

Youthfront Mexico Comes Full Circle

Imagina Program Alumni Pay it Forward



Above: Priscila Pineda interacts with a student as a volunteer at the Imagina afterschool program. **Left:** Priscila, in 2010, participates in afterschool activities as a student in Imagina.

Priscila Pineda, 19, was a young girl when she began attending Youthfront's Imagina afterschool program in her small hometown of Croc, Mexico, outside of Monterrey.

"The Club [Imagina] became not only a place where I could go and do my homework, but it became a safe place where I could go and just be a kid," she recalls.

Pineda's formative experience with the program led her - and other alumni - to return to serve Imagina as volunteer mentors to the children following in their footsteps.

Pineda went a step further and volunteered this past summer for several weeks at Youthfront Camp LaCygne, where she was able to serve, practice her English and share her story with campers.

"Having Priscila's presence at Camp this summer meant so much," said Amber Booth, director of community programming for Youthfront. "It brought together two of our ministries in a way we'd never imagined possible."

For more than 15 years, Youthfront has had a community development presence in Croc. It began with

Youthfront staff who committed to living there, building relationships and learning how Missional Journey teams coming from the U.S. could come alongside the community.

"Those early years were filled with seeking church and community partnerships, as well as building many long-lasting friendships," said Booth, who served onsite in Croc for seven years. "Youthfront teams would come down and build homes, meet families and worship together. Over time, we began to understand the longer-term community needs, and the Imagina afterschool program took shape."

The afterschool program provides homework help, a safe place to play, friendships and a daily time set aside to connect with God through prayer and devotions. Around 40 young people are participating daily.

Over time, Youthfront transitioned local leadership of the program to Mexican staff, who now manage the day-to-day operations for Youthfront. Today, Booth and Youthfront colleagues lead Missional Journeys for youth and churches to serve in and experience Croc.

The Mexico staff conducted a community survey this past year to assess the program's impact. The results were more than encouraging.

"We were pretty blown away by how much the community understood what was happening in the program

and how much they valued what it's meant to the youth in that area," Booth says.

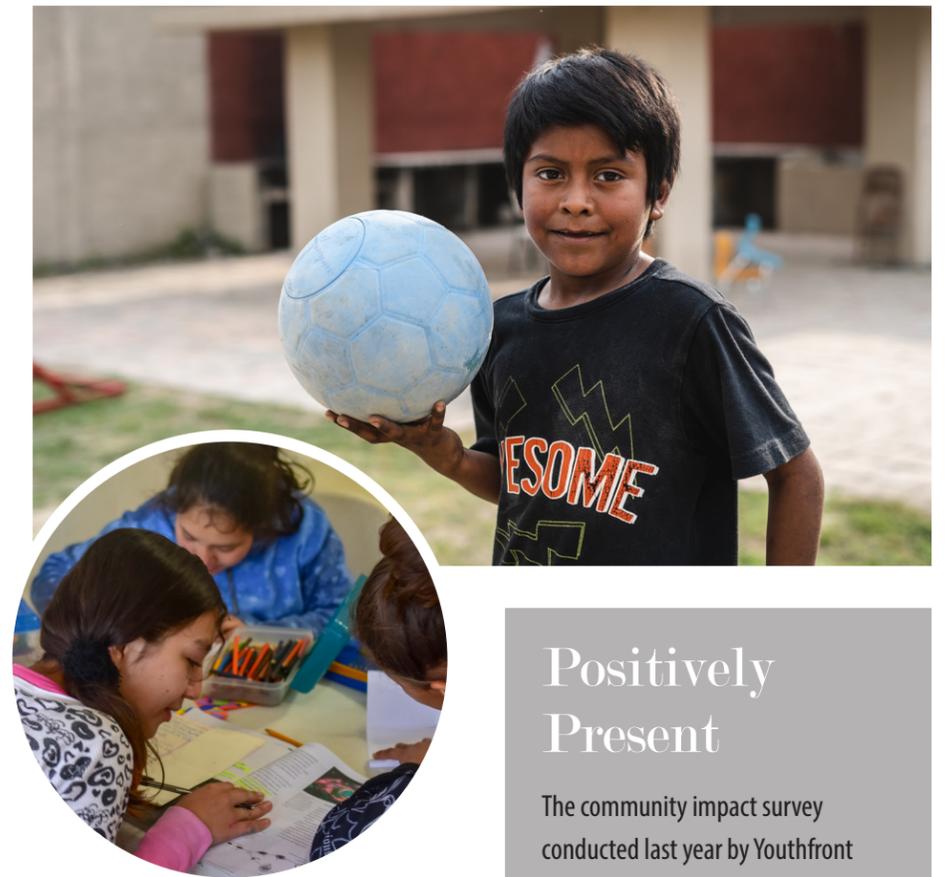
"We heard over and over again that while the program helped kids with homework, it transformed how they saw themselves, their critical thinking and their relationship with God."

The community survey also confirmed the contribution of Missional Journey teams to the program, Booth says. "We heard affirmation of how much the U.S. teams' presence has meant... community members were so moved that they come to get to know them, build friendships as they visit them in their homes and play and help the kids at Imagina."

Pineda says she's gotten more out of giving back as a graduate of the Imagina program than she gives.

"The Club made me more patient with younger kids, and I showed myself that I can accomplish positive changes in my society," she says. "Yes, I taught them a little more Spanish and math, but they filled my life with love, experiences and honesty."

"Imagina, or the Club as we used to call it, has been a very important adventure in my life," says Marco Castillo González, a member of the Mexico staff and another graduate of the program.



Positively Present

The community impact survey conducted last year by Youthfront Mexico staff had some key findings:

- 92% of locals surveyed said the Imagina programs have had an important, positive impact.
- In describing in their own words what Imagina does, "helping youth to be better people and better learners" was a top theme, along with "support and building self-confidence" for youth.
- In answering what has been good about the program, the answer "everything" was given by 33% of respondents. "Teaching manners," "being patient," and "helping kids with reading," were the other consistent themes.

How you can join in...

Youth groups and church teams can take Missional Journeys to serve in both Croc and in the Argentine neighborhood of Kansas City, KS. Teen Staff also serve in Croc each year.

Learn more about Missional Journeys and how to take a trip at youthfront.com/ymj. Support Youthfront Mexico's programs by giving at youthfront.com/donate.