

From Physical Disability and Sadness to Hope and Autonomy **By Ximena Combariza Echeverri**

Description of the situation:

In 1985, after an avalanche that buried the population of Armero, in Colombia, at the National Rehabilitation Center TELETON in Bogota, we received for rehabilitation treatment around 20 survivors of this disaster, who suffered severe physical injuries -such as amputations in their limbs- and physical disabilities resulting from these injuries, in addition to the loss of their homes and several members of their families.



Picture from: noticiasrcn.com

It was a group of adults of different ages, professions, trades and socioeconomic conditions, from peasants to entrepreneurs, along with their closest surviving relatives, and an 11-year-old girl, who suffered minor physical injuries, but lost his whole family and he was very emotionally affected.



Picture from: lasdosorillas.co

The intervention used:

We offered these people a comprehensive rehabilitation process, through an inter and trans disciplinary team, composed of Medical Doctors of various specialties, Social Workers, Psychologists, Nurses and Physical, Occupational and Language Therapists. The objectives: to help both, patients and their families to process their grief for the various losses they have suffered and to develop their physical, emotional and social resources to the maximum; to reduce the impact of the losses and to regain their lives with the greater autonomy possible.



Picture from: masliviano.cl

We used not only traditional medical, therapeutic and rehabilitation resources, but also many group sessions, aimed at creating and strengthening links between patients and families and strengthening the confidence of everyone in their ability to move forward. We still did not talk about resilience or facilitation in our environment, but we stimulated one and applied the other.

The results:

All of our Armero patients, including the little girl who lost all of her family, progressed satisfactorily in their integral rehabilitation process: they smiled again and wished to continue living; they made new work, housing, study, etc. plans, according to their personal conditions; they implemented these plans and actively supported each other during the treatment, and even after it in some cases. They were for us, the professional team that attended them, a true example of resilience.

Reflection of the author:

- All human beings have "installed" the resilience capacity, this is part of us and even in very difficult conditions can go afloat with a little support.
- Feeling part of a group of people who share the same difficulties and challenges and who are willing to fight, is one of the best supports and incentives for resilience.
- Addressing this type of intervention in a group is a critical success factor. And it is also this approach from the perspective and the methodology of professional facilitation..
- A comprehensive rehabilitation process like the one we offered to all our patients in TELETON, is a critical factor in the physical, emotional and social recovery of people with physical injuries and disabilities, regardless of the "seriousness" of these.

The Author

I am Colombian, Psychologist of basic formation, with postgraduate studies in Clinical Psychology, Systemic Group Therapy and Human Management. I have had an extensive experience as a psychotherapist, university teacher and facilitator and organizational consultant, and I have worked in Colombia and several Latin American countries. I am a founding member of the Latin American Association of Facilitators - ALFA. I have been a Volunteer of Global Facilitators Serving Communities GFSC since 2011 and currently a Board member. I have had the opportunity to contribute to the process of psychosocial recovery of communities affected by natural disasters and other crises in several Latin American countries, so I am increasingly aware of the need for support for people affected by major crises. In addition, I have been a lucky witness of the resilience capacity that all human beings have.



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