

Receiving Him in *Our Home*

CAF is a Christian NGO located in São Paulo, Brazil, that works with children, adolescents and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Since its beginnings CAF has developed different projects in order to warmly receive people, helping them to restore their self-esteem and prepare them to be reinserted into society.

In CAF's shelter *Our Home*, children and adolescents sent by the Tutelary Counsel, HIV/AIDS reference hospitals and other shelters, become part of a new family. In the shelter their basic needs are met, and they are introduced in a process of re-insertion, either returning to their original families, being supported by a relative, like a grandmother or an aunt, or being adopted or taken care of by a support family.

Families from churches, volunteers and even the families that are beneficiaries of other of CAF's projects participate as support families receiving these children during weekends and school holidays. This is an opportunity for the children and adolescents to make new friends and to get involved in a family context again. The relationship continues as the families and children or adolescents naturally begin to maintain contact in a regular basis. Many support families are deciding to become adoptive families. In three years the project *Our Home* has helped in 8 re-insertion of children and adolescents who are now back in their families of origin or have been adopted, and this year there are three more that are in this process.

It isn't an easy process, children and adolescents living in shelters have already experienced the loss or the separation from their parents, having in their background memories of being neglected and some, even a past of violence and abuse. Sometimes it's hard for them to be open and to trust adults again, and adding to this scenario, they also have to face the instability of their health and to deal with a tough treatment that sometimes affects their emotional and physical conditions. It's necessary to have good communication and interaction between CAF's team, local authorities and families involved in the re-insertion. It's a process that requests constant learning and takes time and perseverance.

Sebastiana is a lady of 44. She was introduced to CAF by a friend; both are HIV positive and were being treated in the same health center. When she arrived at CAF she had no skills to earn her living and to support her family of 10 children, 2 adolescents and 3 other adults, in total 16 people living in the same house. She needed social and emotional support and started attending one of the workshops of the *Family Project* where she learned how to sew using the technique of Patchwork. She became very skilled and started selling her products. It brought new possibilities to her life, but her story with CAF didn't stop there. She got more involved in the workshop and started helping, teaching other women what she had already learnt. As the children's shelter is on the last floor of the building where the workshops are held, one day Sebastiana met one of the adolescents from *Our Home* project, a 13 year old boy, J.W. She noticed that he was crying and was very upset, so she started talking to him and they became friends.

Although she is very busy and has a big family to support she volunteered to become J.W.'s support family. In her house J.W. likes to help her in the kitchen and to play with Sebastiana's children. Her house is very simple, they sleep in mattresses all placed on the floor and the food is also very simple, but she cares for J.W. and for his future and is prepared to provide for him, not just food, but true values for life just as she does for her natural children and grandchildren.

Sometimes the issue is not just having HIV, some children face disabilities and learning problems which makes the process of reinsertion more difficult. The little W., a 8 year old and his sister J., 15 years old, arrived from another shelter two years ago. His speech difficulties are, in part, consequences of emotional stress due to the separation from his mother when he was very young and also due to maltreatments at the other shelter where he lived before. At first, as he could not communicate properly it was hard for him to make friends and to enjoy games with other children at CAF; he developed a pessimist way to face life. A family from a partner church new about his situation and invited him for a weekend. Even though it was hard for them to understand him, they began an encouraging relationship that helped W. in his socialization with others and raised his self-esteem.

Now he is attending speech therapy sessions and is using a hearing device which is an important step to prepare him to be reinserted. With CAF's support he was able to visit his original mother; It was the first time since he was a baby, a process of approximation that might result in his returning to his family of origin. Thanks to the emotional bonding provided by this support family and by CAF through it's team and the other children and adolescents from the shelter, W. is now able to see life in a more positive perspective.

Our Home is a place for restoration of bonds. Love and acceptance is the necessary foundation in any process of reinsertion. Not just the children and adolescents are blessed by this process but also CAF and the families that take the challenge of receiving them and making them part of their lives. As Jesus says in Mathew, chapter 18, "when you receive a little child like this, you are welcoming me", what greater blessing could we have than receiving Him in our home?

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*CAF – Casa Filadelfia (Philadelphia House) – A Christian NGO that supports children, adolescents and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.