

#10WeeksWithTearfund

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ICS



Ricardo Cardoso

¡HOLA!

This summer I was given an incredible opportunity to work in Bolivia alongside one of Tearfund's partner organisations, PATSIDA. My placement was part of the International Citizen Service (ICS) programme run by the UK's Department of International Development.

PATSIDA (practica el amor en tiempos de SIDA or in English: Practicing love in times of AIDS) is a project in Sucre, Bolivia, which focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, especially amongst young people. Their work in Sucre is particularly important as statistics show that, in Chuquisaca, the region where Sucre sits, there are around 7 out of 10 people with HIV not knowing they have it. Only about 314 cases are recorded. PATSIDA have recently branched into preventing sexual abuse after seeing the need in the local community, with 8 out of 10 girls in Bolivia suffering from some form of abuse before the age of 18.

During my time in Bolivia, our team (made up of 6 from the UK and 5 from Bolivia) ran HIV workshops in schools and colleges, self-esteem sessions and lessons, street fairs and sexual abuse workshops. We even made appearances on Bolivian radio stations and TV!

We spent a lot of our time at the Mariposa Centre, originally established as a safe house for girls who have suffered from sexual abuse. We were able to spend time with the girls and their gorgeous children, running sessions on everything from nutrition to hair braiding and nail art. Despite their pasts, the girls were filled with enthusiasm and their passion for life was inspiring, making us realise how fortunate we are. The Mariposa Centre also works with children and families from areas where sexual abuse is common, running after-school activities where we were able to help with homework and teach them various lessons ranging from friendship to hygiene and, of course, sexual abuse prevention.



'Olympiadas' are days run alongside the local government which aim to teach children about HIV/AIDS in an interactive way. School groups from Sucre travel to Yotala where, after listening to a talk by PATSIDA's director, Eduardo, they face a day full of crazy and slightly terrifying team building activities. All four of the activities signifies a different aspect of teenage life and comes with case studies on a range of issues important to young people, including, amongst other things, alcohol, self-esteem, HIV/AIDS, violence and sexuality.



One of our HIV workshops was held at a night school. The students were a lot older than the 13-18 age range we were used to, with some students being in their 30's! The workshop ran as usual until we arrived at the myths and realities section (my part!) and it soon became very clear why we need organisations such as PATSIDA. In a quiz about their knowledge of HIV, the students responded to some typical questions such as 'Can HIV be spread by sharing a towel with someone?' Their response to the questions really shocked me. Every



single person in the class believed that HIV was very contagious, like the common cold! This makes a huge difference to the way people act towards others, with HIV, living in their community, not to mention the discrimination which sufferers must face on a day-to-day basis. It is important that organisations such as PATSIDA exist, not only to physically support those living with HIV, but offer them the unconditional love they are so often denied.

Thanks to continued Government funding, the next PATSIDA team are already working in Sucre, allowing change to continue even though we are now back in the UK.

I'd like to thank you all for your support before, during and after my placement. It was an incredible opportunity, offering invaluable experience for me, especially as I would love to work in the humanitarian aid sector. If you're aged between 18 and 25 and fancy a challenge, the ICS programme is a fantastic option to consider.

Muchas gracias – Natalie Gibbs