

Women's Empowerment: Miriam Ávila



Nothing can stop Miriam Ávila's smile. A smile that has been hard to achieve, as she suffered violence during the last six years of her first marriage.

That situation is now behind her thanks to the support of the organisation Calidad de Vida (Quality of Life).

"My neighbour brought me here in 2010", Miriam explains, "I was a very different woman back then, I love to dress up, and my husband used to get mad if I put makeup on. I didn't work either", she remembers. "The other day a neighbour told me that before I hardly uttered a word and now nobody can shut up me!" she tells laughing.

"I compare myself with pictures from before. I have changed a lot, but I don't throw them away because we can't forget the past, not to repeat it", she points out.

"Here they helped me, and I have learnt a lot, they taught us to crochet, to make piñatas and much more, now I have my bakery!" Miriam says proudly.

"I enjoyed the legal training, so I can help myself and other people", she says, "for example, my second husband (my youngest child's father) didn't want to pay the support. As they taught me, I looked into the Children's Act and told him that if he didn't pay I would take him to court, he got scared and started paying," she explains with the biggest smile.

"A few days ago a neighbour came to me looking for help because her husband told her that they were getting divorced and he will go with other women. I told her that wasn't possible, that if they got married together, they will get a divorce together", she says very confidently.

"When I was training with Calidad de Vida, I got several Family Act books, and I am still using them."

Recently, she helped her sister to escape violence “and they looked like the perfect marriage...”

“Because I lived through violence, I don’t want anybody else to go through the same. I like to help and to listen to my neighbour, in my bakery or on the bus, because girls love to talk with me. Some husbands get mad when they don’t have a reason.”

Along with other women supported by Calidad de Vida, Miriam also carried out social audits of the courts in charge of tackling cases of violence.

“When we arrived at the courthouse they treated us as if we couldn’t be there, as if they were better than us because they had the chance to study and to work from a desk... and they knew nothing about violence, it was truly a mess, some of them were nervous and were trying to find the answers on the computer...”

Miriam also brought home what she learned with Calidad de Vida.

“My eldest daughter, 18 years old, is already working and is supporting me, the 16 year old now has such a temper...” and she laughs once again “she doesn’t want to know anything about men, and now she is saying she will never get married”.

“I think they will follow in my steps, they also came to some workshops, and they won’t experience what I did”, she says hopefully.

Her son is another story. “He didn’t suffer the violence as we did, we protected him, and now he thinks he is the king of the house, but I am teaching him that he is not living alone, at least he is only one and is a minor!” And she starts laughing again. “My mum still can’t believe that men and women are equal, and she doesn’t want me to married again because she says that a woman can only have one man, but you never know who you are going to meet”, she says.

For the time being, Miriam’s priority is her three children.

“I lived a lot of experiences, some beautiful and some not so pretty, but above all, I learnt a lot”, Miriam says.