



TOS First Person **The Skills to Survive**

A busy woman realizes her profession has a lot to offer youth and keep them out of trouble

Ana Lucia Soto de Escobar is 31 years old. She is married and has three children. She is also is one of the valuable volunteers that gives life to the new Búcaro, Mezquital Youth Outreach Center in Villa Nueva, a suburb of Guatemala City, home to gangs and high crime rates.

Búcaro is one of the three new USAID Youth Alliance Program outreach centers that provide a place for recreational and sports activities, vocational training, and serve as a resource center for youth.

Ana Lucia commits 12 valuable hours a week to the center in her community. As a health nutritionist at Herbal Life, her flexible schedule and her home's close proximity to the center led her to volunteer after she heard of the need for people with skills to teach children and youth.

This mother of three children, who are considered “at risk youth” by virtue of their residence in high crime neighborhoods, divides her volunteer time between classes on how to make sausage and delectable desserts. At first, she didn't think she could spare the hours to volunteer. Then she realized how valuable her skills could be and now, after volunteering with the Center, she knows that her time is greatly valued by the 30 youth trainees.

Having the skills to make cookies, cakes and sausages has allowed Ana Lucia to survive between jobs. In addition to the cooking skills, Ana Lucia wants her students to know that they, too, can survive by learning these skills.

The Centers are not “rehabilitation centers” for gang members. They do, however, provide skills training for those who have left the gangs. The Centers also are not available to current, full gang members, though some have sent their children or spouses because they want them to stay out of the gang life.



Ana Lucia Soto de Escobar, cooking skills volunteer works with other volunteers and young students at the Búcaro, Mezquital Youth Outreach Center–Parroquia Dios con Nosotros Catholic Church. Photo Credit: USAID/2006