2nd Semester, "Francisco J. Mujica" Prep School, Reynosa City,  
Tamaulipas .

Before going to the prep school, I was very anxious. My nerves made me also feel awfully insecure, due to the fact that it would be my first time at a regular school, and to be sincere, I was afraid of my teachers' and also of my classmates' possible answer to my condition.

The first time I came into the classroom, I realized that most of my classmates had been together for many years and were good friends, so they felt neither lost nor strangers. Unluckily, this was not my case. I felt shy, without words, and absolutely isolated. I could not believe that I was not even able to introduce myself to anybody (and that is not at all usual for me). I felt inside me the wish to meet the girl who sat behind me but I was also afraid of being rejected, something that I do not usually feel. Then I decided to do so, and it is not overemphasizing but her reaction made an impact in me because she made me know that I was a very interesting person and that helped me to overcome my fears.

I must say that I like very much to participate, to meet other people and let them meet me. Yet what I like best is to speak when I have a large public. So in the subjects in which I feel strong, I was participating as much as possible, and even more than the rest of the class.

To make my work easier for me and for my teachers, I am using my computer with its corresponding screen reader, and for the subjects less theoretical and more practical, or for those that imply many diagrams, as chemistry, mathematics and biology, I use embossed materials.

What I liked best during the first days was to meet and talk with different persons during the breaks, since I did not know the place at that time and many people were ready to help me. After that I was able to make my first friends, and they always tell me I am very cheerful and that I make them feel cheerful too.

As always, the readiness of my classmates and of all the members of the prep school to help me has made a strong impact on me because on many occasions they wanted to overprotect me and do everything for me. Then I had to show them that I was actually able to take charge of my own needs just as any of them, and that left them without words.

Sometimes, as every student does, we have tasks, or projects or assignments in teams and I repeatedly had the possibility of doing these activities at some classmate's house with the entire group, or simply working through the social media.

Thanks to my enthusiasm, I have devoted a lot of time to studying the subjects, and this has helped me to get 8, 9, or 10 as a result, although most of my marks are 10.

I feel flattered to know that my teachers like me and I play, make jokes and laugh with many of them.

In matters of art, I participate as a pianist and I play in presentations with musical groups of the prep school and also I go on learning outside school, so that I am able to show them my talent as a singer.

As regards that, I would like to tell a brief experience I had during my first participation as a pianist in the high school facilities: it was a traditional event related to Mexican revolution, during which I had been invited to play some classic pieces. However, there were persons who did not sincerely believe that I was actually talented, and this is not the first time that I have this experience. Even so, I was a little edgy and I wanted to choose one of the songs that better show my ability. I prepared a lot for this occasion. And then, that day, after finishing my intervention, the reaction at the "Mújica" Prep School was quite surprising, because they were so moved that some people even cried and they stood up to applaud me. They told me I had left them speechless.

At the end of the event, many students surrounded me and talked with me, they made me interviews and took pictures, and they even uploaded my photo into their social media and

shared my presentation with more people. I got comments like:

“You play very, very well!”

“You made me cry!”

“Wow!, how can you move your hands so quickly on the piano?”

“You are brilliant.”

“You made us stand up.”

“You must teach me!”

Among other praises...

I am very grateful to my teachers, because they put their trust in me and for all their dedication up to now, and above all, for telling me that I am a very special person.

I thank all the school authorities for being interested in helping me to go on with my school training at prep level and also for helping me to put my trust in them. But most of all, I thank them for making me smile every morning.

I have learnt to grow as a person, I have learnt to live with more people, to put up with different sorts of personalities which maybe I had not met before, to be a little more patient and, above all, to feel a great affection for my classmates.

At the same time, my wish and my love for the public and for the artistic activities have increased, because of the way I have been received.

Thanks to my creativity (humbly said), I have been able to help some of my classmates when they needed that and in our daily contact I have realized that they transmit me a great joy, and I also learn from them many things as for example, to be happier every day (more than I already am) and to see the good side of life.

My heartfelt thanks!

## Lucas's experience

Lucas Gabriel Porfirio das Neves, 15 years old, Brazil  
1st Grade, "Prof. Beathris Caixeiro del Cistia" E. E. School of  
Secondary Education.

I started studying there in 2009. Because of my disability, my mother thought it was better for me not to attend a pre-school. I started my school life at CEI 45 in Sorocaba. I only remained there, during my first year. After that, I studied at "Darlene de Vasto" Municipal School.

Until the 5th grade I was considered a low vision student, so it was all a bit easier. When I couldn't read my textbooks properly, they had just to be enlarged.

Since my 6th year at school, everything changed, not only because of the new subjects or having eight teachers. It was a much more complex change: I lost my vision because of a retinal detachment. But thanks God and my parents, everything has been improving. I had been already participating in the ASAC (Sorocabana Association for Helping the Impaired), but then I had to start learning the Braille System, abacus, informatics and mobility.

From the 6th to the 8th grade I studied at a school which is very close to my home called "Jorge Madureira". I began there in the middle of the year when I started writing and reading braille for the first time, I do not master this system yet, but I am improving. When I was learning braille, an ASAC educator informed the school that they had the possibility of requesting the State to provide a braille typewriter for me. I am already in the first year of high school and I have not yet been given this typewriter. I write with a borrowed one that belongs to the Visual Disability Resource Room (a service which I attend after my ordinary school classes; they have resources for the visually impaired, such as braille typewriters, adapted computers and teaching materials).

In 2016, I wanted and I had to leave the “Jorge Madureira” school. There were only two people among my classmates, who helped me in my school activities, and the teachers unfortunately did not ask other people to do that. I left that school and entered E. E. “Beathris Caixeiro del Cistia”. I have been using a notebook since the 8th grade that helps me thanks to a screen reader free voice program called NVDA.

Since the end of last year, my mother has been struggling at Justice level, at the Public Defender's Office, to be precise, to get an auxiliary teacher, and at the beginning of this year we have succeeded and I have been getting this kind of support to do my school activities.

I have never been bullied, but I do realize that in ordinary schools nobody is prepared to receive a visually impaired student-inspectors, doormen, teachers and direction included-. The result is exclusion. In addition, the State is not committed to provide us with adapted materials such as braille or large size summaries, adapted books, braille typewriters, braille printers, adapted games... In Physical Education we do not have a sound ball, and in some way, we, persons with disabilities, are excluded from class participation and learning.

## Andrés' experience

Andrés Marcelo Remigio, 16 años, Peru.

Fifth year, Monseñor Marcos Libardoni, Secondary School, La Victoria

My mother tells me that when I was two months old, the ophthalmologist told her that I was a blind baby and that she should explore what she should do. Time went by and she got an appointment in rehabilitation, neurology and paediatric ophthalmology, to know with precision what she could and should do to help me.

Once, when she was waiting for her appointment at the hospital, a lady addressed her. She asked: "What is your baby's problem?" and my mother answered. "He has no problem", because she was quite tired of being asked the same question all the time and this annoyed her and made her sad. But the lady told her she quite understood her discomfort as she herself had a disabled son, but he was multiply impaired. She said her child went to a special school where, while getting the rehabilitation appointments, I could also benefit by being stimulated, and this would be a progress.

My mother paid attention to her, took note of the address and consulted the Educational Centre and registered me immediately. When my mother entered the classroom, she saw that several mothers had children with the same problems I had, and even more difficult ones, and felt better. Specially, because she was not alone, as in our family we have no member with disability.

She learnt everything the teacher taught and she repeated that at home to help me. I had music classes and my teacher was blind. She played piano and accordion and my mother admired her a lot and asked herself how she was able to play so well. It was funny, just by listening to our voices, the teacher recognized our presence. She sang in the classroom and children went out into the garden forming a little train to continue singing. My mother tells me that I liked that very much and smiled. In that educational centre I was the King of Spring and Jesus the child in a live Nativity representation and they celebrated my first birthday.

I was also taken to a clinic that had been recommended to my mother to find out what my problem was, as at the hospital she did not succeed in getting a paediatric ophthalmology appointment. The physician there diagnosed low vision due to glaucoma, myopia, astigmatism, a lesion in the optic nerve and a very elongated retina, and for all that, today there is not any ophthalmological solution to me, I was one in a million, and I should be prepared, because my sight would be slowly diminishing and probably, I would lose the little sight I have.

I was at the special school and in rehabilitation at the same time, because my development was slow: I took longer to walk and speak and even a therapist told my mother that I would not cry as all children do when they start going to the kindergarten. And it was true!

When the time came to register again at the special school, the teacher told my mother that I should go to the “San Francisco de Asís” School for low vision and blind children, because my problem only affected my sight and there, they would be able to help me best, and so it was. I was enrolled in San Francisco, but later on I was in the inclusion group, and they had to search for a kindergarten for me to study with the so-called normal children.

There were some problems in that search because some of the centres had no experience in teaching disabled children and they even were not prepared to the needs of a high IQ and above all, they were not ready to add auxiliary staff to take care of me and help me. They neither accepted the visit of the inclusion teacher from the CEBE to offer counselling nor they would allow her to enter the classroom.

It was a very distressing period for my family, but after searching so hard they found a school in La Victoria district, called “Diego Thompson”, where one of my uncles had studied. The director was told about my case and he did not say NO to help me. He was very interested in meeting me and have an educational experience with me together with the other teachers and the CEBE of “San Francisco de Asís”. They all were trained and assisted to a lecture and helped me a lot. I went to this school from the kindergarten to the end of the primary school. That is why living in Villa El Salvador, I went to study to La Victoria, and I was lucky, because we have a train now.



From my experience in the kindergarten I do not remember much. In the primary school it was quite fun because we were just a few and the director and the teachers explained my classmates how to help me. But it was funny, because I rather helped them instead. Ah, but there was a boy that annoyed me a lot, and finally they had to split us because he hit my head with a broomstick and I hit him on the stomach. But today we are friends and we remember our fight as an anecdote.

I also studied robotics at 13. The teachers were excellent with me and they knew about my condition and helped me a lot. I also had many attentive friends, ready to back me. At the end of the year, we presented a Lego chariot with a hydraulic crane which I had planned.

I studied English at 13, but it did not go well for me, because my classmates mocked me because of my visual impairment and of my head movements and I always listened them murmuring and I was not able to concentrate myself. I passed first Junior but I repeated the second and I refused to go back to study at that school.

I also received swimming classes because I am somewhat fat and my mother always sent me in summer but I do not like that. The teachers were good to me, as my mother always explained my condition to them from the very beginning, even before enrolling me in order not to have any inconveniences but I have a swimming pool phobia.

After finishing a nice primary education, I passed to another school called “Monsen~or Marcos Libardoni”, at La Victoria, because the former school only covered the primary period. As my mother say, it is there where life starts.

During the first year I suffered a lot of bullying, as they mocked my head movements and I had a very reduced vision and my mother had to take action. But this did not stop until they started to ban the more difficult boys because it was not only me who suffered but all those who came from “Diego Thompson” primary school. They called us names and laughed at us. But we also learnt how to defend ourselves and even to answer.

The teachers were not ready to help me. The inclusion teacher even trained them and used simulating goggles to make them understand. Some did, and helped me, but others did not. My inclusion teacher said: “Be patient.”

During the second year, it was the same because the teachers changed and my inclusion specialist had to train them. But the teacher of communication and oral reasoning was aware that I was good as a master of ceremonies and she always had me as a participant in that workshop, and in that way my notes improved. My classmates went on with the bullying and I had a friend who understood and helped me with my homework.

In the third year the bullying went on and again, the teachers changed and the CEBE also trained them. But she was also with me during the classes; to express myself better, she has always accompanied me since I was a little boy, and I feel at home with her help and besides, she knows everything.

In fourth year, bullying went on but I have learnt to defend myself and not to pay attention. I have the support of my mother, my grandparents, my uncle and my CEBE teacher and my other teachers who help me, though not all of them.

During that year I learnt to play violin and my teacher is a very good person and she helps me a lot. Even my book is enlarged to A3 and It does not embarrass me to show it to everybody. They tell me they like my book and admire me because I know the scores by heart and I like practising a lot.

I am learning a lot and I even want to study music and devote myself to that in order to be able to help many other boys like me because it is easy to study music especially when teachers have the will and the patience to help you. It came from an experience I had, because at an NGO they did not accept me because I have impairment and they are neither prepared nor ready to help me because they control the use of their time. Of course, I went there with great expectations. I was prepared to introduce myself but I ended that day feeling very sad. My mother said that they had rejected me because they were afraid of my being better than them and occupy their posts. But the teacher I have today is a super man and I esteem him a lot.

Fifth year, I am close to finishing school. The same situation as always. The teachers change, and happily, the CEBE teacher is always the same. And the best thing is that they do not bully me now, because they know what my reaction is, but anyhow, I do not

trust them. That is why I do not have many friends; they do not invite me to their meetings and I would not go even if they did.

My mother comes with me to the classroom to help me, and the teachers are not against that. I went with her to the Ministry of Work for vocational orientation and the result is that I like music, marketing and being a teacher, but I will choose music. We are already finding out where I should go, how the entrance exam is and we are again just at another beginning: how will my teachers be and how will it all be for me? In our country not all Universities are ready to help us and my CEBE inclusion teacher will not be there either.

It is another stage, but I must go on studying to be able to progress in life. Thank you very much and I hope you will like my inclusion experience in my country.

## My inclusion experience

Samira Abigail Ríos Portillo, 15 years old, Paraguay.

9th course, "Acosta Ñu" Basic School No. 382

My name is Samira Ríos and I want to share my experience in inclusion, which has taught me that “the best makes you wait”.

Everything started when I was 4, and I had to go to school. My parents were ready to do whatever they were asked to, but I could not start studying.

I succeeded to enter as a preschool student, when I was 7 and it was not so hard for me to feel included. I was somewhat mischievous and it annoyed me that everybody was ready to do things for me. At the end of the year, as I wanted to go to the first grade, the headmistress suggested that I should go to a school for irregular students. Two classmates and I were left outside -they had speech issues and I could not see-. We appealed to the highest levels, but everybody thought she was right.

We tried to enter the “Acosta Ñu” School where I was warmly received. The positive aspect of having begun late was that I was able to read and write. During my first course, my mother dictated to me and my classmates were a little afraid of me. The teacher Olga included me in her classes, through reading and writing. During the second course, it was the teacher who dictated me and in the third, my classmates took weekly turns. I already had friends: Mauri, Marlene and Ivonne.

I can tell you that with my teacher Olga I learnt to read and write in three years. I also sang and played in theatre performances.

In the 4th course Mónica was my teacher. I admire her because she did not stop her explanations until I had understood and demanded from me the same standard of work that she required from the rest of the class. I had friends: Thiago, Antonio, Mauricio and Ivonne, and we shared both play and mischief. I also got awards and honours in theatre, writing and knowledge contests.

In the 5th course, my level test arrived. Thanks to my skills I was able to take it; my friends were sorry, but they backed me. Ana was my teacher and classes were not different, but they were adapted. And then I was no longer different. With Ana, everything in the program was the same to the smallest detail. I was the class delegate in 4th, and in 5th I was elected Queen and I chose my friend Mari as a member of my court.

In 7th I was able to adjust at about the middle of the year, thanks to Mario, Adams, A´lvaro, Alexis and Andre´s And after them, Rodrigo, a new student.

I was already included in 8th, and I was elected President of school management. I am in the same group, now, in the 9th course.

My teachers are the best educators, and even better than them is my mom! Thanks to the CRSL and God, I am what I am today.

## The impact of inclusion in my life



Angelina Ruiz Graciano, 14 years old, Dominican Republic  
2nd year, "República de Guatemala" Secondary Education Primary  
School.

I passed my kindergarten at the National School for the Blind, and then, for the Preschool level, I was included in the “Manita De Oro” School. The headmistress, the teachers and my classmates received me very warmly, although I felt somewhat sad because my first experience was among blind children and here, all were able to see. But they offered me a great support and I started to feel confident, as I was treated just as the other children. I had duties and rights, my mother was ready to support me, and the Resource Centre was there to back me up and offered me some resources to study. I was there for three years but they seemed just months for me because I participated in all the school activities. When I finished there, I felt that a piece of my heart remained there. And my classmates’ and teachers’ kisses and hugs made me cry.

I did not want to go away and I wondered how my new school would be. Would they give me as much support and love as in the former one?

I went on with my studies at the “Elda Josefa Reyes de Muñoz”, at San Luis, where I went for the 3rd year. My life was different there as I was older and I made friends with those I felt better with. My fears disappeared because I was well received by all the school staff. I took part in the artistic activities, since I like singing and I also remember a scale model that I had to do with my mother's help. I was congratulated for my efforts by my teacher, as my work was one of the best and I also took part in the rehearsal of a poem. I stood out because I had memorized it and the rest of the class recited it with the help of the written text.

Everything was wonderful there, till my mother told me that we had to come back to Villa Faro. Again I had to face another very sad farewell because I had got used to my classmates and teachers, but mum said: “We must go!” At Villa Faro, my mother faced a lot of difficulties because she tried to enrol me in many schools and they refused on the basis of lack of knowledge. At last, she asked for help at the Resource Centre and they offered support and orientation. Nevertheless, my mother continued knocking on doors in other schools, but the same attitude continued. After a couple of months my mother heard that I might be accepted at an educational centre, “General Gregorio Lupero’n”. There I was received with great joy by the Headmaster, the teachers and the support staff. Although I have made my mischief, I have been lovingly corrected and I have participated in every school activity.

In fact, I felt included as it was not necessary for me to tell the centre which my needs were, they offered me solutions. These five years have been wonderful. I relied on my mother, my school, my teachers, the community and the “Olga Estrella” National Resource Centre.

I thank God and these three educational centres where I had been included, because they have made me go on and I will go on progressing and will be able to compete with children who see on the same basis.

## Experiences in educational inclusion

Yordaliza Taveras Taveras, 17 years old, Dominican Republic  
4th year, "Santana" Secondary Educational Centre, Regional 08,  
District 04, at Santiago de los Caballeros .

For me, educational inclusion has meant a great development as a person in spite of the obstacles I had to navigate through. It does not only support the right to be different, but it also values explicit diversity. Thanks to inclusion, I have been taken into account without people paying attention to my impairment.

At 6, I entered a children's home, for reasons I am not going to explain now. Since then, I live with my adoptive parents and my foster siblings.

My mother wanted me to study just as the other children and because of that she visited her daughters' school, talked with them about my case and asked them to accept me. At first they refused to do so, they were not ready to receive someone with my condition, but later on, they changed their decision and accepted me just as a listener, on the basis of the quality of my performance during their assessment which would take place every Monday and Thursday. They also committed to provide me with a scholarship. My mother accepted and I was anxious. I felt I could not wait. I could neither read nor write, but I was sure that everything would be all right. She was excited, and she had even bought my uniform and my school equipment without knowing if I would use them.

The first time I participated in a class I felt a little weird. I was very afraid and I was not sure about having friends, but in a few days, my doubts disappeared, I adjusted, I was not so afraid and was happy.

I remember that once, my mother was desperate. We needed help. That day we visited the dentist and, on coming back home, we met a blind person. My mother asked him if he knew whether there was a support institution for blind children. Luckily for us, he gave us all the details of a nearby institution (the "Olga Estrella" National Centre of Educational Resources for the Visually Impaired) where they would receive us. We went



there. On our arrival we felt welcomed. They accepted me. Since that moment, my life gave a 360 degree turn, both in the educational and family environments.

I immediately started to receive the visit of an itinerant teacher both at home and at the educational centre where I study. She taught me, among other things, how to read and write in braille. Thanks to this support, I started going to school every day, just as the other children. I met there a teacher who helped me a lot. I still remember her words: “You are important and meaningful, therefore, fear must not be a barrier in your life.” Her words encouraged me a lot. I kept on receiving their monitoring at my school and she offered a lecture about visual impairment to the students.

I knew how to read and was happy, I knew there was a lot more to learn. There was something I could not understand: for students’ day everybody was preparing to receive an award for their effort. The most brilliant ones received a certificate. A teacher told me that they could not give me a prize because of my disability. My name was always in the honour roll, then, why wouldn’t they take me into account? I should receive my award just as the others. I always had excellent marks. I told them that the disability with which I live had nothing to do, and that I always give my best. Thanks to the work of the Resource Centre and to my own impulse, the teachers started to take me into account, I began receiving certificates, and I already was within the academic excellence category, just as the other worthy students. I was very happy. The headmistress always puts me in front of my classmates and tells them: “He who wants, is able.” I tell them: “We are an example to be followed, we must believe in ourselves, struggle and endeavour to achieve what we want and to be better people every day.”

The support of the educational centre was vital in this process. Besides the instruction, it has provided me everything I need to complete my training. Among other things, it provided me with a cane, a braille slate, a stylus, a recording device, special paper to write on and an iPad, They also offered me informatics support and my itinerant teacher teaches me contracted braille and mobility.

I have participated for three consecutive years in the Constitution reading. It is a great honour for me to take part in this activity because I get in touch with the rights that have been recognised for us. Besides, I love reading, this is what I like most. I have always received

certificates for participating because of my excellence in reading.

At school I have participated in many activities such as singing in the graduation ceremony of the 6th year secondary students. I am always ready to collaborate, and sing at the family days and I have represented Salome´ Uren~a de Enri´quez on her birthday.

I was selected to participate in the Students' Regional Forum too: we discussed various proposals for schools and private centres. After that, I qualified to go to the students' National Forum "For a culture of peace". Twenty young students discussed the different problems faced by educational centres with the Minister of Education, Andr s Navarro. This was an unforgettable experience for me, I met many people and enjoyed it very much. As a reward for my effort and dedication I got a tablet, a diploma and a photo of the regional meeting which I belong to. I have no words to accurately describe how happy I felt.

One of my greater dreams is to study modern languages. I love languages, especially English, French, Italian and Catalan. I am in fourth year of secondary school and I am happy and proud of having been able to reach this level. I have much to learn!

To be at school and be part of it is the best thing that has happened to me. Everybody has a right to education. I learnt that we should not allow to be guided by fear in life. I struggle to achieve my goals, I struggle for a better world. If there is something I can tell to people with disabilities it is that they should never give up. I know that we all have dreams and want to see them becoming true. That is why we should not abandon them, even if we think that they are unreachable. We must have faith and trust that everything is possible for God. We must go on forward no matter which the circumstances are.

## My story

Rowell Urbáez Reyes, Dominican Republic. 1st year,  
"San José" Technical School, Educational District 01-05, Secondary  
Education level, Vicente Noble, Barahona.

Everything started when I was 5, as I went to my father's aunt house to pick some gallons of water. When I left the house, I started to see a shadow in my right eye. I went and told to my grandmother about it and she advised me to tell my mother. I was afraid she would punish me, and said nothing.

A month later, I decided to tell my mother that I was not seeing well with my right eye. Her decision was to take me to the doctor, and the doctor explained that I had lost the sight of that eye. He prescribed me glasses.

Time elapsed. One day, when I arrived from school, I started to notice a shadow at the edge of my left eye. At that moment I didn't give it much thought, because I believed it was just something temporary. I came home as usual and took a bath. Then I went to the music academy to take my lessons. At that moment I started noticing that the shadow was getting bigger and bigger, and I decided to tell my mum about it. She told my dad what was going on, and we went to consult the doctor at Santo Domingo.

During that process I had three operations, the first one went well and I succeeded to see. After the last operation the doctor told my mother that I would not recover my vision. At that moment, we were shocked by the news and lost control of the situation.

Sometimes I hit my sisters, I raised my voice when I spoke to my father and I did not respect my mum. At those times, my only thought was death. I kept on asking God why that had happened to me and why not to someone else.

Every day I felt emotionally bad because I was not able to do anything: I wanted to study and I couldn't because I did not see. Due to that situation, I stopped studying, because in my state it was impossible, or at least that's what we thought at home. I did not know then that I would be able to do it.

I did not attend classes during a whole year, until a representative of the "Olga Estrella" National Educational Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired started working on my case. They told me about the services offered by the centre and suggested home backing to help me with both emotional and educational issues. They also held several meetings at the centre. On those occasions, they gave several talks to inform the teachers and the students about my visual condition to make them aware of the way to help me. Thus, they improved not only my emotional state but also that of the whole family.

The situation was even more difficult because my father was out of the country. He was in Spain, and in his absence, all the family relied on the assistance offered to us by the "Olga Estrella" National Educational Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired.

I am grateful to this Centre for the timely assistance received and for their permanent support to my educational inclusion, as thanks to them I can go on studying at the "San José" Technical School.

When they came to my house, I was receiving psychological treatment, and since they started coming, it was not necessary for me to continue receiving psychological services. Thanks to their support, today I am a very efficient and competent student. I am in the group of the best students not only in the classroom, but also at school level.

I am grateful to my father and my mother who never abandoned me in this situation, to my uncle Lucas for taking me to the doctor even neglecting his work, to my uncle Darío for helping us financially and emotionally, and to my family who, despite the pain they felt, they told me to go forward, and believed that I was able.

I am very grateful to my teacher Hector Aquino Feliz, because besides teaching me the basics, he offered me his advice, and taught me that I had to consider my own difficulties but also those of others and always thank GOD.

## My story in inclusion



Yajandi Valera Rodríguez, 17 years old, Dominican Republic.

6th grade, "Andrés Valera Vargas" Primary School.

I was born in Juan Barón, a small town in the south of the Dominican Republic. My birth was premature and my mother died at my birth. Obviously I did not get to know her. My first years of life were very difficult as I was always sick. One of these diseases was glaucoma, and although I received the corresponding treatment, I lost my vision when I was only a few months old.

I live with my maternal grandparents since my birth. Our small house has two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. This is where my grandparents lived (my aunts don't live here anymore): my aunt Dominga and her six children, aunt Elbita and her three children, my two brothers and me. So many people shared this small space, situation that often caused a lot of problems, and we quarrelled frequently. Besides these difficulties we had to face my frequent health problems and, of course, my lack of vision. Every day my cousins went to school, but I didn't go because I had not been enrolled, as I was always sick and besides, I was blind!

I went to school for the first time at the age of eight. It seemed to me very beautiful, as I felt the air was very fresh and clean and I was told that it was surrounded by trees. They gave me a little table and a chair for myself, which I liked very much. Rosa, the counsellor, and Jacqueline, one of the teachers, treated me very well, but what I liked most was the noise of my classmates. They took me everywhere in the

school and played with me a lot. I liked going to school.

One day, at the end of the classes, all the children ran out towards the exit door, the iron gate was not completely open, and several children bumped into me, pushing me hard against the door. My face strongly hit the iron gate and my left eye was seriously injured. Even though I was bleeding heavily and the pain was intense, I didn't pass out. I remember that my teacher Jacqueline took me to the medical centre, which was not far from the school, where I received first aid. As the biggest damage happened to affect one of my eyes, I was referred to a specialised centre in the capital.

I was hospitalized there for three days and then, they told my grandparents that my case required a very expensive surgery. As you might expect, my family did not have the resources to pay for it. We received half of the cost from a famous major league baseball player, from my hometown, and the other half was raised through activities promoted by the school. Thank God and to all the help I received, my surgery took place and it was successful.

After I recovered from this operation, another one on the same eye was necessary. My greatest pain was to miss my school class.

One year later, one of our neighbours, who has a son older than me, who is also blind, recommended my grandparents to take me to the "Olga Estrella" National Educational Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired. My parents followed the advice. How well I felt there! Everyone treated me as if they had known me all my life, called me by my name and treated me with a lot of familiarity. They explained to us that they were going to support us, but that I had to go back to school. They gave me many materials, including a Perkins Braille. A few days later I received a visit from a lovely lady named Sara, who said she was an itinerant teacher and that she was going to help me with my academic training, but that I had to attend school every day as well. This was not possible for a long time, as my weak health condition prevented me from doing so: I was always ill.

Sara, the itinerant teacher, came to my house every week; she brought many materials and taught me many things, but what I liked most was the Braille generator sign, and the combination of dots to form letters and then words. How exciting it was for me when I wrote my name for the first time... My learning of braille and also my career towards

knowledge had begun. I was entering the world of the literate, as I was learning to read and write. This race was not going to stop, because I loved what I was learning. I also learnt to use the abacus, to write and solve operations in Braille. I learnt a lot during those years.

When I went back to school, I was enrolled in third grade, as I had already started reading and writing Braille. A year went by and I attended school regularly. I was rarely absent. By then I received the support of another itinerant teacher called Andrea. She stimulates me a lot in reading, as we always read very interesting texts and she motivates me to go to school every day.

Problems arose at home and these affected my school attendance. At one point I practically dropped out, because I didn't want to go to school, but I didn't want to be at home either. I didn't talk to anyone and I wandered aimlessly through the streets. Rosa, the school's counsellor, talked to me and to my grandmother, and as a result, I was taken to a psychiatrist. My mental state improved, but I lost the school year, and this made me very sad.

This year my school attendance is regular, I prepare myself in time to arrive early, I have always at hand everything necessary to participate in all the activities promoted in the classroom.

My favourite subjects are maths and natural sciences. I like maths because I have learned to calculate and manage my money well and to take exact measurements of ingredients when I help my grandmother in the kitchen. With natural sciences I have learnt how my body is formed and the different stages of my development, and how to take care of the environment.

Ah! I like social sciences too. Professor Claudia, who teaches this subject, organised a parade for Independence Day. I took part in it for the first time. I walked through the streets with my group and felt very good. I walk with them, I am with them, because I am one of them.

## Franklin's experience

Franklin David Velásquez Ayala, 14 years old, Honduras.

9th grade, "El Campo" School, Tegucigalpa.

It is somewhat difficult to describe my school experience. At first it wasn't the most beautiful one, but everything has been improving.

It all started when I entered my first pre-kindergarten school. At that time I could see a little better than I do now, but even then, I needed glasses. Naturally, the other children were very impressed for the fact that I saw less than the other boys with glasses in my class. I did make some friends though, but I felt that a few avoided me.

After almost a year in this school, my parents decided to send me to another one, because it seems that they were not able to commit to a case like mine. I felt better at this other school, I even had a best friend. However, my time there was relatively short.

My parents decided to change my school again. Although I had more friends there, it was also there that I started suffering from bullying. I remember that in the playground there were plastic boats, slides and houses where everyone played. Of course, my friends didn't play with me all the time. They had their own groups and I was not accepted in them. I thought that no one but my friends would accept me to play, so I would look for some abandoned house and stayed there for the rest of the break. Even this was not enough to escape bullying: a group of children came with the intention of taking the house over. They told me to go away, I insisted on having arrived first and that they could not take it away from me. They just entered the house and pull my hair, throw my glasses away and pinch me. I tried to defend myself, but they were a group. They threw me to the floor and kicked me a couple of times, then they went into the little house they had taken from me. I used to tell the teachers and they wanted to help me, but as I was unable to identify those who had hit me, the only thing they could do, was to stay with me so that it would not happen again.

I started to write at this school. I had to do it with crayon or with the help of a teacher. It was frustrating not being able to do things alone.



In spite of all the bad things, there were also good things. I really enjoyed the times I spent playing with my friends, the projects in class were fun and I was almost never bored. But I wanted to have more friends. At that time, I didn't understand why I was left aside. It wasn't until I grew up that I understood: many times, people don't accept what is different. This was my case. As I wore glasses, some children called me "Little blind boy". Now that I think about it, I believe they called that way everyone who had glasses.

Two years passed. Finally, the school told my parents that they could not deal with my problem, but they recommended a school that surely would, it was called "Del campo" school.

This is the school I attend now. I have been here for the longest period and it is where I have felt best. It is a bit expensive, but it is worth it, as it is an excellent school and they have dealt very well with my problem. I have been here since first grade and in my opinion there is no better one. The teachers are very helpful. I don't remember having suffered bullying at this school, and my friends, classmates and teachers make me feel like one of them.

It is as simple as that: I love my life as it is now. Every year this school gives me something new, whether it's a friend or new methods to work more independently. It is the same school my younger sister attends and we are both doing well. Of course, nothing is perfect. I have my differences with some people, but that, is worthless if I compare it to all the good things.

I know that life can be hard and I know that many people face much harder challenges than mine. All the bad experiences my low vision has caused me have only helped me to learn and made me stronger. But what has made me even stronger are those who always are by my side. My family, friends and teachers continue to teach me, and I will be eternally grateful to them for all they have done and continue doing for me.

I feel the hardest part of changing schools is having to leave friends and teachers behind when you love them so much.

As regards things like music, I love the piano. The reason I take the challenge is the wish to adapt the songs I like. Sometimes I end up exhausted, but it's fun.

Finally I will tell you a couple of things. They have to do with all the help they give us and how it makes us feel. I'll give you an example: when I drop a pencil, I like to try and look for it; but before that happens, people would pick it up and give it to me. Of course they have good intentions, but in my case I like to try and do things by myself. When people help me with everything, I feel that they think I can't do things on my own. Of course, we need help. I just advise them to try to be helpful. If you see a child with low vision trying to pick something up and you think he is too shy to ask for help, ask him if he needs it. That's my advice.

Since my early infancy my parents have always told me that I can achieve great things, and I think they are right. Now I tell everyone with any disability: "You can achieve great things if you put your mind to it". I keep fighting and I will keep fighting, as long as I have those I love by my side, because they make me strong.

## My inclusion

Milagros María Zabala Galeano, 15 years old, Paraguay.

8 th grade, "Cnel. Felipe Toledo" Basic School No. 821

My school's name is "Felipe Toledo" and I went there since the 1st grade. Now I'm in the 8th grade. I'm still there, because I already know most of the people there. This year I have some new classmates who watch me write.

My relationship with my classmates is good and I get along well with the students in other classes. I have a best friend and she always helps me.

Since last year I have a number of teachers. They are all very good and I get along better with the science one because she understands me better.

During the recesses, I am usually with my friends in the courtyard, where we take a snack and talk.

