Sing a New Song

February 11, 2015

Girls from families of limited resources between the ages of eleven and fifteen living in the frontier region of Intibucá, Honduras, hear a chorus of “You can’t” messages. You can’t escape the generational poverty in which you were born. You can’t go to school beyond the sixth grade. You can’t succeed or be productive on your own. You can’t survive without the protection and support of a man. The chorus reverberates in her body, her being, debasing her very identify. With head and eyes to the ground, a weak voice speaks with hesitant subservience, “I can’t.” It is not a wonder that placed in such a vulnerable position of degrading self-esteem, the girl finds herself with a child. Perhaps the only recompense to the “You can’t” chorus, she can at least bring life into the world. But nothing else has changed, the “You can’t” chorus sings ever louder, and the demeaning chant echoes into another generation.

The victim becomes a victor only when she can find a power greater than the power that defeats her. If those voices are left unchallenged, if there is no alternative chorus, there is little hope for anything other than “You can’t” becoming “I can’t.” Shoulder to Shoulder is singing out a new refrain. It is a song of empowerment, girl empowerment. This simple melody says “You can.” When that beat is internalized it becomes “I can!” (¡Yo Puedo!). Believing “I can” overcomes and silences the chorus of “You can’t.” We sing “You can,” they sing “I can,” and soon everyone hears it and joins in. One day, the “You can’t”

chorus will become less than a whisper of a remembrance. The powerful, soul moving rhythm of I can, Yo Puedo, will empower a new and liberating dance of joy.

The teacher training for the Yo Puedo Girl's Empowerment and Sexual Health Program was held last Friday, February 6, 2015 in the Shoulder to Shoulder Clinic in Concepción. Minsis Ramos Diaz, Yo Puedo Program Coordinator, and Kate Clitheroe, StoS Director of Programs, led the twenty-four 5th and 6th grade teachers, representatives of the fourteen Yo Puedo Schools. The success of the program is readily apparent in the enthusiasm and dedication of the teachers. They already intone the new chorus line. The school in Magdalena has done so well that they were able to donate funds toward incorporating more schools into the program. Two new schools were inducted into the program.

The program is growing, changing the rhythm, the tone, and inviting others to join in a new chorus. Schools were introduced to a new empowerment manual presenting topics in communication, self-esteem, peer pressure, decision making, and sexual health. Cedric Clitheroe, a new Shoulder to Shoulder volunteer, craftsman, and small businessman will begin trainings for teachers and girls on jewelry making and successful business strategies and techniques. A new contract was signed by the teacher representatives, committing to the ongoing success of the program. Finally, an evaluation tool to measure the short- and long-term outcomes of the program was introduced for implementation.

The beat reverberates more profoundly, the chorus is becoming stronger, and the old songs of "You Can't" are fading. Shoulder to Shoulder wants to keep playing this song. To learn the song, read more about us at Yo Puedo. To join the chorus, to add your voice to an empowering song, visit us at Donate to Yo Puedo.