

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

Empowerment Takes Root in Chile

Maria lived in isolation, spending most of her time indoors cleaning houses just to make ends meet in the shantytown near Santiago, Chile, where she lived.

But after encountering Popular Education in Health Foundation, Maria found freedom and a deeper meaning in life.

Today, with a degree in social work, Maria helps those in her *población* (community): women in abusive relationships and families in need of affordable daycare. She has also become a leader in her church.

“Maria is a powerful witness to what the program can do,” says Raquel Rodriguez, program director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Global Mission program unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). “Her story could be multiplied over and over in so many places.”

The foundation works in poor, marginalized communities in Santiago and Concepción, Chile. Volunteer health promoters conduct educational workshops on a wide range of topics, including self esteem, reproductive health, mental health and gender issues. ELCA Global Mission works with the local church to provide mission personnel in support of this work.

The majority of program newcomers eventually become health promoters, themselves, after undergoing the training program. By doing so, they too become qualified to lead workshops and go on healthcare visits to homes, taking blood pressure, identifying signs of illnesses and teaching how nutrition plays an important role in preventive care.

The Popular Education in Health Foundation carries out its mission in a variety of other ways, too: organizing around environmental issues, distributing educational materials and using wall murals, marketplace displays and street theater to raise awareness of HIV prevention, domestic violence, breast cancer and other issues.

The program has grown since its founding in 1982, as women continue to go through the program and become leaders throughout other communities.

“Like a flower, the foundation blossoms and spreads,” Raquel says.



For more *Stories of Faith in Action*, visit www.elca.org/stories. Do you have a story to share? E-mail us at stories@elca.org.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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