

PROJECTS ABROAD ARGENTINA

LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT



Social Projects					
CeCAM <i>Girls Correctional</i>	Felisa Soaje <i>Girls Home</i>	Paulo Freire <i>Boys Correctional</i>	Quisquisacate <i>Girls Home</i>	Casa de Ronald McDonald	Basta de Trata <i>Human Trafficking & Trade</i>
Monitoring Human Rights		Community Advocacy	Educational Outings & Office Research		
Fundación G.A.N.A.S	Copa de Leche	Blas Pascal neighbourhood	La Perla	Federal Court Proceedings	

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE DO LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS?

MYTHS AND TRUTHS AROUND A TOUGH QUESTION



Though I don't think I will be able to demystify this big question that has been around for hundreds of years, I will try to share a little bit of my experiences and knowledge, and also part of my personal beliefs.

What comes to mind when somebody asks you, "what are human rights?" It is a tough one right? Most people have to stop for a second, think about it and at the end (and believe me it has everything to do with their context and their personal experiences) they will answer something like: freedom? Life? Education? The rights of a human? And I'm writing with a question mark because most likely they will be unsure and answering with another question, as if asking: "Am I right?"

Can you imagine the face of people when we ask what are human rights? Or what does a human rights lawyer do? It's apparently the toughest question ever!

I just want to say, it is not!

Many people believe that practicing law & human rights is being the defender of victims of major human rights violations like tortured or murdered, or holding a big sign saying "stop human rights violations" in the middle of a protest, or standing in front of 20 people who have been abused and teaching them that they have the rights to education, they have the right to live in a non-violent environment, etc.

Yes, indeed that is human rights! But the amount of people around the world that are occupying such places is insignificant; comparing them with the many other human rights defenders. So if you have been lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and you actually have had the possibility to be one of these persons, please enjoy it! There are only a few times in your life when the right instant and the right place will line up and you get to be part of one of these emblematic moments of "doing human rights".

If it hasn't happened yet, please do not feel disappointed, I have great news! There are hundreds of other ways to practice human rights, you just have to be willing to open your mind (and heart) for new ideas and understandings that you've never thought before.

So what are these hundreds of other ways to do human rights? Let me tell you more, but first some clarifications:

Human Rights are: "Inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being."

List of Human Rights: 1. We are all free and equal. 2. Don't discriminate. 3. The right to life. 4. No slavery. 5. No torture. 6. We all have the same right to use the law. 7. We are all protected by the law. 8. Fair treatment by fair courts. 9. No unfair detainment. 10. The right to trial. 11. Innocent until proven guilty. 12. The right to privacy. 13. Freedom to move. 14. The right to asylum. 15. The right to a nationality. 16. Marriage and family. 17. Your own things. 18. Freedom and thought. 19. Free to say what you want. 20. Meet where you like. 21. The right to democracy. 22. The right to social security. 23. Workers' rights. 24. The right to play. 25. A bed and food. 26. The right to education. 27. Culture and copyright. 28. A free and fair world. 29. Our responsibilities. 30. Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us. *(List provided by Youth for Human Rights International, adapted and simplified from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights)*

Doing Human Rights: A human rights defender is someone who, individually or with others, acts to promote or protect human rights. Human rights defenders are those men and women who act peacefully for the promotion and protection of those rights. *(Adapted from Wikipedia)*

Then, considering that practicing human rights is not only *protecting* (what common sense would point out to be practicing human rights e.g. defending an abused person in court), but also *promoting* (meaning thousands of other actions to be taken in the field, e.g. a workshop speaking about no discrimination to your partner) and also considering fundamental rights include the rights to be treated free and equal, the right to no discrimination, meaning we all deserve the same opportunities in life, then and finally I would say promoting same opportunities in life through teaching a group of young offenders how to design a CV, and having different sessions about what is required during the process of being interviewed for a possible job position.

Every day, in countries all over the world, people live under difficult, life-threatening circumstances caused by human rights abuses, war, polluted environments, disease, famine, and poverty - only to name a few. For one to promote and protect human rights they need to be committed. Commitment is about giving. When it comes to human rights, how much are you willing to give to achieve the dialogue that is necessary to protect and promote these rights? Without commitment you cannot protect your own human rights or bring about change for others. This commitment can be shown in a number of ways, including attending meetings and rallies, designing Internet sites and joining human rights organisations.

Furthermore, your commitment will sow the seeds of peace in many ways: by fighting ignorance, by increasing awareness of what constitutes human rights and by promoting preventive measures.

The goal is to help create a world where all people have the opportunity to reach their full potential. (Adapted from www.abc.net.au)

Continuing with the idea to “help to create a world where the people have the opportunity to reach their full potential,” I can tell you and maybe some former volunteers can agree, that: sitting every day at the same table with girls that are living in an institution because their father sexually abused them, and taking the time to listen to them and ask them how do you feel? How can we help? Doing a collage about how they see themselves in the future and speaking about how they can achieve these dreams; or inviting the neighbours of a city slum to a meeting where you can give them a voice and the opportunity to say something about their daily problems – such as the lack of water, electricity etc. -Working together to reach a solution; or taking the time to listen to what young offenders have to say about their backgrounds, about why they made the choices they did, and about how they feel they are being discriminated by the people in the streets because of the way they look, and that they feel they cannot do anything about it and instead just duck out of sight and try to continue on their way, sharing their pain, and sadness and trying to encourage them to fight for their rights against discrimination. Please, believe me, this is also doing human rights, everything and all of what you do that is orientated to “helping create a world where the people have the opportunity to reach their full potential,” coming from a human rights point of view, promoting and protecting those; **all of that is doing human rights.**

And for those intending to be a human rights lawyer, I will share an excellent piece of work written by the Irish human rights law professor Conor Gearty in his text *“Doing Human Rights: Three Lessons from the Field”* that deeply explores the work and the political and ethical position of those who are being said to do human rights law.”

It was through reading Kevin Boyle and scholars like him that I came to learn three things about law and human rights that have stayed with me through my professional career. The first of these is that the proper function of human rights work should be the empowerment of the vulnerable and the marginalised. Of course it is a subject which is interested in philosophical ideas like autonomy and liberty, and which might indeed also rightly require of its proponents a display of technical virtuosity in the field of legal analysis from time to time, but what ultimately makes this body of work tick is the beating heart for the weak that lies at its core. This insight has (for me anyway) the important consequence that the human rights discourse should itself be viewed as functional, that it (and indeed the values of equality of esteem and dignity that lie under it) stands for a perspective on the world that is as particular and challenging as it is virtuous: the poor not only need and deserve but are entitled to their life chances, just as much as are those whose various accidents of birth, genetic make-up and education mean that that they are able to do much with their freedom and autonomy. Second, and Kevin Boyle could hardly avoid this growing up where he did and when he did, there is the self-evident fragility of law, its vulnerability to being captured

by the powerful, even in a decently-functioning democratic society much less one that is pockmarked by sectarian division. What this means for human rights lawyers is that judges often disappoint, that in the fleshing out of the grand instruments of right and wrong courts can sometimes open up disturbing gaps between law and justice. Judges can be wrong either because they have in this way ignored the demands of law but they can also be wrong (in a wider, non-legal sense) when they have reluctantly buckled before them to a law which is harsh but unavoidable. Of the two the first is the greater wrong, it being personal to the decision-maker on the bench rather than systemic, but the activist lawyer needs always to be alive to the possibility of judicial decisions being wrong in both senses. The first requires a legal response, the second a political one. This is the third of 'Boyle's laws' – that in human rights law politics should always matter. The rights, rules and regulations that bubble to the surface in a case, framing the principle that needs to be identified and the context in which the facts are first found and then applied, exists always in a particular here and now. Cases in the law reports are like skeletons laid bare – they tell you about the bare bones but you need the rest of the body if you want to know truly what has gone on in the particular life that is laid out before you in all its cadaverous opacity..."

Lic. Ma. Victoria Marton
Law & Human Rights Coordinator

SOCIAL PROJECTS

CECAM

CeCAM, (Centro Correccional para Adolescentes Mujeres) is a correctional facility for young girls aged 14 to 20, who committed or were involved in serious crimes. Usually the institution houses about fifteen girls.

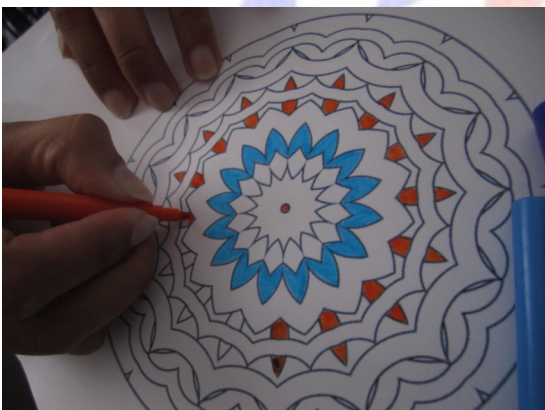
The girls were encouraged by the volunteers to involve themselves in more intellectually demanding activities in order develop and expand their academic capabilities.

The girls have begun to think in a positive direction – their future. They've mentioned to volunteers and brainstormed as to what kind of job they would like to have in the future. Volunteers had the girls brainstorm about their interests, what they enjoy doing, and what kind of job they could have doing this.

They took it one step further by helping create their own curriculum vitae with the help of the volunteers. The girls really took to the idea and enjoyed creating one, at the same time making the volunteers feel worthwhile in the work they were doing.

FELISA SOAJE

Felisa Soaje is a residential care facility for girls aged between 14 and 17. The girls living there have been ordered by the court to reside there as their biological parents have been deemed unfit or incapable of caring for them. The girls are provided with meals and accommodation and attend school 5 days a week. Volunteers meet with the girls on a weekly basis.



Like at CeCAM, the volunteers at Soaje have been encouraging the girls to involve themselves in more intellectually demanding activities in order to help develop and expand their academic capabilities.

This month's activities at Soaje have been focused on building self-esteem and developing the girls' sense of self-worth. The volunteers have devised several activities in line with this ethos: making collages about the girls' futures, making microphones and learning songs with powerful messages, drawing "mandalas" in order to teach the girls how to meditate and find a peaceful place inside

themselves when they are having a hard day and other symbolic drawing activities which remain very popular with the girls. They hope the next outing can be to the zoo.

The volunteers hope to organize a field trip for the girls on the first weekend of every month. The employees at the institution rarely have enough time to take all the girls out together, so they hope to be able to do so with the help of the volunteers. Most recently they accompanied the girls to the cinema to see Monsters University. It was great to see the girls have so much fun as a group outside of Soaje, having the opportunity to behave like normal teenage girls.

LA CASA DE RONALD MCDONALD

The well-known Ronald McDonald Foundation has a local house in Córdoba. The house provides lodging to children and their families who are receiving medical care in Córdoba. The children and their families come from smaller towns throughout Córdoba province to receive medical treatment that is not available close to where they live. The children undergo treatment at the hospital next door and stay at the hospital for the period of their treatment.

The volunteers participate 2 days a week in activities organized by the Casa de Ronald and on Saturdays organize their own activity.

Volunteers have presented the idea of human rights at the Casa by presenting the rights of children. To do this, they had the kids build houses out of all sorts of materials, to make the children and families aware of their right to a safe environment. Afterwards they put all the houses together to form a community aimed to make the right to a safe environment a more “visual” right for the children and families.



PAULO FREIRE VILLA CABRERA

Paulo Freire is a social services and correctional facility that offers a number of different services for children and adolescents. The Law & Human Rights volunteers work with young male offenders, who have constant problems with the police.

The boys come from poor backgrounds and live in rough neighbourhoods. They have committed criminal offences in the past and now have juvenile criminal records or misdemeanour records which often make it impossible for them to find employment. Since most of them do not have a job nor go to school, they are likely to fall into a life of crime and unemployment. They also suffer greatly from a set of laws called the “Código de Faltas” (“Code of Misdemeanours”) which directly enables the police to arrest and imprison them whenever they want and without a specific reason. For example, there is a “loitering” offense where

a police officer may arrest anyone in the street who is “acting suspiciously;” this means there is no limitation on the power of the police to infringe and violate an individual’s right to personal liberty.

It is our purpose to give these boys a space in which they can discuss their situations and help them understand their individual human rights. The volunteers have done this by organising sessions focused on educating the boys.

- Código de Faltas workshop: Our Legal Coordinator Martin assisted with the activity. Martin explained to the boys, aged 13-18, what the Código de Faltas is and presented videos about how the Código affects their human rights. He allowed the boys to share their experiences if they had even been picked up by the police and what happened to them.



- Using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, volunteers did an activity to demonstrate to the boys their rights to personal liberty and a fair trial, and that it is normal for them to feel frustrated that these rights are being violated by the authorities. The boys shared moving stories with the volunteers about how they felt discriminated against by the police and by people in general who believed them to be thieves based solely on the way they dressed.

QUISQUIZACATE

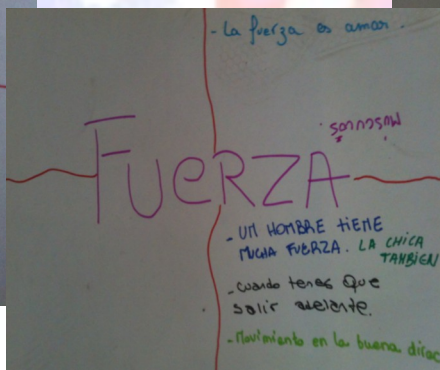
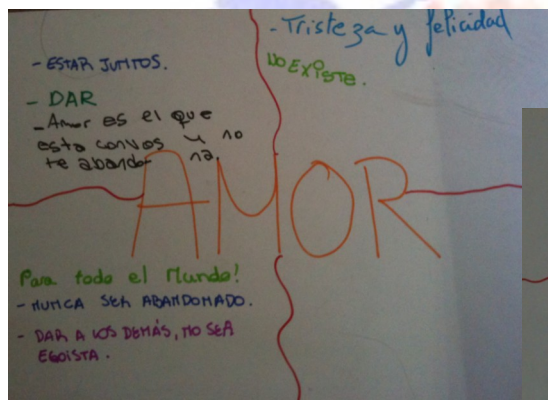
This month the Law & Human Rights Office started a new project placed in a government institution called "Quisquizacate." Quisquizacate is a residential care facility for girls between 7 and 14 years old. They have been removed from their homes by the order of the courts for different reasons such as abuse, poverty and abandonment. At the age of 14 they are moved to another facility or they may return to their families if the court decides so.

The institution has room for 15 girls but at the moment there are only 6 girls living there full time. During the first month the three volunteers assigned to this project were working to get to know the girls and build a relationship with them, with the idea to develop a long term project aimed to educate and empower the girls on trust, self-esteem and confidence.

They organized different activities with the above objectives in mind. The activities included a workshop to make jewellery such as bracelets, necklaces, headbands. After they made the jewellery the volunteers did a 'photo shoot' of the girls with the idea to help boost their confidence and empower them. Volunteers printed the photos and later handed them out to the girls. It was heart-warming to see that the girls decorated their rooms with a lot of pictures of themselves and the volunteers, appropriating space and changes the impression of their rooms.

They watched *Camp Rock*, a movie that presents values of team work, fighting for a purpose, friendship and the importance of a supportive environment.

- A workshop where volunteers presented different values/words such as courage, love, friendship, trusty, loyalty and happiness, and asked the girls to write what those words meant to each of them and/or how it made them feel. Volunteers were able to learn more about the girls' feelings and their values.
- The volunteers designed a workshop aimed for the girls to educate them about the world and the different cultures. The volunteers working there at the time were from Senegal, France and Tunisia, and the volunteers presented to the girls some information to help see how these countries are different yet similar to Argentina. They made charts with four squares, each representing a country. They stuck typical pictures of the different countries on them. The girls of Quisqui were very surprised to discover certain pictures of their own country in some of these. They've accomplished that the girls to recognize themselves in the traditional and representative things of our own country and also to recognize that there are other countries and how different they can be!



Not to be confused with Paulo Freire of Villa Cabrera, this Paulo Freire is an institution whose role is to provide a safe and beneficial environment for youngsters who have had problems with the law.

In the past month volunteers have helped the youth that attends the centre collect broken toys and fixing them to be used again. The youth have passed out leaflets in the community, then went door-to-door to collect from neighbours. After fixing the toys, they made an inventory of what was collected, and separated the toys to be distributed to children

The work has a positive impact on the lives of the youngsters who are attending. The project teaches them the importance of generosity, all while in a comfortable safe environment where they are respected and appreciated. Also this environment is being used by the director and the volunteers to speak about boys' feelings, and rights.

MONITORING HUMAN RIGHTS

FUNDACIÓN GANAS

Fundación Ganas is a non-profit organization that provides food, clothes, and friendship to the homeless living in and around downtown Cordoba. They have been working in the streets of Córdoba for the past six years, and in the past two months the Law & Human Rights volunteers joined to help.

Ganas meets every Tuesday and Thursday nights in the centre of Córdoba and circulates through the centre giving meals to the homeless in the streets.

The Law & Human Rights Office participates in this project in a few ways. They not only help with distributing food, but they also monitor human rights by interviewing the homeless in order to determine the needs of the individuals and the gravity of their situation. With this information they are creating a database of the people in the street, which will aid in determining the priorities to help the people and to develop strategies within the foundation to help improve these peoples' lives.

Interviewing these individuals enabled us to interact and exchange with different personalities and life stories. The volunteers found great satisfaction when witnessing the willingness of the homeless to answer their questions.



Blas Pascal is a peripheral community of government and makeshift housing built in 2009. Prior to the existence of the slum, the residents were living in shanties along the river; however in 2003 they successfully petitioned for proper accommodation arrangements. There are approximately 100 families living there. The Law & Human Rights Office has started a community project, with the goals of educating and empowering the neighbours in their goals to help improve their community and improving their quality of life.

Our project at Blas Pascal has been very interesting this month! Over the past month we have solved several issues in our weekly Wednesday night meetings.

Electricity: Progress is being made in regards to the issues with the electricity.

- Members of Blas Pascal and the neighbouring community of Nuevo Progreso came together to sign an agreement to give all the neighbours electricity. The discussion began a bit tense, as neighbours of each neighbourhood discussed their reasons for the frequent cuts in power, placing blame on each other for the reasons. The main arguments are for the safety of the families and children in each neighbourhood because of frequent robberies when there is no light.

After much discussion, one community member suggested writing an agreement between the two neighbourhoods so that everyone will be on the same page moving forward.



- Our Legal Coordinator Martin drafted the document, which states the following:
- The members of Nuevo Progreso have 48 hours left to stay connected to the current connection (which is of the Blas Pascal)
- Second, they will present their plan for electricity in the following meeting
- Members of Nuevo Progreso agreed to use a reasonable amount of energy and not use in excess.

Once drafted, all neighbours in attendance signed the document.

Other topics: In other meetings we have solved issues of violence, drugs and trash pickup in the neighbourhood. Because the municipality only comes every three months

to pick up trash, there is trash everywhere – in the streets, plazas and the river. There is no place to put it until the government comes to pick it up, and in the meantime, many end up burning the trash. As a result, the air is dirty and fills nearby homes with smoke. To help resolve this issue and to improve the appearance of their neighbourhood, neighbours are pooling their money and asking a friend with a machine to come and clean the river that runs in front of the neighbourhood.

Water: There is not enough water pressure and it is likely that the community will run out of water before the summer months.

To fix this, the neighbourhood is looking at a few options:

To ask the water company to provide more water to the area or to cut all illegal connections that are connected now. The leaders of Blas Pascal and Nuevo Progreso want to create the same agreement with the water as they have with the lights, to allow illegal connections as long as they are well maintained and the usage is managed. Martin is working on getting the paperwork necessary for each neighbour to petition for the services they need from the water company.

We hope to have this issue resolved before they run out of water!

BOOK DRIVE

During the month of July, we organized a fundraising of books for the children of Copa de Leche in the Blas Pascal neighbourhood. The purpose was to gather as many books as possible in order to create a library in the Copa de Leche.

The volunteers went by groups of 3 or 4 with big signs and walked all around the streets near the office knocking in different houses to ask if they had any books they were willing to give. It was very surprising to see how people were very open and committed to help. Most of them gave the volunteers books and the one who didn't, ask them to come back later in the day or the following one to get the books they have gathered.

The book drive lasted for two weeks and at the end we were all very happy to see how many books we collected.



EDUCATIONAL OUTINGS

FEDERAL COURT PROCEEDINGS

Last December, Federal Court of the province of Córdoba initiated a legal process against 45 former military officials involved in repressions in La Perla, one of the biggest torture centres during the last dictatorship and the most important in the area at the time. From 1975 to 1979, around 2500 people were detained and tortured there. Some died while in custody while others disappeared. The process units 16 causes and 416 victims and is one of the biggest cases in the entire country. Over 700 witnesses will speak up in the trial, and the process might extend until the end of 2013.

Volunteers continue to attend the hearings and listen to the witnesses telling their experiences in La Perla. Though there have been many depositions, the stories were not so different because the procedure for the 'operations' carried out by the task forces followed a relatively stable *modus operandi*. People targeted as 'political dissidents' were abducted, either from their place of residence, a public place, their work-place or place of study. They were blindfolded and taken to the centre of detention. Once there, the initiation rite involved torture – the aim being to obtain as much information as possible as quickly as possible.

One of the most moving depositions was Gustavo Contepomi's. He recounted how members of the security forces broke into his home in 1976 and hauled him and his pregnant wife Patricia away, stealing furniture, dishes, the car. They were both beaten and tortured with different methods, including electric shock and the 'submarine' or 'waterboarding,' to get them to turn over fellow activists.



Patricia was also raped, as were female political prisoners in general. Contepomi also recounted that the prisoners were called 'walking dead' and that they were identified by numbers.

Volunteers listened directly to the depositions. They had the opportunity to talk to the witnesses and to the relatives of the victims. Some of the people present at the trial were holding a red flower in their hand: they were the mothers of the victims, honouring the memory of their disappeared sons and asking for justice. Now the question arises, can a sentence pronounced thirty years later really make justice? And, moreover, can gross violations of human rights' perpetrators really be punished? One thing's for sure, the 'Juicio La Perla', such as many others that are now under way in the province and in the entire country, will officially shed some light on the atrocities committed during last Argentinean dictatorship and it will serve as deterrent so that all these won't happen ever again.

