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### Paths of hope

**“Since we left Venezuela, I’ve never felt as much fear as I did that night. The night that I was separated from my newborn daughter, listening to the nurses say, the girl, she needs to be checked very carefully”.**

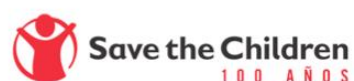
Since September 2018, and leaving behind her home in the Venezuelan city of Barquisimeto, Williannys and her husband have traveled a path filled with sadness, which has been balanced only by the joy that their daughter Abdiana has brought.

Making the decision to flee from home was not an easy one. But they were living in complete uncertainty, with little sense of where to go or whom to ask for help, knowing only that they could not keep waiting and hoping that one day things would change for the better in Venezuela.

They crossed the border into Arauca, and continued walking until they arrived in Agua Azul, a municipality in Casanare, where they began to sell small goods informally on the street, always sleeping on the street as well, and only very rarely ate three meals per day.

But one of those days would leave an impact on their lives forever, when in the middle of an excruciatingly hot, 90-degree day, Williannys fainted, unsure if the cause was the lack of sufficient food, the heat, or exhaustion from long workdays.

They received immediate help from a Colombian woman, who brought Williannys and her husband to the nearest health clinic, where they received first aid until Williannys regained consciousness. The clinic staff ran some basic tests, and to the surprise of the Venezuelan couple, Williannys was seven months pregnant. Upon hearing this news, the couple contacted a close relative in Bogotá, and began their



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journey on foot to Colombia's capital in search of a better future for their growing family.

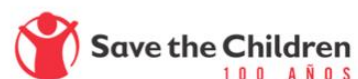
Upon arrival in the city, they were able to find a safe roof over their heads as well as three meals a day. Most importantly, they were able to access prenatal checkups for the baby on the way. Williannys found a job in a garment factory, but at the end of her first week of work, received only the equivalent of six dollars – less than a dollar per day – and she decided not to return the following week.

The lack of income led them once again to restart their journey, this time to the south of the country to the department of Putumayo, where Williannys had been given the promise of a dignified job to provide at least the bare minimum as she continued with her pregnancy. When they arrived in Puerto Asís, life began to change for the family – with a climate and environment akin to their native Venezuela, and with an income that allowed them to pay rent and purchase food.

Despite this newly found stability and the care Williannys received since learning she was pregnant, their daughter Abdiana arrived in the world with a medical condition called osteogenesis imperfecta, with what are known “crystal bones” – a genetic abnormality that causes extremely brittle bones in infants. Within five days of her birth, Abdiana already had eight fractures in her body, requiring emergency referrals to the hospital to receive the appropriate attention, equipment, and treatment.

In addition to her daughter's medical condition, Williannys's family experienced many other challenges, including being robbed and suffering acts of discrimination and xenophobia. However, thanks to the support of the VenEsperanza program, the family was able to finally achieve stability and create the foundation for life in Cali.

**“With the help that we have received from the VenEsperanza program, we have been able to purchase diapers and clean clothes for our girl, as well as pay rent and buy other needs in bulk – because we don't know what the future holds. With this assistance and given our girl's condition, we believe that she will be safer here – in Venezuela it is very difficult to find the medicines and specialists she needs to manage her illness.”**





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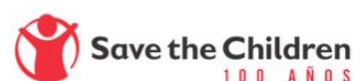
### Coming back, to start all over again

In 2017, María, her 6-year-old son Jovanny, her 10-month-old son, and her mother decided to return to Colombia, their country of origin which they had abandoned for Venezuela decades ago in search of new opportunities. Because of the crisis Venezuela is currently experiencing, history has repeated itself for the family. María and her family decided to return once again to Colombia, to be able to find the economic and other resources her family needs to survive.

They currently live in a settlement in Cúcuta, Norte de Santander, one of the primary host cities for the migrant population entering the country – primarily Venezuelans and returned Colombians like María. She and her family live in an abandoned lot, with an improvised roof in the Alfonso Gómez neighborhood, because despite these informal conditions, the family reasons that it is worth it to not incur costs like rent and utilities. They are forced to resort to different coping strategies to secure food, none of which are consistent or sustainable for survival – it is particularly difficult to find sufficient food for the family’s youngest, who is now 2 years old.

María and her mother prepare empanadas and hot drinks like *agua de panela* and coffee, and then sell them on the streets around their home and in other settlements across the city. Between cooking, travel to other neighborhoods, and conducting sales, the two women take turns looking after the children.

María and her family are part of the VenEsperanza program, which through MPCA has enabled them to cover their basic and emergency needs over the last six months. With her first cash transfer, María purchased school supplies for her children, and she used the following payments to buy food for her family and to



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invest in her business to be able to continue making empanadas and drinks, and lay a foundation for a more sustainable income.

Given the current situation in Colombia, the mandatory quarantine due to COVID-19 has significantly depleted her sales. The items necessary to make empanadas have been more difficult to find and more expensive to purchase, and many customers no longer have the means to purchase her products. María's situation becomes more precarious and more critical every day.

However, María wants to continue working in order to give her sons a decent future, support her mother, and have the opportunity to improve their current living situation. She and her mother sometimes dream about having their own business – not empanadas and coffee, but rather, a sundries shop where people from the community can come to purchase stationary, jewelry, and gifts.





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### Jehovanisi's family's exodus

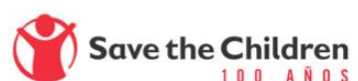
Four years ago, Jehovanisi faced one of the most difficult decisions possible: to leave behind her home of Zulia, Venezuela, which for 23 years had been a refuge. This almost meant leaving her mother and sisters (who would later follow in her footsteps), as well as a full, vibrant life.

Jehovanisi's decision was motivated by the difficult situation she and her family were living in Venezuela, in which neither she nor her husband Brayan could find a job. They had incredible difficulty guaranteeing proper healthcare and sufficient food for their three children – who were 4, 7, and 10 years old at the time.

The family began their journey via one of the irregular border crossings into Colombia, with the destination of Soledad, Atlántico.

**“I give thanks to God because he allowed me to convince my husband to come to Colombia. If we had stayed in Venezuela just a few more weeks, my younger daughter would have died from malnutrition and a stomach infection. The day we arrived in Colombia my daughter began to vomit and had a fever, and we spent 16 days with her hospitalized because the situation was so severe.”**

By the time they arrived in Colombia at Brayan's grandmother's home in Soledad, it had been a year of complication, little formal work and income, and many efforts to reconstruct their lives – they were now facing an opportunity to create a new reality. Jehovanisi's mother also decided to flee Venezuela, so she could support Jehovanisi's children while she and Brayan found better work opportunities. Upon her mother's arrival, because relations with her husband's family were tense, the family decided to relocate themselves in a settlement in Barranquilla called Villa Caracas. This was another decision marked by pain, and once again restarting their lives from zero.



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With great effort, Jehovanisi and her family managed to acquire a small plot of land to build what is now their home. Made with boards and mattress padding, the family constructed their home with the help of various community members, including one of Brayan's first bosses, who gifted them their roof – which nowadays shows evidence of damage, cracks, and is in need of repair. Despite the few pieces of furniture and the home's imperfections, the family has been able to adapt to their circumstances, and their home is the product of many relatives' and acquaintances' solidarity.

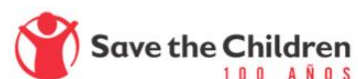
Jehovanisi learned about the VenEsperanza program in the community cafeteria that her children attend at the San Joaquín church, close to their home. They were told at the cafeteria that to be part of the program they would be called and asked some questions, but at the time they didn't know what the program would entail.

After participating in a survey and learning that her family had been selected as beneficiaries, happiness flooded into the León Avendaño home, and plans to improve their house and their livelihoods – re-lining the walls, laying a proper floor, and opening a small hot dog stand – became that much closer to a reality for the young mother.

Upon receiving her first payment, Jehovanisi decided to continue with the spirit of solidarity, receiving her community brothers and sisters to commit to helping them and moving forward together, as a family. She allocated part of the money to support her mother, part to pay off debt to a store nearby which has previously supported her, and purchased food for her family.

With the second transfer, she purchased more food for her family, paid other debts, and installed electricity in her home, which she shares with her mother's and other community members' homes.

**“Because here, I tell you, what makes us Venezuelan is that we help each other get ahead.”**





### One mother, four ways to learn

Daniela, a determined woman hoping to find a better life for her daughters, decided to leave them in the care of her mother and begin a journey to a new country, not knowing then all that this new path would bring.

Now at 27 years old, Daniela has four children – Sofía (9 years old), Estefanía (7 years old), Valentina (4 years old) y José Ángel (2 years old) – for whom she fights daily to provide them with better opportunities than she herself had. The first time that she arrived in Santa Marta, Colombia, she worked selling juices, in maintenance at the beach, and as a waitress to be able to send money to Venezuela for her daughter. When she became pregnant with José Ángel and was no longer able to work, her partner fortunately found work in Uribe, and they decided to move.

Before arriving in Uribe, Daniela went to retrieve her girls in Venezuela, encountering the harsh reality that was even worse than when she had previously left, and that her youngest daughter Valentina did not remember her. It was a bittersweet reunion.

In Uribe, the job market proved incredibly difficult to navigate, and Daniela's husband became unemployed shortly after their arrival.

**“He worked 7 months and they fired him for no reason, and did not pay severance. The baby was just two months old, and I could not get a job because I didn't have a degree or a professional career – we lived only on the short-term opportunities he could find.”**

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Later, Daniela's husband found another job in La Guajira, and they decided to formally change Daniela's daughters' names to make them all legally related. Daniela's priority has always been her children's education, which she considers the gateway to their futures; however, it has been a constant challenge to afford their school supplies and uniforms.

She learned about the VenEsperanza program from a neighbor, who let her know that an organization was collecting information from Venezuelan migrants to participate in a workshop around resilience. In this workshop – the program's registration session – participants discussed their experiences arriving from Venezuela.

**“They had us walk over sandpaper, stones, and cotton, and discuss the differences in how the materials felt – we discussed our feelings about our journeys coming here. Many spoke about bad experiences, with many having been robbed, and others who were not received well in their host communities. For me, I am so grateful to God that my journey was a good one.”**

Two weeks after the workshop, Daniela learned that she had been selected to receive assistance. With her first transfer, she started a business, selling lunches next to a business that sells bricks; however, her clients began to ask her to start “tabs” rather than pay for what they ordered outright. Since she depended on the income she made daily, she decided to invest the MPCA in her education. She finished the equivalent of a high school degree to begin studies in “Social and Community Management,” a career path for which she believes she has a gift and a great interest. Currently, due to the quarantine, she is continuing her courses remotely.

In the future, she hopes that through her studies she will be able to help other people, and continue building a more stable situation and providing her children with higher quality of life.

**“I hope that God permits me to graduate as a Social Worker, to get a job in this field working with communities – schools and hospitals in particular need people to serve in those roles. I would like to have my own home, with a room for each of my children, and to be comfortable and able to establish myself here. Once I have my license, I will also be able to help my partner, who is currently responsible for all of our expenses.”**

She has doubts about a future in Venezuela, and for the moment believes that Colombia is the perfect place to achieve everything she dreams of, and is optimistic as she hopes for the future.

