

HISTORY:

Grupo Colombo Suizo de Pedagogía Especial

Doctor Hermann Siegenthaler, professor in Pedagogy at the University of Zurich, together with the Colombian doctors Rafael Diaz and Aurelio Tobon, and the Swiss Pedagogist Maja Weber, established the Special Pedagogy Colombian-Swiss Group in 1985. Its objective was to train Colombian educators in Special Pedagogy through courses and seminars offered by specialists from Switzerland and Colombia; furthermore, to put at their reach vanguard texts in educational theory and practice.

This work awoke great expectations among the benefited teachers' group, so that the Grupo Colombo Suizo felt the social responsibility of increasing the programs and to delve into the most urgent needs in training. With this purpose, the Swiss Specialist Pedagogist Pascal Affolter arrived in Cartagena in the year of 1996.

Mr. Affolter gave the Colombian juridical life to Dr. Siegenthaler and his team's purpose with the name Fundación Grupo Colombo Suizo de Pedagogía Especial; he strengthened the ties with Universities and other educational institutions in the city and nearby towns; he served as an intercultural bridge between the headquarters in Switzerland and the work field in Colombia; developed pedagogical and cultural activities in the community: he created the bases of a great educational project and consolidated them with the creation of the Centro ALUNA (ALUNA Training Center) in 1998.

Hogar Crecer and a study of its needs.

The idea of creating an institution for disabled persons was born from the experience that the Foundation had as the advisor of "Hogar Crecer" in Cartagena de Indias, a special education institution coordinated by Mrs. Carole Ventura. The urgency of an integral attention center with pedagogical fundament to help disabled people and continue training educators and therapists came from dealing with many parents seeking help and from a study on the needs of the city.

ALUNA is born in a borrowed place in the outskirts of Cartagena de Indias

Aluna began its activities in Turbaco, in the outside of Cartagena de Indias, in a building lent to us by ASPAEN, where the school Colegio Cartaena de Indias was located. Thirty two disabled boys, girls and teenagers and 15 professionals opened the doors to a new hope filled with magic and color on March 2, 1999. In December, 75 boys, girls and teenagers happily finished their school period; and many parents knocked on these doors seeking integral attention for their children.

A waiting list leads to the Project "Our own school"

The place was beautiful. But the minimum public utilities at the time, the cost of transportation and the need for offering better quality of service to our students and many more on the waiting list faced us with a new challenge: Our own School. A place in Cartagena de Indias to take care of the children. A place with its own identity and a sense of belonging.

New Board of Directors

In this point, from the road of dreams and faith, the motor management was lacking. And this force arrived with the conformation of a Board of Directors with city public figures, local men and women,

altruists, with a clear vision of the needs of the disabled and an open heart to help in its solutions. At this point of the road, Dr. Raimundo Angulo Pizarro, in a Board of Directors' meeting in the offices of the National Beauty Contest said: "Gentlemen, it's a fact: We will build a new School!" He was so certain in his words that no one imagined the difficulties we would be facing.

Purchase of 15,000 sq m. of land –December 28, 2001.

During two long years of steps, contract, deceptions, frustration, missed appointments, multiple presentations of the project, promises, disillusion, anguish and happiness always conjugating the verb "persevere" loudly, a vital step was taken at last on December 28, 2001 at 12:15 p.m. when the Mayor of the District of Cartagena signed the Purchase-Sale Instrument of a 15,000 square meter lot for the Centro ALUNA.

We highlight the great help of Dr. Nohra Puyana de Pastrana, First Lady of Colombia, to our cause; of Dr. Eudenis de Diaz, First Lady of Cartagena de Indias; Dr. Carlos Diaz Redondo, Mayor of Cartagena de Indias; of the National Beauty Contest, of the District Council of Cartagena and the wives of the City Councilmen; of Mrs. Tulia de Cubillos and Maria Patricia de Roman; of the Naval Social Group; and other public figures in this city.

Laying the First Brick – September 7, 2002.

On September 7, 2002 we celebrated "The First Brick." This was a simple act but full of emotion. We all touched the brick to give it life. Aluna's children and teenagers, their relatives, professors and therapists, authorities and public figures of the city, Aluna's friends, we all touched the first brick as a talisman. This brick, symbol of a dream, charged with energy, was finally placed on the land where the ALUNA Center was built, with the round of applause of a very happy audience.

Construction began on October 1, 2002.

The land movement began on October 1, 2002: Donation of the National Beauty Contest and with resources of the Colombo-Swiss Foundation Group in Switzerland, the base for the future of the children was built.

Fund Raising and construction in ten months

Thanks to the tireless and hard work of the Foundation, the Government, social responsible entities and altruist people who joined this project of great social impact, ALUNA was inaugurated ten months after the construction had begun. With a serious, transparent management and with the interest on the future of many children we took advantage of the many donated resources. The quality and beauty of this work is the response of ALUNA to the confidence placed by the donors.

Inauguration – July 19, 2003

It was a special day: after much work and solidarity the children and teenagers of ALUNA inaugurated their new school: 17 classrooms, management and training building, kitchen, kitchen-workshop, sports field, sidewalks, roads, gardens and restrooms. The buildings were done with an architectonic concept full of life and colors in whose classrooms the children and teenagers share their illusions and feel how important they are for their families and for society.

From Inauguration day to December of 2004

We do not rest in ALUNA, neither do our needs. Thanks to new important donations we were able to finish the "Herman Siegenthaler Auditorium", with a capacity for 100 persons and with modern furniture and audiovisual equipment, and the Library for Training our personnel. We built a beautiful Kiosk-Dinning Hall and a Kiosk for the Amusement Park. We created the Investigation Center under the direction of Astrid Caceres, with a Master's Degree, and we began a Post University Course in "Educational Investigation" in agreement with the Bolivar Technological University. We also implemented a second Satellite Project (extension towards the community), and since August 2004, we offer Hypotherapy (a special therapy with the help of the horse) in agreement with Cabalgar and we are working on other new projects.

ALUNA, a dream come true