

## **Support strategies for young people in vulnerable situations. The Project Amigo case.**

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**Thank you very much “Proyecto Amigo” for letting us know part of your work and congratulations for this great work.**

### **Summary**

Education is the main engine of development, so it is intended to guarantee an inclusive, equitable and quality education promoting learning opportunities for all, it is a public good, a fundamental right and the basis for guaranteeing the relationship of other rights (Forum Education World Cup, 2015), hence the importance of supporting young people in situations of social vulnerability, such as economic inequality and rural communities. One of the programs that provides accompaniment to young people in this situation, in the state of Colima, Mexico, is Proyecto Amigo, for which its strategies, processes and scope are analyzed. For the present work, eight in-depth interviews were carried out with students benefiting from Proyecto Amigo and the people responsible for it, based on the results of the interviews; a category analysis was carried out. The main supports provided by Proyecto Amigo that stand out are economic, academic and health support. Generally, the accompaniments provided to young people in vulnerable situations only consist of financial support that is limited to scholarships; what makes Proyecto Amigo different is that it covers several areas, in addition to the economic one. In the work, the processes that are followed and their impact are analyzed in detail, from the opinion of the participating students, in order to recognize useful strategies that could facilitate the development of accompaniment proposals within educational institutions for young people in situations of vulnerability.

Introduction The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) points out that “education is the deliberate process of acquiring knowledge and developing skills to apply it in situations corresponding. “The acquisition and use of knowledge are the ultimate goals pursued by education, guided by the principles of the type of society to which we aspire” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 86). In Mexico, the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) in its Educational Model (SEP, 2017), considers basic education as compulsory, which ranges from preschool to secondary and upper secondary education [Sr. High]. As a whole, the Model “seeks to educate people who have the motivation and ability to achieve their personal, work and family development, willing to improve their social and natural environment, as well as continue with their academic and professional training” (pg.45). For its part, higher education also faces multiple demands. Fernández (2017) emphasizes her contribution to rigorously analyze the problems that nations face, collaborate in the appropriate solutions for them, as well as to contribute to forming more just societies. The globalization processes add current challenges such as internationalization, evaluation and quality (Sebastián, 2017). The higher level has great value for society, as it prepares for insertion in the production processes demanded by the system: economic, social, ideological or political; contributes to solving the problems of society that are found (Calderón, Zamora and Medina, 2017). Education is a fundamental right that allows children and adults, especially those who are socially and economically marginalized, to escape poverty and fully participate in community life; despite this, children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities due to social, cultural and economic factors (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). In terms of access to education, the population of rural areas shows greater difficulties compared to that of urban areas, due to the lower availability of educational services, as well

as their quality (CONEVAL, 2018). This is confirmed by the OECD (2018, cited in OECD, 2019) by mentioning that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to access education; Furthermore, those children whose parents have not attained said education are less likely to enter it. Educational opportunities are not the same for everyone, young people who are in rural communities have less access to educational services and at the same time the quality is lower, so it is important to provide support in different areas to young people who are in situations of vulnerability so that they continue their educational training at different levels and in this way they can have greater opportunities. As Morán (2019) states, educational inequality affects the poorest and most marginalized sectors; occurs when there is the exclusion of people, individually or collectively, from access to educational opportunities, permanence and success in the educational system Díaz and Pinto (2017) argue that educational vulnerability is a complex phenomenon that involves the family, socio-interpersonal and school community dimensions, related to the teaching and learning process or the climate of the educational institution, which causes young people to experience a total disadvantage in school. This prevents them from taking advantage of the curriculum and teaching within the classroom and can even lead to school failure. In this sense, Prieto (2015) recognizes that the complexity of the processes of educational exclusion is linked to the reproduction of structural inequalities, as well as to issues of organization and functioning of the systems, which leads us to educational practice. For Tapia and Valenti (2016), the Mexican educational system faces a double challenge: finding mechanisms to overcome inequality between schools, as this is observed not only between different levels and educational modalities, but also between states; and to banish intra-school inequality, with the purpose that the distribution of learning overcomes socioeconomic conditioning within schools, which implies the recognition not only of factors that make learning possible, but also those that favor it despite the socioeconomic conditions of the students. Higher education in Mexico faces, according to Jongitud (2017) great and serious problems; one of those that stands out is discrimination due to the social and economic condition of people in accessing and enjoying a quality higher education, which requires attention based on the right to education and its regulation in our country from a suitable framework. Cañete (2015) emphasizes that States should be concerned with designing policies, offering sufficient public resources, as well as providing quality services in education and health, among others, to effectively confront inequality. This makes it necessary to think about mechanisms to offer equal opportunities, access to education and, above all, equality in the educational quality that is provided and in the scope of learning in various areas, such as cognitive, affective and Social; In addition, it must involve, in addition to the student, parents and teachers, so that with this a solid comprehensive academic training is generated (Morán, 2019). For all the above, it is important to recognize education as a tool to promote development, and the solution of problems of poverty and inequality, focusing on real food programs that effectively cover the needs, with scholarships and care of students, so that they successfully complete their higher studies, with sustainable proposals favoring personal, family and community development (Estrada, 2019). In line with the aforementioned, Juárez and Rodríguez (2016) found that in multiple investigations it is pointed out as relevant that better resources are assigned to schools (rural ones show greater disadvantages in this regard) and that educational actions are reinforced with health policies, food, labor and economic, in the search for greater equity and social equality. They emphasize that, if the Mexican State focuses its efforts only on what happens within educational instances, it will ignore fundamental aspects that are related to social contexts, which should seek social equity. It is clear that it is the students who must build skills or, more fully, competencies; but they will not do it alone, since the accompaniment of the educational institution and its members authorized to carry out its purposes, the teachers, play a key role. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that students are active entities that design and mark their own educational trajectories, which must be accompanied by teachers, for whom it is

essential to understand the processes involved in learning, such as affective and cognitive development, processes transformation and, of course, pedagogical practices. Accompaniment is defined as an intentional educational action, which is based on closeness and the willingness to affect and be affected by the other, with the goal of enhancing the capacities that help the individual to achieve their purposes, in addition, as part of the educational process by the teacher to the student, it is not only about helping the student in the construction and acquisition of knowledge or content, but to support in the development and potentialization of capacities to function in the different scenarios in which they must interact (Puerta, 2016). At the same time, García and Mendía (2015) affirm that educational accompaniment is a fundamental dimension in the growth and development processes of individuals and groups, which implies educating through the care of relationships, the climate and the educational style, thus constituting a support process for the construction of personal and social itineraries. Martinic (2019) found, in a study on academic accompaniment, that students highlight as relevant five main changes that facilitated their training process, and that can be a reference for the development of proposals: the generation of study habits, the best understanding of the contents of the subjects, the generation of self-confidence, the improvement of academic performance and the contribution to social and university integration. For their part, González and Abarca (2017) summarize that the so-called success factors, according to students, are related to personal aspects, such as motivation, character, clarity of objectives and perspective of the future, and that for this reason it is essential, so that the student to get ahead, responsibility, dedication, effort, perseverance, perseverance, time organization and setting personal goals. Educational institutions must provide a context for the development of these factors. Although the role of educational institutions and their agents in overcoming processes linked to vulnerability has been highlighted, a comprehensive and complete approach is not always achieved. Economic, human and institutional resources are often insufficient, so there are non-governmental bodies, such as associations, groups or projects, that can provide additional specific support. In the state of Colima, Mexico, one of the programs that provide support to young people in vulnerable situations, such as young people from rural communities and with economic problems, is Proyecto Amigo. Proyecto Amigo is an association that helps disadvantaged and marginalized children and youth to achieve their maximum potential through support with education and support with materials, enriching activities and health services that are not available to them in certain circumstances. In order to analyze the processes and identify the strengths of this project, the following objectives of this study are proposed:

- o Analyze the processes of accompaniment in the transition and the school career for young people in vulnerable situations.
- o Outline the various support strategies in the transition and the school trajectory for young people in vulnerable situations, and their impact on the academic process of students.
- o Evaluate the accompaniment strategies in the transition and the school career for young people in vulnerable situations, for their application in similar cases.

## **Development and results**

Proyecto Amigo is an association that provides support in their academic careers to young people in vulnerable situations, for this, those responsible for the project go to the communities and select children and young people who are interested in studying and who for economic reasons or relatives are not able to do so. Once the parents and the students are talked to, all the benefits of the same are granted to the young person, from the level at which

they are, can be primary or secondary until they culminate in professional training (degree). In order to analyze the accompaniment process and outline the different strategies, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants: six students who successfully completed their undergraduate studies and two people responsible for the project. With the information collected from the interviews, a category analysis was carried out through a discourse analysis exercise. According to Bardin (2002, cited in Díaz, 2017) content analysis by categorization consists of classifying constituent elements of a set based on defined criteria, thus forming categories, that is, sections that bring together a group of elements under a generic title. The categories generated from the analysis were: financial support, academic school support, health services, other supports and commitment of the beneficiaries.

### **Category A: Financial support**

The young people benefited by Proyecto Amigo receive financial support, both monetary and in kind, since each beginning of the school year or semester, the program provides school supplies such as books, notebooks, pencils, uniforms, shoes, registration and tuition and financial support for food and transportation. In the case of young people who are in the last semester of high school, a computer is given to them so that they can use it throughout the degree. A fact in which the young people interviewed from Proyecto Amigo emphasize is the opportunity to tell about it, because in addition to belonging to rural communities in the state, their family economic situation and context did not allow them to continue their studies in the nearest town. This is where the importance of having academic support to continue studies stands out, in this regard some of the interviewees comment:

“Proyecto Amigo supported me with uniforms and high school enrollments”  
(Interviewee 4, oral communication, January 2019).

“I received the weekly scholarship that is for lunches, the tuition was paid by a friend project, they gave me uniforms for supplies, everything came complete and if I needed a book they told me if they could get it or not and if they got it they gave it to me and if they did not see a way to buy it or support us with a certain amount, in high school they gave us a computer already in the last semester so that we could keep it for the entire degree ”(Interviewee 5, oral communication, January 2019)

### **Category B: Academic support**

It implies support in homework and school activities, for this, other young people who had benefited from Proyecto Amigo and who had a higher grade, were in charge of providing support to young people who presented some difficulty, as well as part of the project, clubs are offered homework, where they offer classes in English, mathematics or other subjects in order to avoid abandoning their studies because of this factor. Likewise, the people responsible for the project monitor the qualifications of the beneficiaries, providing the necessary tools and equipment to achieve their goals. Academic support throughout the individual's training is of utmost importance, since coming from a rural community does present a disadvantage, given that the quality of previous educational services is lower. “When something like spelling was difficult for us, they helped us or when we had

difficulty with an academic subject, also in school aspects they looked for other scholarship holders to support us, everything was like a team if someone had something difficult, the other partner was already there to support”(Interviewee 4, oral communication, January 2019).

### **Category C: Health support**

It consists of health services in case young people require them. Some of the services provided in this category are providing hearing aids; vision clinic campaigns where in addition to performing eye exams they provided glasses if required; the dentist, frequent dental check-ups; and psychological counseling, since many times the problems of young people come from a young age or due to family situations, and this is where they should be supported through these consultancies.

“They support you both financially and psychologically, you have the support if you need to talk to someone in case something happens to you, they have the time to listen to you and know what is happening, how you are doing and why it is happening, why did you drop your grades, and come how can it be arranged by talking to people responsible from Proyecto Amigo” (Interviewee 6, oral communication, February 2019).

“In terms of health, I resorted to the benefit of the dentist, they had a dentist and then there they made check-ups for cavities and I don't know how much, but if they checked us and followed us, then they gave us the treatment and it was completely free, the visual exam also, there is an accompaniment that is given to the scholarship recipients who require it, it is psychological accompaniment, I never need it, fortunately” (Interviewee 1, oral communication, January, 2019).

### **Category D: Other support**

As part of Proyecto Amigo, the beneficiaries, in addition to receiving school, financial and health support, receive other benefits or gifts from the godparents / sponsors, that is, those who make financial contributions to Proyecto Amigo. These are coexistence, trips to places that perhaps had not had the opportunity to know, economic issues for family members, among others. In addition, transversal training different from that of your area, such as talks and/or conferences on topics of social relevance, workshops to improve communication skills and first aid workshops. One of the interviewees who is part of the project organization affirms:

“Our services do not remain in the receipt of an economic resource and now we try to accompany them but the accompaniment of which we speak, suddenly when there is an opportunity to approach or that the student approaches us to entrust us with some of their problems of their challenges, at that moment we can intervene a little more Interviewee 2, personal communication, January 2019).

“We had some workshops by civil protection and they were first aid for anything” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, January, 2019).

### **Category E: Beneficiaries' commitments**

The young people who are part of Proyecto Amigo acquire the commitment to collaborate with others in their community, so they have the responsibility to carry out a social service regardless of the tasks and activities that their institution demands of them. This service consists of cleaning streets, painting, reforestation, helping the elderly, or any other necessary activity in the same community. This social service is seen by young people as a way to contribute to their community, since if they have been benefited by other people to continue their training, they can contribute even a little of what they have received.

"We did a social service, at that time we coordinated, we had to do hours of service for the scholarship, and we went to clean streets, paint streets, paint trees, help the old ladies, that is, everything that makes up a community social service and we did not have to charge anything and on the contrary it was something that we liked because we saw each other all week and we also came on Saturdays and there we were with the coordinator and the community commissioner and on Saturday they already had specific tasks for us, sometimes we would go on these dates to clean the cemetery, we would go, I tell you, to walk in the street to go around collecting garbage and thus close to the community and all that with a friendly project"(Interviewee 3, oral communication, January 2019).

## **Conclusions**

With the analysis of the interviews carried out, the following can be concluded: Proyecto Amigo has a very defined structure, from the process of selecting the young people who will be part of it, and in all the support that it provides them throughout their trajectory academic, being three areas in which it focuses mainly: economic support either in transport, food, registration, uniforms, school materials, and in what they need for their studies; academic accompaniment, since it does not leave the responsibility to them to study, but rather supports their process in subjects that present difficulty; Lastly and not least, there are health services, which, although they have medical insurance in the institutions, more closely support the health area. Likewise, young people who live in a vulnerable situation have deficiencies, and it is of the utmost importance to provide support, since although financial support is of great help, young people need other supports such as academics, and not only can be provided in the classroom, the fact of having this support for the completion of tasks, allows them to reinforce what was seen in class and continue their learning. Generally, the accompaniments provided to young people in vulnerable situations only consist of financial support that is limited to scholarships; What makes Proyecto Amigo different and gives it a plus is that it covers several areas, in addition to the economic one, because as observed in the results, it offers academic support, health services and cross-training training, so that young people can expand their opportunities. This is related indisputably with what was indicated by Juárez and Rodríguez (2016), with reference to the fact that educational actions are required to be reinforced with health, food, labor and economic policies, in the search for greater equity and social equality. One of the supports that stand out within Proyecto Amigo, is the academic one, either through tutorials in specific subjects or homework club, this reinforces what Martinic (2019) pointed out where he mentions the importance of academic support in the training process of students through the generation of study habits and understanding of subject content. These support programs should not only stand as independent proposals; It is up to all institutions to have strategies that favor the trajectory of their students and accompany them throughout the educational process, since, as indicated by UNESCO (2020), students are active entities that design and mark their own educational trajectories, but this effort must be accompanied by teachers, through processes involved in learning, such as affective and cognitive development, transformation processes and pedagogical practices. Proyecto Amigo can be a reference for Higher Education institutions to design a strategy of

accompaniment with young people from rural communities or in vulnerable situations. This strategy can be directed to the academic area, through a peer tutoring program, where students in higher grades can support their classmates in the first grades, in this way it is accompanied in their transition process and school trajectory and, if possible prevent them from dropping out for academic reasons. As Tapia and Valenti (2016) point out, both inter-school and intra-school inequalities must be addressed, in order to overcome socio-economic conditions. In summary, the support proposals for young people in vulnerable situations should at least include financial, academic and health care support. It is also useful to develop courses and workshops in order to strengthen cognitive and emotional development, as well as the connection of the young beneficiaries themselves with their communities.

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