



2017
Della Strada Award
Samuel Salas

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One day I was meeting with Reverend Hunter Director of Hospitality House and Sue Rowley, financial Director. Suddenly the door of the office opened and a girl in tears came to Rev. Hunter and said: “My brother has just been shot.” Rev. Hunter’s presence and words were full of compassion as he comforted her. She came counting on his help. He personifies what HH is for young people.

On another day I was watching some kindergarteners in line to go to a class. I looked at one child that was laughing and seemed very happy. I was troubled and sad as I wondered what his future would be like. That is what prompts the urgency of a HH for him now and through his teenage years. This is a place where children and young people come, play, pray, do academic work and have a snack. It is a place of hope with an ambitious vision: to prepare young people to become leaders of integrity, to restore broken families and to rebuild the North Minneapolis Community.

Earlier this week I was talking with Jeb Myers, President of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in South Minneapolis. He told me that a girl, a student at the school, was coming out of US Bank downtown where she works as part of the school program, she had her hijab on. Someone passing by pulled on her clothes and told her “Go back to Africa!” She went back into the building.

Thinking of the experience of students at Cristo Rey, Jeb said that a senior girl had spoken at an assembly to celebrate seniors’ admissions to colleges. She said “I didn’t know that being the first to graduate from high school in a family would be so hard. There is a lot of work and expectations at school and at home. But I never knew how proud I would make my parents and grandparents when I was admitted to college.”

100% of students graduate from HS at Cristo Rey. The average income for a family of four among their students is \$36,000.

The school is a community characterized by serious work and support of each student. What is most impressive, Jeb told me, is the deep love parents have for their children, the dedication of teachers, and the determination of students to graduate against all odds. It is a place of hope and energy.

At the Basilica as we give shoes to the poor we hear about their most difficult lives. We often talk to people who have spent time in jail, others who are homeless, sick or victims of abuse, violence or addiction. The Basilica welcomes them and helps them to find assistance for their difficulties.

The Aim Higher Foundation raises funds and distributes them so that children of low income families may attend catholic schools. The impact of this program is transformative as it brings many children to schools that offer good academic work and a formation in values.

Last year the foundation distributed scholarships to over 800 students in 78 schools.

All these places I have described to you open their doors to help those who are under-resourced, who lack opportunities for a more fulfilling life, who are suffering some limitation, who are vulnerable.

All of these places run thanks to the admirable work of compassion and good will done by staff, teachers and volunteers.

Why am I telling you all of this?

When I retired after 70 years of going to school as a student, teacher and administrator I thought I would teach or help with education.

The great surprise, however, has been that I have been learning about the tough life that many families and young people live, the suffering that burdens many of them, the uncertainty of their future.

I have also been learning the high degree of compassion, kindness, generosity of those who work with them, those who have chosen to spend there lives trying to rescue them from the hurt that they live everyday or threatens to hurt them in the future.

As a member of the Ignatian Volunteers Corps I attend a monthly meeting where we talk about our experiences at the place where we do volunteer work.

My fellow Ignatian volunteers are also a big lesson for me for their selflessness, they retired and chose to give what they have to others.

I appreciate very much this award. It is the example of those who give that has changed me into a student again.

My parents were givers and so are Cecilia, my wife, and our daughter, Maria-Paz.

Thank you all for your most valuable lessons in giving to our brothers and sisters.

Thank you!