

**DEAFBLIND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN IN COLLABORATION  
WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE PROVINCE OF CÓRDOBA AND  
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CÓRDOBA**

**INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETING  
CÓRDOBA, MAY 30 AND 31, 2024**

**REPORT**

**First Day**

The meeting began with the words of the Minister of Education of the Province of Córdoba, Dr. Horacio Ferreyra, who expressed his gratitude to the Catholic University of Córdoba and all the participants from around the world for being here.

"In the ministry, we see all difficulties as opportunities. At this moment, we have been working on inclusion, which is a great challenge; currently, we have more than 7,000 students in this process. Inclusion involves teachers, structure, and research, along with people and their families. We need to know what we are doing and communicate it effectively. It is important that people feel truly included; for this, we talk about many diverse areas.

I appreciate the presence of the minister of special education and health area. Education is a social area that cannot be resolved only with the ministry; we need all areas (family, educational, medical, social) to build quality for the families that need special services. For us as a country, it is also a challenge to talk about issues that need to be discussed; we know we need to improve the education. 'We need to talk about disability and the inclusion process.' Many questions are necessary; one could be: if our students only go to their schools to socialize or actually learn and do different things. We want them to experience more. At this moment, we talk about quality education, but we need to talk more than just numbers... We need to ask ourselves: how useful is this for our students? To carry out the inclusion process, we need to debate and know each part. Our students need to learn.

The greatness of people with disabilities is part of the educational process. Whether formal or non-formal... we need to improve every area. We are here to listen to each other and learn from one another. We know that inclusion is a broad concept and, therefore, sometimes we end up hiding some problems. We know we have many areas to improve and change; when we talk about schools for people with special needs, it is important to speak consciously about the term: schools. This word means a lot. We have schools for people with special needs but also private schools and regular education schools that include other areas that improve our educational field. We always need to move forward, towards inclusion, but his word: "inclusion", is difficult to understand.

To not only talk about educational inclusion, it is also important to talk about advances in the health area. We know we need to continue changing our decision-making in the government. Each area of our government is evolving; we need to walk hand in hand with different areas.

For his part, the Dean: Andrés Aguerre SJ shared the following message. 'We need to talk about inclusion... it is part of our work. On this topic, we can relate our work as if it were a large orchestra, where everyone needs to play their own melody.

It is a pleasure to have you here. When I saw the video, I thought of "let me in" and related it to this: "I CAN, AND I WANT TO." I want to acknowledge our desire to let people in... but also, what about the children who want to be included and we are not letting them in? Our goal in this campaign is to improve education in our schools. I think like the minister, that we want to include, and this campaign is in line with UNICEF principles. Specific strategies for specific needs. For me, that I am not close to people with special needs, I am impressed by you; this place feels like a place full of sensitivity. This specific area is very important, there are too many children who can and want us to "let them in".

This campaign presents a unique opportunity. It is letting us think that we need to open up, open our ideas and concepts... it is a great challenge. Pope Francis says: "We know the great advances in special needs. This speaks of their dignity, no one can feel strange in their own home. Although we still do not have this as a goal, we must realize that each person has great wealth. We know many people who, although they have problems, have achieved greatness and happiness. Every month the pope has an intention, and in 2023, he spoke about people with disabilities and how they can be rejected by different institutions. We need more initiatives to help them. Above all, we need BIG HEARTS THAT WANT TO WALK WITH THEM. Please, do not let your heart become small, do not lose your main motivation.

When things get complicated, go and look at your students. Go to your motivation, I hope that if you get demotivated... go and look at your students. They are the reason. I am a priest, so I will say a prayer."

### **Presentation by Deafblind International and its Education Campaign**

First, Mirko Baur presents the Global Deafblind Education Campaign, explaining its origins, objectives, and the regions it covers. This campaign began in January 2023 and it covered: Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa.

After this presentation, Carmen Lucia Guerrero and Graciela Ferioli, leaders of the regional campaign, shared the steps developed since its inception. The actions included meetings with countries under the campaign: Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic, later joined by Bolivia and Ecuador, and recently Argentina and Venezuela. Additionally, meetings were held with each country, including various international organizations working in the region such as SENSE International Peru, Fundación Once for Latin America, CBM, ICEVI Latin America, WDBF, and DbI networks such as the technology network, family network, and education network.

Moreover, programs from other countries in the region were invited to these spaces, represented by families and professionals with extensive experience in this area. This is how they began working with them as mentors for the new countries. People with deafblindness were also invited as leaders in our region of the world.

This first stage focused on disseminating the campaign through videos and interviews to raise awareness about the education of people with deafblindness.

In June 2023, the campaign started with meetings with national committees (national leaders, mentors, and international organizations) who collected videos with the "Let Me In" and DbI logos to present the campaign and raise awareness about deafblindness in each country.

The next step was for each participating country to conduct a SWOT analysis to identify their specific needs as a country.

From August to December 2023, each country worked on its action plan while videos continued to be shared. At this point, meetings began to include all participants; working together proved to be much more enriching. Videos with the voices of families with a member with deafblindness started to be shared.

From January to May 2024, materials (in English and Spanish) began to be collected on a platform shared with all campaign participants. During this time, a questionnaire about each country's reality was sent and responded to. The research showed the need to focus on early services, primary and secondary education, technology, and research. Around this time, Ecuador and Bolivia joined the campaign, and recently Venezuela and Argentina joined as well.

### **What needs to be done?**

Continue sharing information through the media. We need more representation of people with deafblindness in the region, particularly in Paraguay's National Committee.

### **Presentation of the Progress achieved by the National Committees**

Next, each National Committee shared their progress and received feedback from the authorities and the audience present.

#### **El Salvador:**

- Worked closely with the ministry.
- Meetings with the ministry.
- Presentation of the campaign and the inclusion team; the project was still in progress at the time of the presentation.
- The ministry is aware of the project in all its stages.
- A SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the country's needs.

#### **Honduras:**

- Gratitude to all present and those who participated, recognizing the great opportunity for Honduras to be part of the campaign.
- The project title is Creating Opportunities.

- The institution that presented, works with visual impairments and deafblindness (35 years of work).
- Aims to improve the lives of people with blindness and multiple disabilities.
- Perkins International has provided much support over the years.
- Began working on an action line in 2023.
- Important information is shared with different areas of the country.
- Reviewing the relationship with the medical area is important to know how many children are born with deafblindness.
- Information has been provided to the medical area about deafblindness.
- Currently, a national team is working.
- One of the needs is to have teachers with knowledge in the field.
- Communication with families needs to start.
- The goal is to deepen the work of the ministry of education.

### **NEEDS:**

1. Awareness: Share on social media and with the ministry of education. It is a real need to work hand in hand.
2. The ministry has shown great desire to work together. It is believed that learning and training are what is needed in our country. This campaign seeks to strengthen this area. Each country's needs are unique, and through our work as a region, it was identified as a common need to work on "awareness and training."

### **ECUADOR:**

- At the moment they collaborate with Salesian University.
- Have some adults with deafblindness.
- Work on training teachers.
- Work with UNESCO guidelines.
- Salesian University is open and interested in opening research projects in the field of deafblindness.
- Currently managing UDL strategies since 2021.
- Have research areas on inclusion, active participation, and multiple disabilities.
- Currently, there is collaborative work between Salesian University, the Ministry of Education, and UNESCO.
- Willing to work on public policies in the field of deafblindness.
- One area to develop is that the ministry that issues disability cards is the health area, where deafblindness is not considered.
- One of the focuses needed is to raise awareness about deafblindness in universities and the health area.
- Another area is to include deafblindness as a subject in the university curriculum.
- A reality in Ecuador is that deafblindness can often be detected in the classroom, but it takes a long time for the health area to confirm this detection, and this needs improvement.

- Ecuador lacks specific documents on deafblindness; it is a national need for teachers to know how to work with children with deafblindness. Specifically, it is about finding the "how," that is, what strategies need to be used.
- In Ecuador, inclusion is often not happening, integration is, and this is a reality that professionals face. Urgent training is needed in this field.
- There is also a lack of materials and assistive technology.
- Trainers of trainers are needed. This administration provides money for materials, but we lack knowledge about which materials are most appropriate.
- Ecuador seeks to work in a network. It is necessary to have quality in the educational process to ensure that the process of students with special needs (deafblindness) is: to enter services, learn, and complete their educational process.
- It is important to be able to evaluate the work being done, so a long-term plan is sought to evaluate the process.
- Basic areas: research, identification, networking, and training needs.

## **BOLIVIA:**

- Presented by Juan Antonio Loaiza (a person with deafblindness). He begins by presenting the reality of rejection faced by people with deafblindness in his country, as people and the government believe they live with the sum of two disabilities.
- The area of deafblindness is not included in the inclusion efforts in Bolivia.
- It is believed that there is a population of children born with deafblindness who have not received any specialized services.
- Currently, there is no understanding of deafblindness as a unique disability. This implies that often children are hidden from society. To date, there is no research on the number of children with deafblindness.
- Some people with deafblindness have hearing loss and blindness, with their main needs being hearing aids and support in the communication area. Sometimes people find themselves needing to create a language that only the mother and the person understand.
- This campaign will help work better in this field. For Bolivia, it is very important since, in addition to being a very large country, it is divided into zones that are far from each other.
- Bolivia is a country that has joined this campaign through people with deafblindness who have made and continue to make great efforts to contact their authorities. They have tried to do so through social networks and by visiting the ministry in person. They have tried to approach both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Inclusion and Health. Among the opportunities mentioned:
- Work with the law and have legal frameworks in the country will help make this population visible.
- Training is needed for different teachers.
- They seek to work with all areas willing to get involved.
- As a region, Latin America has a lot in common; the aim is for countries to relate and work together with the ministries. A small diagnosis created by parents and people with deafblindness has been worked on. In this diagnosis, strengths are discovered. One of them is that this campaign is led by professionals with experience in teaching people with any disability, including those with deafblindness. A great challenge is that the

government has not been present in the development of the work carried out. This is a weakness and a great challenge. The area of deafblindness is not included in the national curriculum. They want to work in three areas:

- Socialization
- Identification: We know there are people with deafblindness, but they are not counted.
- Training for teachers: We need this to help our children. We also need interpreters. Alliances have been expanded! Now they are working with the school for people with hearing problems and really trying to make this campaign known to everyone in Bolivia. This helps us generate actions, concrete actions that will help us. The feedback offered by those present to the different National Committees was:
  - Support from the authorities present to contact authorities from other countries that are not yet part of the campaign. Some ideas that emerged for contacting the authorities were:
    1. Organize Round Tables: Invite government authorities, educators, parents, and health professionals to participate in public discussions about deafblindness. This can increase visibility of the issue and encourage government commitment.
    2. Social Media Campaigns: Use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to raise awareness and pressure authorities. Personal stories and videos can be particularly effective.
    3. Partnerships with NGOs and International Organizations: Collaborate with organizations that already have experience and established contacts in the governmental sphere to facilitate access to ministries.
    4. Public Petition: Create and spread an online petition through platforms like Change.org, addressed to the relevant ministries. The more signatures collected, the harder it will be for authorities to ignore the request.
    5. Participation in Public Events and Conferences: Attend conferences, seminars, and other events related to health, education, and human rights where they can interact directly with government representatives.
    6. Pilot Projects: Offer to initiate pilot projects in collaboration with the government to demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed strategies and technologies for helping people with deafblindness.
    7. Use Traditional Media: Send press releases and request interviews on radio, television, and newspapers to raise awareness and gain public support. These actions can increase the visibility of the problem and help secure the necessary support from the government and other key players. Among the participants' concerns were:
      - The need to know the story of one of those present about what it is like to live with deafblindness. He comments that he was born with blindness and lost his hearing at university while studying communication. He helps himself with assistive technology. He is currently working in the field of vision and has had the opportunity to meet various people with deafblindness. He expresses the importance of technology support in the area of low vision.
      - The concern about what is being considered when talking about specific knowledge about deafblindness? Courses or a university degree? It is answered that specific courses will help teachers have more tools.

- The words of Minister Horacio Ferreira about "the possibility of teachers participating in the teaching process of different specialists" are brought to the table. It is important that in each country, specifically at this moment in Ecuador, they work closely with the University and the Government.
- It is clarified that using UDL is not about adaptations. Each country needs to review terms as sometimes words can be used incorrectly.
- Another concern presented is related to prevention and early intervention. It is mentioned that sometimes there are doubts about detection. Should it be done by the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education? In response, it is said that it is necessary to work together health and education. It is necessary to walk together in identification to know the diversity of the population with deafblindness. In this line, the General Director of Special and Hospital Education of the province of Córdoba shares some ideas on how to make connections and networks with different areas of the province. She comments that they work on early intervention where many areas of development are found. In Argentina, legal frameworks express that up to 2 years old a child is healthy. This helps to place students through the medical area. She also comments that early intervention spaces work within their own communities, and from there, networks are created between the areas that need to work with these children (each one has its specific teams) along with parents. In Córdoba, they are currently working on a new area with local groups seeking to know the needs and from there create meetings with different professionals where needs and experiences are shared. The way they work is "talk, talk with each sector and share ideas, roles, and opinions that guide the work." The universities in this province work a lot in research, and each area provides information and work ideas according to their specific needs. An example is when two areas of the city, such as health services and early intervention, join to work. For specialists, being part of this information exchange helps them become aware and know the needs of each case. This information is shared with parents and/or teachers. This communication makes goals and achievements visible. Something interesting to comment on is that by working together, the area of education and health activates the exchange of information, allowing decisions to be made that help and are close to those who need these specific services. It is suggested that General Director Adriana Cali and Raul could talk so that these experiences help the Bolivian committee establish a relationship with the ministry. Some authorities could support as sponsors and possibly have meetings between ministries. As a campaign, we need your help.

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:** The Directorate of Special Needs has a multidisciplinary team currently working in collaboration with FOAL and Perkins. The Dominican Republic has different laws. Among them is one related to people with disabilities, ensuring that the services provided are of quality. The Olga Estrella School, now the Olga Estrella Resource Center, was responsible for creating strategies for people with vision problems. The history goes from 1957 to 2024. The DR has evolved enormously. In 2024, the first classroom for people with deafblindness was opened in a regular setting. Currently, the Ministry of Education works with different organizations such as FOAL and Perkins since 2020. Presently, the Dominican Republic has begun a process to implement the educational model.

- 2022 – FOAL and Perkins

- 2023 – Evaluation process
- 2023 – Process and evaluation with Perkins and FOAL
- 2024 – Official launch of our process Currently, there is:
- Directorate of Special Education
- Resource Center
- Technical teams
- Regional offices
- Educational districts
- Inter-school groups In March, the DR got involved in the campaign and the service model for people with deafblindness. This was achieved with the support of sponsors, including María Luz Neri de Troconis. In April, they began working on teacher training. In April - May, teacher training for working with people with deafblindness continued. In May, the training course began: "Teaching teachers in the area of deafblindness" (with the support of FOAL and Perkins). Work was also done on selecting the materials needed to work with people with deafblindness. Currently, there is support from the health area. The DR already has an association for people with deafblindness. They also work with diplomatic areas. The DR developed a plan where all areas work together. They are seeking to have a national definition of deafblindness. Currently, there are 3 people with deafblindness on the team. Through this work, it has been discovered that the more characteristics of this situation are known, the broader the population is found to be. The DR has developed different videos. Many people in the DR already know the campaign (by sharing videos on social networks). And they are thinking of conducting comprehensive 4-year studies for teachers. María Luz Neri de Troconis, in her role as sponsor, shares that they feel very good being part of this group. People like Mary Carmen from Mexico and I think it is a pleasure to work in this country and that they, as a group, have great diversity. I believe we need to work collaboratively. All the people involved in the issue of deafblindness need to be involved in these processes. We have worked very hard to have this collaborative work. We have an institution with many years. And everyone can help. We believe that our population needs services close to their homes. For this, we need to train teachers. Thanks to the global campaign. We want to thank you for your commitment. You have helped us enormously to move firmly towards our goal. It has been a great honor for me to work with Ma. Luz. We can't wait to start our training course specially created for and by the Dominican Republic. We even want to create a master's degree. We need to train our teachers. We are very happy for the Dominican Republic. These things are happening! Wow! We are part of people with deafblindness and all this work has enriched our task. We have always worked closely with professionals. The children who at some point came to us now have a quality of life that makes us proud. All you have done, plus our experience, has been great work. Therefore, at the national level, we have tools in our educational department. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak, and we always move forward. It is commented that when talking about collaboration, something very important is being talked about. This joint work, you as an association, with the ministry and with different community resources, such as universities. The work being done in the DR is an example for all of Latin America.



## **PARAGUAY:**

Presentation of the school, its mission, and vision. They started with yarn bombing last year. Actions of Paraguay through the campaign:

- Participation in monthly meetings.
- Meetings with the ministries of the campaign.
- Sharing information about the campaign with school teachers.
- A 4-year-old child motivated them to work harder and more deeply in the campaign.
- Two students with deafblindness were found in the school for hearing-impaired students
- Research was conducted in different special needs environments.
- Information and videos are also shared through social networks.
- There is a real hope to have legislation for people with deafblindness and to recognize it as a unique disability.
- Teacher training is also needed.

Paraguay has included families as an important part of working with the deafblind population. Another very important aspect for this country is the laws, so that deafblindness is seen as a unique disability. The motivation to be part of this movement was: "to meet a child." It is NOT necessary to have too many students.

A comment was made that in the Dominican Republic it has been discovered that students with deafblindness can be found in schools for children with hearing loss, and there is a specific proposal to open classes for students with deafblindness in schools for people with hearing problems.

**Nicolás Benítez Saguier**, Director of the Migration Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies of Paraguay shares: When I visited the school, I could see the human qualities of the people who work there. In our countries, we never have enough money, but I could see the fantastic work they do. I will do everything possible to help all these students. WE CANNOT LOVE WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW. We need people to know about deafblindness. I know that when we can communicate about this situation, we will have more and more students. Very grateful and committed.

## **SECOND DAY**

During the second session, words of welcome were offered to all people with deafblindness, families, professionals, and the general public. Being this the second year of the campaign, this space invites us to learn about all the actions carried out in the area of deafblindness in Latin America.

Presentation of Deafblind International and its global education campaign The first presentation was given by the President of DbI, Mirko Baur, who shared the Global Education Campaign "Let me in". The main words focused on the fact that the Campaign seeks to work for a better future for our students with deafblindness. It seeks to connect children, families, and

governments. There is a lot of passion and energy among us. Children with deafblindness are left out. Most do not attend school. This reality goes against human rights.

What are we doing? We are working to meet the needs of children with deafblindness. If we meet their needs, we meet the needs of all children. And we are talking about 5.85 million children with deafblindness in all the countries involved in this campaign.

In addition to all the national projects, we have planned to support 30 research projects, ten per region. The results will be presented at the next World Conference. We are looking for quality education in school, but we also wonder what happens after school. This is an audiovisual world, so it is enormously important to have adequate support, specific for deafblindness. However, the population is very diverse, and therefore the challenges are diverse. It is essential to know what where we are and where we are going. We have a lot of work!

### **Presentation of the Global Education Campaign “Let me in” in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The second session coordinated by Cristina Sanz presents Carmen Lucía Guerrero from Guatemala and Graciela Ferioli from Argentina, who lead this campaign in Latin America. In the development of the presentation, emphasis is placed on the importance of empathy in the inclusion processes being carried out, and special attention is given to the countries involved in the campaign. The progress made in the National Committees with the support of international organizations and the programs and professionals from sponsoring countries is shared. The lines of action being worked on and the progress made towards achieving the proposed goals are described. Efforts are tirelessly made to identify children who remain hidden and to involve governments in joining the campaign.

### **Maricarmen Scheleske: “History of Deafblind Education from Argentina to Latin America and the Caribbean”.**

Maricarmen Scheleske presents educational practices, breaks, and continuities from Argentina to Latin America. Maricarmen shares that the present study arises from the need to recover practices and methodologies of the educational and rehabilitative process, and to understand that history is a relationship with the past that is evident in the present. The study makes it possible to visualize how professionals developed skills to work with the population, how they thought, and how they remember their educational practices. During the narrative, the voice of one of the interviewees is presented, who in that segment of the filming talks about communicating, teaching others to listen to what the child is saying, interpreting what the other is saying, giving the other what they need. To see, to feel that there is someone else outside of oneself. The pilgrimage with Love and Wisdom left deep marks in the tireless work of the teachers.

### **Panel: Current actions in favor of people with deafblindness.**

Elizabeth Zabala representing the Ministry of Education of Ecuador: These days have been a great learning opportunity. Today, as a country, we are taking a new step in this area. I work in the Ministry of Education in my country. We seek quality, inclusion. In my country, many

families abandon education. We are working on policies to prevent this from happening. We want them to complete their studies, and that those studies are of quality. We have 3 levels in each educational district and seek to promote inclusion everywhere. As a country, we have psychologists and other areas that help with special needs (multidisciplinary approach). We also have areas that cover learning difficulties that do not necessarily involve special needs. At this moment, thanks to the university and DbI, we know better how to work to achieve our goal.

**Nicolás Benítez Saguier** representing the Directorate of the Migration Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies of Paraguay: I know that in Paraguay we have many limitations, but our hearts have grown over the past two days. In Paraguay, we have a strong legal framework. We are all equal, everyone has the right to be educated. And an education with accessibility, without barriers, and inclusive. We also work with human rights, providing our entire community with the services they need. All Latin countries have economic problems, but that never stops us from achieving our goals. We are not the only country that lacks information about deafblindness.

**Griselda Moreno** representing the Directorate of Inclusive Education of El Salvador: Listening to all of you gives us great hope and happiness. As a country, we begin education with early intervention, where there are 5 areas: quality, health and nutrition, families, inclusion, equality, and diversity. Each area has its own set of cores to develop. Support systems are available, offering resources and technical aids as well as educational follow-up.

**Edwin Hernández** representing the Ministry of Education of Honduras. We must care about our students. We have a commitment to help them, and we are grateful to INFRACNOVI. We are ready to work with them in this government. Quality education, quality training for teachers. We want to see our students as people with rights and dreams, and we are ready to work in collaboration.

**Adriana Cali** representing the Ministry of Education of Córdoba. “Let me in” is the possibility for schools to have a common area where love and teaching take place. We carry out many actions that lead us to inclusion. Therefore, it is important to know that this objective is carried out transversally. At this moment, Córdoba has 121 schools for five thousand students with special educational needs. Most of our schools are state-run, although some are private. Our priorities in this area are to have quality education and early intervention, taking into consideration the needs of the community.

**Presentation of Educational Practices by International Organizations.** I want to share who we are and what we do. I am really happy to hear from you. Our NGO was created 18 years ago and was founded for people with multiple disabilities. Currently, we try to create services for people with deafblindness. We also want to help the community to be more inclusive. We work with companies and schools to help create inclusive areas throughout the community. We receive students from all over the region. This helps us to multiply our services throughout the country. Each service created is to cover some needs that come to us. We work from early intervention to job training. We are very open to seeing what the needs of our community are and then seek to solve them close to the families. We really focus on walking with people who need it so that they find a job where they can develop. All this is based on human rights: the right to education, to

participate, to work, and finally, the right to an independent life project. We focus on specific people, we get to know them and follow them to meet their needs.

## **Panel of International Organizations**

### **Marycarmen Peral, Organization of Ibero-American States**

We all have an idea, a dream, and we want that dream to become a reality. All of us strive to achieve quality education for everyone. We have more than 19 million children who need quality education. That is why we support this campaign. Our children have the right to continuous education. We work with different organizations to provide real solutions to the diverse needs of our students.

We have worked with Graciela Ferioli, María Nina Cormedi, Sonia Margarita Villacrés, and others in creating some resources based on UDL (Universal Design for Learning). For this, we need to understand our capacities and responsibilities. This work is a guide and a training course as a self-training process.

We also work in spaces that promote training on the situation of people with deafblindness, talking about quality education. We want to be inside, but we also want to be in quality education.

As OEI, this year we have helped the countries participating in the campaign in the creation of laws. We know that money is always a problem. But we also know that we cannot stop in this situation. We need to be proactive, working in collaboration, both with the ministries and with the different institutions in each country.

Another area in which we are working is with society. We do not believe that a society should be isolated.

### **Estefanía Mirpuri Marino, Fundación ONCE Latin America**

- **Who are we?** 26 years working in Latin America. Our main objective is inclusion. We have five lines of action. Education and employment are our main areas. In education, our main goal is for children with deafblindness to have access to education. This can be in special settings or in regular settings. We work closely with other institutions. We also provide the means for the necessary resources to be developed.
- **What do we do in education specifically related to this issue?** Together with Perkins, we are working in the Dominican Republic in collaboration with other institutions in the country, where we have shared our experience and expertise from the years we have worked in the area of deafblindness in Spain. We are convinced that we cannot do it alone; we need to work hand in hand.

### **Matías Ferreira, President of the Latin American Union of the Blind (ULAC)**

- **ULAC worked with Perkins in 1989; the history is long!**
- We need to know what we are doing now and for the future.

- The importance of working together internationally. We believe that the main goal of a group of people with disabilities is to be active and participate in what is happening in their own fields.
- Deafblindness is now known worldwide as a unique disability. As ULAC, we can work together towards inclusive education.
- We are eager to work together; our goal is to be with people with deafblindness.
- Inclusive education is in a developmental stage. Their rights.
- Reasonable adjustments in educational processes.
- The organization of SC people; their voice must be taken into account. Constant consultation on the measures to be taken.
- The voice of families to assert their rights.

### **Cristina Sanz, Past President of ICEVI Latin America**

- Our organization has worked in this region for more than 50 years, and we emphasize the approach of starting from home and school, targeting teachers and professionals, empowering families.
- To have a life full of rights, we need to start from education. This involves parents. Youth are the NOW, not the future.
- ICEVI is part of the campaign because we believe that this relationship makes no sense if we do not include people with deafblindness.
- We have been working with deafblindness since 2001 with a collaborative approach. And in this campaign, it is no different because those who must defend their rights and make their voices heard are people with visual disabilities and those with deafblindness. We must work together so that people with deafblindness have the life they are entitled to.
- We emphasize the approach and the need to start from home and school.

### **Karina Medina, Representative of Perkins International**

Perkins works in 15 countries with ministries of education and their schools, offering support, training, and advice. Additionally, it offers courses and conducts research through strategic national groups. In each of the institutions we work with, we implement action plans with quality indicators, involving not only professionals but also families by engaging family coordinators, pedagogical coordinators, and international tutors. It is important to observe, project, act, and evaluate. We should reflect on our practices.

Particularly regarding this campaign, Perkins is working with the described model in the Dominican Republic, developing a model program to ensure access, retention, and graduation.

### **Carmen Lucia Guerrero, Representative of CBM Office in Guatemala**

CBM works in the inclusive field worldwide in coordination with some organizations and governments (education and health) to break the cycle of poverty and disability to have a positive impact. CBM is committed to prevention and ensuring rights for equal opportunities. In the field of deafblindness, we need to reinforce their voices and obtain information and data to act accordingly.

## **Ricardo Zevallos, Director of SENSE International Peru**

Sense International Peru promotes the rights of people with deafblindness. Time is fleeting, so we must generate evidence and think collectively to enhance resources. We must move out of our comfort zone to the opportunity zone, as we need to transcend territories.

In summary, we must:

- Generate evidence.
- Have a purpose.
- Be aware that there are different steps along the way.
- Create the need to move to grow.
- Walk to go further, leave our comfort zone.

As institutions, we must forget that we are islands and see all opportunities to promote and enhance our resources. As a campaign, we are helping to move towards the right to education. Our role must go beyond our own processes. We need to go beyond our borders and share with everyone.

## **Melba Benjamin, Vice President of the Latin American Federation of the Deafblind (FLASC)**

Babies and children with deafblindness are the most vulnerable group in the deafblind community, requiring more significant attention in the future as only 7% are currently included in early education and 20% in primary education. It is important to link foundations with organizations of people with deafblindness.

We must:

- Recognize deafblindness as a unique disability.
- Consider the report of the World Federation of the Deafblind, which visualizes a very small number of students with deafblindness being included.
- Understand the difference between inclusive education and quality education. To make these changes, teacher training is required.
- We are part of this campaign because we believe in its objectives.

## **Walter Wittich, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health ICF and the Development of Core Sets for Deafblindness**

Today, I have the honor of presenting the development of the "ICF Core Sets for Deafblindness." The ICF, a biopsychosocial framework of the WHO, guides our understanding of health, functioning and disability, including conditions such as deafblindness, influenced by body structures and functions, activities, and participation, all modulated by the environment. The Core Sets for Deafblindness will focus on deafblindness and filter out those ICF codes that

are most important to capture deafblindness. That will facilitate communication and decision-making in areas such as education and health services. Currently, we are finalizing the development of the Core Sets for Deafblindness through a rigorous process that includes literature review, lived experience studies, and global expert opinions. We will soon hold an international Consensus Conference with representatives with and without deafblindness from all WHO regions to agree on the Core Sets – a major milestone for everyone concerned and involved.

### **Presentation of Educational Practices by the Helen Keller Institute**

The Helen Keller Institute offers specialized educational services for people with visual, multiple disabilities, and deafblindness, recognizing the uniqueness of each educational journey and promoting the development of skills to improve quality of life. The school, part of the special modality and under the Ministry of Education of the Province of Córdoba, covers from early education to the care of the elderly.

Services include early education for infants from 45 days to 3 years, initial, primary, and secondary levels for those requiring a specific approach, inclusion in regular schools, home education for those who cannot attend school, and care for young people and the elderly to improve their quality of life and autonomy.

The text highlights a specific case of Bruno, a 3-year and 5-month-old child with educational challenges. It describes how the school and family work together to facilitate his development, using strategies such as play, imitation, the use of anticipatory objects, and creating structured routines. Bruno gradually progresses in communication, autonomy, and social interaction, allowing him to successfully integrate into a nursery.

The account emphasizes the importance of adapting educational practices to the individual needs of each student, collaborating closely with families and other institutions to ensure their inclusion and development.

### **Alejandra Delgado and Heliana Molina, Research Progress. The interrelation between teacher training and student-centered educational practices with deafblindness.**

The presentation of the research line "The interrelation between teacher training and student-centered educational practices for students with multiple disabilities and deafblindness," endorsed by the Catholic University of Córdoba, is directed by Mg. Graciela Ferioli and Mg. Mariana Dalbes. This line aims to analyze the educational practices of novice teachers with up to five years of experience who are currently working with children with multiple disabilities and deafblindness in Argentina, Guatemala, and Mexico. It also seeks to offer conclusions regarding the use of Dr. Leslie Buchanan's protocol as a tool for self-reflection on teaching practices. In the presentation, the objectives to be achieved, the implemented methodology, and the expected impact of the project were explained, involving, among other aspects, progress in scientific knowledge, influencing teacher training, and educational policy aspects. Additionally, some findings obtained from the analysis of 80% of the sample were shared. The members of the research line agree on the importance and richness of the work being done, as it will improve the



quality of educational services for this population, minimizing the risks of exclusion and providing functional learning opportunities for each child and their family in the Latin American context.

### **Presentation of educational practices by the María Montessori Special School**

Today's meeting allows us to explore a collaborative and systematic educational trajectory centered on Samara, a student accompanied by teachers from different institutions throughout her schooling. From her entry at the age of 4 in kindergarten to her progress in primary school, inter-institutional and family efforts to overcome barriers of autonomy, communication, and pedagogy are highlighted. Strategies such as augmentative communication, inclusion in group activities, and the use of concrete materials have been fundamental. The active participation of Samara, her family, and the educational community has demonstrated that inclusion is possible when adequate supports are provided and a collaborative and understanding environment is fostered. Education, in its transformative capacity, opens doors to a world of possibilities, showing that every challenge can be addressed with commitment and dedication.

### **Presentation of educational practices by the Sullai Special Education Institute**

The presentation of the private educational institution "Sullai," from the province of Córdoba, was given by its director Jessica García Lorena and secondary level teacher Vanesa Patricia Riquelme. The institution serves students at all educational levels: early childhood, primary, and secondary, and also has a day center for those who have completed their educational journey. The institution provides services to students with multiple disabilities and deafblindness and is a reference for international projects conducted in campaigns such as LET ME IN!, as sponsors of the institution "Don Luis Braille," directed by Silvia Salcedo in Asunción, Paraguay. In their presentation, they discussed the approach methodology and considerations for working with the target population, as well as audiovisual material representing the practices they carry out at the institution. The guiding thread was the inspiration and motivation fundamental for the development of functional educational proposals and concept development. Additionally, in the awareness campaign about deafblindness, they presented images of families involved in institutional projects, creating graffiti knitting and placing it around institutional premises; promotion and visibility projects at the National University of Córdoba, and community interventions with experiential experiences.

### **Sonia Margarita Villacres Mejia: Equality in rights and opportunities for full participation in society**

In this plenary session, Sonia Margarita shares her fight for the right to education, independent living, and full participation in society. She narrates firsthand what it has been like to live with deafblindness. She shares how she acquired deafblindness due to an accident while playing with her "siblings" and how her parents struggled, with much effort but little professional guidance, to find a solution for her vision loss. However, due to the medications prescribed by specialists, it was not possible to recover her vision; on the contrary, she lost her hearing due to the ototoxic antibiotics administered. These situations motivated Sonia Margarita to face her condition with strength and to prevent her parents and family from suffering for her. She recounts her struggle

to get into university because they did not believe in her ability. After several attempts, she finally gained admission to a university in Ecuador, where she graduated with honors and later obtained other university degrees. Sonia Margarita expresses the happiness she found living with deafblindness, being independent, and demonstrating her capabilities. Among the thoughts shared by Sonia Margarita, the following stand out: "The best way to demonstrate is to do"; "I am fortunate in adversity"; "Life is beautiful despite everything"; "The more you fight, the more enjoyable life is"; "I am happy to be deafblind because I go to sleep and no one wakes me up."

**Carmen Lucia Guerrero and Graciela Ferioli: The future in our hands. A commitment from everyone**

During the working sessions, it became evident from government representatives, participating international organizations, professionals, families, and people with deafblindness the need to ensure inclusive education. The responsibilities that this entails were visualized, including a shared vision among different government departments, organizations, professionals, families, and the community through cooperative work; the guarantee of providing human and material support to ensure full participation; and the ongoing training of personnel. To guarantee people with deafblindness a full life, it is necessary to continue with actions and structural changes in educational proposals to ensure access to learning. This implies close collaboration with government authorities to make necessary modifications and a change in attitude towards this disability in society in general. Education plays a crucial role in this change, but it requires political support and commitment from various government agencies, organizations, professionals, and society as a whole. We all must be part of this educational change.