

Buscan nuevos rumbos en Caimito

(English Translation)

SEEKING NEW DIRECTIONS IN CAIMITO

“Koban makes mentoring the best strategy for prevention”.

“Participants in the Koban program, sponsored by the Eisenhower Foundation, found the combination of love and discipline they need”.

Kevin Villegas does not hesitate to admit that until just a year ago, his life was led by his bad temper.

And with the same sincerity that he explains his bad attitude in school and at home, this 14 year old admits it was a tragedy, like so many other young people across the country experience, that rescued him from a lethargy that could take him down that same path.

“In January last year I was normal, and what made me wake up was the death of my uncle,” Villegas says about the impact that the murder of a close family member had on him.

Thereafter, Villegas began a journey that surprised his teachers. The improvement in grades have been remarkable to his family, but not to his peers and facilitators of the Koban’s Program of the Centro Sor Isolina Ferré in Caimito.

While Villegas tells the details of his transformation, five of his companions listen with a mixture of understanding and empathy that reveals how their circumstances are familiar to them.

As part of Koban, the product of an alliance between the Center, the police and the Eisenhower Foundation, with the Federal Justice Department, 25 teenagers of Caimito, participate each evening, Monday through Friday, in activities that reinforce their self-esteem and show them how capable they are to build their own future.

Soon they will be joined by a group of another 50 children in this neighborhood between the boundary of San Juan and Guaynabo that for the past years has seen times of great violence, and where dropout rates are high.

Education is, indeed, one of the pathways through which Koban has inserted into the lives of these youth and their families the hope of a change that goes beyond academics.

Parents of participants are very eager for their children to “keep on going” and that their history does not repeat itself, tells Pablo Dumeng, the police officer that everyone knows as Michael. This year, in addition to visiting the school and supporting the children, he has the task of fostering a community dialogue to find solutions to neighborhood problems.

Every day, around 3:30 pm, there arrives at the new facilities of the Centro Sor Isolina Ferré a bus with Koban’s participants and Michael at the wheel.

Several groups are formed to go to the dance halls, art, leadership and the library, where a facilitator will ensure that they fulfill their assignments and projects.

Therefore, when asked what is the goal of Koban, the first response of the participants, which they say almost without thinking and in unison, “it is to raise our grades”.

Francheska Fontáñez, 14 years old, confesses that she has always “loved the fun”, but with the discipline she receives in Koban, she has learned that there is a time for everything. “Now I joke when I have to joke. It calms me a little bit and encourages me to see others doing their assignments.”

Keishlyann Ramos also identifies her improvement in the school as the biggest benefit, but for her academic success has been even more fulfilling than grades.

“I felt the rejection of my family and I did not believe in myself and believe what they wanted. Now they say I’m a smart girl”, says the teenager.

KOBAN FOR EXCELLENCE

In the past year, 22 of the 25 Koban’s participants improved their grades substantially.

For example, an eighth grade boy who last year had earned a C in Social Studies, Science and Spanish, now keeps grades of A in the first two and a solid B in the third.