

BUILDING DIGNITY: INVESTING IN LEADERS, FUELING DEVELOPMENT

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At 4.30pm, a rusty bell rings as several hundred young people stream out of an over-crowded school building. With no paved roads to guide them, they make their way up a sandy hill towards a sprawling neighborhood perched precariously on top. A group of students head towards a simple, two-story building at the heart of the community. Welcome to the Center for Development with Dignity, an innovative resource center in Lima, Peru. The Center is home to Building Dignity, a non-profit whose mission is to provide community education, empower local leaders, and support neighborhood-led development.

The Problem: In the neighborhood of Lomo de Corvina, 55,000 Peruvians struggle against scarcity and hardship: 81% of adults lack stable employment, the school dropout rate soars 35% higher than the national average, and levels of violence surpass those in most other parts of Lima. Without local leaders, communities cannot work together to confront these challenges.

Building Dignity's Approach: Building Dignity seeks to catalyze community development through targeted support for talented neighborhood organizers and leaders, both young and old.

Step #1: Enabling Leaders: In Lomo de Corvina, we run a Leadership Academy that enables individuals to become the leaders their communities need. In the Academy, young people and adults participate in a series of workshops that allow them to identify pressing needs, propose solutions, and develop the skills necessary to implement their ideas.

Step #2: Investing in Local Ideas: Building Dignity offers project grants that range from \$100 to \$600. These small grants allow leaders and community organizers to implement projects that improve neighborhood life.

Step #3: Mentorship: We work closely with local leaders as they implement their projects, helping them secure additional funds from local government. The Center offers free access to workspace, computers, and internet, while regular group meetings provide peer support, encouragement, and feedback.



The Results: In April 2011, eight youth leaders (aged 11 to 16) led a campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy. These young women organized the screening of an educational film, prepared and distributed information on sexual health, and mobilized young adults to protect themselves against early pregnancy. In August 2011, Building Dignity awarded a \$600 project grant to Betty Lozano, a resident of Lomo de Corvina's 9th Sector. Betty is using her project grant to construct a permanent roof for her community's preschool. The renovated building will serve 60 students.



As Jack Kent Cooke Scholars, we benefited from the Foundation's investment in our talents and potential. Now, as a JKCF alumna, I have sought to apply a similar model to my work with Building Dignity. Whether it's providing a student with the means to pursue higher education or enabling a community member to cultivate organizing skills, fostering personal attainment and leadership among individuals is a key ingredient for social change.

You can read more about Building Dignity and opportunities to support our work at www.buildingdignity.org. We are always looking for opportunities to collaborate! If you're interested in Latin America, international development, or the non-profit sector, please feel free to get in touch with me at emily@buildingdignity.org.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

HAVE AN INTERESTING STORY
 OR EXCITING NEWS YOU WANT
 TO SHARE WITH THE COMMUNITY?

Submissions for May newsletter due 6 May at 8:00pm (EST) to zadrian.smith@jkcsa.org.

THANK YOU! Special thanks to Copy Editor: Liz McCarthy