



USAID | GUATEMALA
DEL PUEBLO DE LOS ESTADOS
UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA

TOS First Person

Who Volunteers at Youth Outreach Centers?

Young people who know they have it better than others on the block and want to share the luck.

When Manfer Manuel Guzmán, age 23, was asked by his neighbors how much the new Youth Outreach Center pays him, he said, *“I’m paid with love and I’m planting seeds to harvest.”*

Manfer volunteers a mere three hours each week at the Ciudad del Sol Center located in his *Fuente de Agua Viva* evangelical church. Though it is not much in time, he knows it goes a very long way.

Manfer is a music teacher and a student at the *Instituto Canción* (Song Institute) and lives with his parents and brother. He says he never gave much thought to being a volunteer even though, as a child he thought music lessons should be free and that it was unfair that his parents had to pay for his lessons.

One day Manfer heard that the USAID Youth Alliance Program and his church were opening a center for youth that would encourage them to stay out of the clutches of gang recruiters and other forms of violence that tax his neighborhood. He was intrigued, and now teaches music, music theory, and electric piano to children and youth that come to the center. In keeping with his principles, music lessons are free.

Manfer considers the best part of his volunteer service to his community to be learning the serious problems that his students face in growing up in dangerous neighborhoods and how a few hours a week can help them grow in healthy and productive ways.

The three USAID Program youth outreach centers are open 10 hours a day on Monday through Saturday. Each day the centers together serve nearly 450 youths between ages seven and 25. The older youth use the centers as a refuge or “safe place” and learn new skills for employment. Each center relies on different skills and abilities that volunteers can offer. Volunteers provide expertise, knowledge, and experience in varied areas from helping youth learn how to play a musical instrument to making cakes for sale.



Manfer Manuel Guzmán giving a student music lessons at the *Ciudad del Sol* Youth Outreach Center housed in the *Fuente de Agua Viva* evangelical church. Photo Credit: USAID/2006.