

The Inner Working Progression of Youth Development in León”

by Lydia Hentzen

The process and philosophy of Project Minnesota/León revolves around a four-step process.

To truly understand the process and its potential for positive changes, it is important to look at the real stories of community development in León. In particular, the youth of León have highlighted this philosophy well through their efforts. Despite their young age and seemingly powerless positions, they have brought forth many positive changes. Follow along for a demonstration of the PML philosophy and how the youth in the village of San Carlos, outside of the city of León have truly embodied this process through their efforts.



The **first step** in the process is **to identify the most prominent issues that are present in the community**. Starting in 2015, Rosa Lira Ulloa, PML’s Director of Community Development, started meeting with a group of about twenty 14- to 18-year-olds in the village of San Carlos. It is a rural area about seven kilometers from León. The meetings were initially very informal and were treated more as a time to hang out, with the underlying purpose to unite the youth. They met on Fridays when there was no class to play games and hang out. Before these meetings, there was a great deal of tension and distrust amongst the youth. They would not socialize or interact with each other. However, through these meetings the youth were able to come together as a group and become unified by identifying the common issues they experienced. They identified that the main challenges were a lack of sufficient internet availability, lack of financial means for transportation to school, and an inadequate recreation field.



The **second step** in the process is to **create a consensus on the most urgent issue and how it can be addressed**. The youth decided that the lack of sufficient transportation to school was very pressing, seeing that they were the ones most affected. Many families were not able to afford the bus fare for their children to the high school located in the distant city of Leon. Many others noted that they could have used this money for snacks or extracurricular activities. They brainstormed ideas and realized they needed to lower the fare and raise money to help cover the remaining fees.

Then the **third step is to implement a plan to help solve the issue**; so, the youth set out to get the bus fare lowered and raise money. The youth rallied the community together and were able to gain enough support to create a petition and form a commission. The commission of students met with the bus owners and bus cooperative and were successfully able to lower the bus fare from 6 cordobas to 5 cordobas, which is a 20% decrease. Interestingly, this decrease came out to only a few cents in American dollars. Additionally, the youth helped create a scholarship fund to provide students with the bus fees. PML helped invest in the scholarship fund, and now the community continues to raise money to keep this program running.



More recently, the youth came together to start a pizza business to help raise money to cover the cost of transportation and other miscellaneous expenses such as photocopying homework packets. The youth knew everyone liked pizza in the community, but there was nowhere close by to get any. Thus, “Josempi” pizza business was born - short for Jovenes

Emprendedores de San Carlos. They also made great contributions to help get the recreational field established. The youth turned to other institutions for help, and pooled money together from the Rotary funds PML received to get the field up and running. A team of individual was also created to do upkeep on the field and maintain a usage schedule agreement to ensure that their work was not done in vain.

After starting to implement courses of action, the **fourth step is to evaluate the actions and act accordingly**. The youth started confidently with their pizza business after taking some courses about marketing and entrepreneurship to bolster their knowledge. They worked with the non-profit organization, *Soluciones Comunitarias* (Sol Com), to master their pizza making skills and make smart decisions for their business. However, their pizza business was met with more difficulties than expected. The youth lacked the practical skills and capital to get started. They did not think they would be able to succeed and kept losing hope. However, they took some time for reflection, and “thought like adults.” They saved money to cover their purchases, and with the help of PML, they were able to pay for an oven, which was a principal item they needed. They also expanded their menu to sell Chinese noodles and hot dogs. A total of 9 kids work at the shop, all from the youth exchange. The youth exchange allowed them to come to Minneapolis and live with a host family to experience what life is like here. Though their plan did not go as smoothly as designed, they were

still able to adapt and overcome the struggles they faced to run a functional pizza shop.

The process continues by cycling back to stages three and four, to implement the plan and assess actions.

After evaluation, they continue to **implement their plan, making adjustments as necessary.** Currently, the youth

are still running their pizza business in San Carlos. The shop is open on the weekends from 3-9 PM serving pizza, and other small food items to the community. They are saving the money they raise to help cover bus fees and other expenses. The recreational field they helped establish is frequently used for community activities, so the upkeep and scheduling efforts continue.

The **last step** in the process is to **monitor and evaluate the results** of the actions taken. The youth were able to successfully advocate for lower student bus fees and fundraise for other student expenses with efforts like their pizza business. They also helped to establish the recreational field in the community. The impact of their work is

widespread in the community. The pizza place and recreational field give the members of the community central places to come together. The group of youth also became more unified through their central places to come together. The group of youth also became more unified through their work and are like a family now. They proved their maturity and potential to the community, which now instills trust in them. Their impressive work has gained the attention of other institutions like SuNica and OMEGAS, who are willing to support them going forward. The youth plan to continue their work and want to inspire future generations to also put in the work to bring forth even more positive changes.

