



# DEFENSORES DEL CHACO

Building the Future Together

VIVA Trust Case Studies



# VIVA Trust Case Studies

## A successful example from civil society

The VIVA Trust Case Studies series describes projects in which cooperation among different sectors of society results in especially successful synergism and leads to a more sustainable social development.

The third Case Study in the series is dedicated to a civil society project: Club Atlético Defensores del Chaco. This example fully documents the way in which a local, spontaneous initiative by a group of Argentine young people has resulted in an international project that has opened new vistas for its community and offered fresh opportunities to thousands of other young people.

This Case Study is the third one written by Dr. Roberto Artavia L., former rector of INCAE Business School.

The foreword was written by Bernardo Toro A., advisor of Fundación AVINA, whose in-depth knowledge of Latin America's realities is second to none.

We hope this case will prove inspirational.

Dr. Peter Fuchs  
Chairman  
VIVA Trust



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# Foreword: The Mother Science

"In democratic countries,  
the science of association is the mother science;  
progress in all others depends upon it."

*Alexis de Tocqueville*  
*"Democracy in America"*

## **Knowing how to organize: the mother of all sciences ... everything else depends on it**

People committed to change often ask this question: "What is the first step I must take to help change the poverty situation in a community or territory?" The reader can find the answer in the pages of this Case Study, prepared and delightfully written by Dr. Roberto Artavia: it is organization.

That was what Fabián Ferraro and Julio Jiménez, the founders of Club Atlético Defensores del Chaco also understood: it is by organizing themselves that people become social actors, citizens, *i.e.*, individuals capable of creating or transforming the social order to offer all a worthy life. They understood that if they did not organize themselves, they could not protect their rights or promote their interests. It is by organizing ourselves that we marshal and negotiate interests and decide the future in a steady and stable manner.

A person who fails to organize himself does not feel bound to respect rules in his dealings with others or with society (he lacks self-regulation). At the same time, his isolation makes it easier for others to violate his own rights (he lacks social protection). Organizing brings about self-regulation and the protection of rights.

What we call the social fabric is nothing more than the framework generated among themselves by different organizations. The greater the number of organizations engaging in productive transactions (win-win) in the economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual fields, the more strength, dynamism, and self-regulation society is able to achieve. The simile is a textile one: the tighter the framework and the larger the number of threads, the stronger the fabric.

When one part of society has a stronger fabric (more organizations) than others, the distribution of private and collective goods and services (rights) tends to be unequal. An individual or an organization's importance in, and influence upon, society is related to the number, type, and quality

of the organizations that individual or entity is associated with. Defensores del Chaco has increased its service capabilities and local and territorial influence (“opening the field”) by establishing new partnerships and creating more complex forms of organization that enable it to give and receive energy from other milieus.

Being organized is a must in order to productively resolve conflicts (i.e., without violence). It turns conflicts into opportunities by establishing rules for the all-essential give and take. These rules and criteria, when respected by all, facilitate the task of reaching balanced solutions and sustainable results. Invariably, a conflict without organizations leads to chaos.

As this case study shows, to solve problems, marshal interests, or mobilize towards a goal in a locality or society, all types of organizations are important: from the bridge club to the corporate board of directors to the social movement.

### **Organizations and institutions: how to become social actors**

We can say with Douglas North<sup>1</sup>, that organizations are a society’s rules of the game, or, putting it more formally, limitations thought of by men and women that shape human interaction. Thus, they structure incentives for human interchanges, whether political, social, spiritual, or economic. These interchanges are called transactions. It is through transactions that we add (win-win) or take away (win-lose) value to the goods and services a society produces. A win-win transaction is understood to mean any transaction that helps make human dignity possible, *i.e.*, to make human rights possible.

When we wish to say hello to friends, buy oranges, make a loan, bury the dead, we know how to do it. The rules or limitations we have agreed upon tell us how to carry out those exchanges (transactions) in a safe and productive way.

Organizations and institutions help us reduce uncertainty by providing a structure for everyday life. They are guidelines for human interaction. Institutions define and limit all aspects of individual behavior. These limitations shape human interaction, according to D. North.

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1. North, Douglas (1990), *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press.

Several implications follow from this:

- An organization is useful to society to the extent it generates more win-win exchanges (interactions) with other organizations or individuals in their everyday life.
- Organizations generate a greater number of useful and easy transactions when they have well-defined rules for interacting among themselves or with individuals. They appropriately limit freedom.
- On the other hand, when organizations and institutions have rules that are ambiguous or contradictory, exchanges are slow and costly in time and money.
- The more useful exchanges (interactions) organizations generate, the more dynamic a society will be and the more wealth it will produce.
- Citizen involvement is enhanced when people are able to engage in more useful transactions, whether economic, political, social, or cultural. To put it simply: organizations make us into social actors.
- Bureaucracy, in the negative sense of that term, exists when organizations and institutions make transactions slow and costly, thereby diminishing citizen involvement.

Another way of looking at institutions is to define them as systems geared towards:

- Solving a problem on an ongoing basis (an emergency center, for example).
- Preventing a problem on an ongoing basis (a vaccination program, for instance).
- Preserving the solution to a problem in time (a museum is a good example).

From this standpoint, it is the understanding or evolution of problems which determines and guides those organizational and institutional systems that are useful to society. If the problem in a society evolves or disappears, institutions must also evolve or disappear (e.g., the invention of the automobile made the horse irrelevant to transportation; smithies gradually gave way to auto repair shops). Bureaucracy emerges when an institutional organization loses sight of the social problem that gave rise to it and instead devotes itself to protecting the institution for the institution's sake.

The individuals and groups in Defensores del Chaco gradually became social and political subjects and actors because, in order to create the organizations, they had to:

- Define for each organization an identity that would differentiate and identify it within the whole institutional array, thus determining the type of problem they wished to solve or prevent, or the solution they sought to preserve. This implies the ability to recognize itself as being different, and being able to recognize the different nature of others. It is this mutual recognition that makes transactions possible.

- Create rules of inclusion (who may belong) and exclusion (who may not belong) for the organization. This entails accepting internal and external rules, and understanding and being bound by specific behaviors towards others and towards themselves.
- Define and create ways and rules for associating and re-associating with, and disassociating from other organizations so as to establish agreements, contracts, exchanges, and covenants.
- Learn how to make plans and projects to guarantee the organization's survival and continuing influence. This implies learning to design, take care of, and defend social futures (together with the rest of society). An indicator of this learning is the manner in which Defensores del Chaco makes use of information (data bases) and cultural memory to make decisions and create services.
- Seek public recognition for established rules and limitations, as well as recognition by the government. Understanding and accepting the rules of legitimacy and legality so as to be able to act within the whole of society at local, national, and international levels means learning to recognize, belong to, and protect the social contract of the society where it operates: the political constitution.

The creation and development of organizations are, at the same time, a significant teaching force for the training of citizens and the strengthening of democracy, for negotiating and establishing the future. And being able to define the future is the utmost expression of autonomy, *i.e.*, of citizenship.

### **Autonomy and citizenship: the foundations of sustainability**

Defensores del Chaco is, first and foremost, an exercise in citizenship, if we understand citizenship to mean an individual's or a group's ability to create and transform the social order in cooperation with others. Ethically based on the search for their own dignity, they founded new social orders and created their own organizations to control their lives. They did not resign themselves to a fatalistic notion of destiny. They understood that every social order is created by the same people who live in it and decided to change the one they previously had.

They have become autonomous through self-knowledge and self-valuation as individuals and as a community, and they have built up social and political self-regulation through their own organizations. As the title of this Case Study proclaims, the residents of Chaco Chico de Paso del Rey, in the district of Moreno, together can define and build their own future. To understand how they have done it – and continue to do – I invite the reader to follow their story in these pages. And once again, we all will be able to understand that social change is indeed possible.

Bernardo Toro A.  
Advisor, Fundación AVINA



# Case Study DEFENSORES DEL CHACO

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Building the Future Together

Dr. Roberto Artavia Loría



Fabián Ferraro at the headquarters of Defensores del Chaco

# Introduction

The Defensores del Chaco Athletic Club (Club Atlético Defensores del Chaco, in Spanish, herein simply referred to as Defensores) was founded in 1994 by a group of twelve young people from the neighborhood or barrio of Chaco Chico (hereinafter the neighborhood or the barrio) in the sector of Paso del Rey, district of Moreno (hereinafter Moreno) in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. These young people used to get together to play soccer at street corners in the neighborhood where they were born. A lot has happened since then, thanks to the leadership of their founders and of many others who have joined them. With great creativity, hard work, and unwavering personal commitment, they turned their idea into an admirable institution whose real impact upon the community is readily apparent.

*The mission of Defensores is “to generate spaces where the different members of the community can meet with the goal of restoring the barrio’s links and promoting the human development of its people.”*

Fabián Ferraro and Julio Jiménez are the club’s founders. Ferraro, at age 36 a veteran in the organization, has become a true social leader in the areas of education, youth programs, and community relations in the district of Moreno and other nearby communities. A semi-professional soccer player for some years, he was a midfielder for his team. While playing in midfield, he always sought to have a wide view of the playing field, frequently leading his coach to ask him to “open the field,” which in soccer parlance means to play in the empty space, open up space, make room, so that other players can join in the attack and pass the ball to others better positioned to move it forward. “Open the field” is the expression used at Defensores to express the possibility of moving in a new direction, the need to make room for others to join and contribute to the progress of the organization.



Outside wall of the organization Defensores del Chaco



At the present time, 55 people work at Defensores, handling the most diverse community development programs. This has created a dynamic process of expansion and diversification invariably centered on the human development of barrio residents.

Because of its impact on the community where it does its work, Defensores has become an exemplary organization. It has also been a model of skillful management in a variety of ways, and AVINA Foundation and VIVA Trust have seen fit to fully document its experience through this Case Study.

VIVA Trust is a private organization, founded by Stephan Schmidheiny, bringing together in one single organization investments in productive businesses, philanthropy, and support for sustainable development. The dividends paid by its productive investments are earmarked for the Trust's philanthropic and sustainable development activities. The major distribution channel for its philanthropic activities and investments is AVINA Foundation (hereinafter simply AVINA), a non-profit private organization with a substantial presence in Latin America, dedicated to strengthening and advising innovative leaders committed to sustainable development and to helping them create useful networks.



# The Stage: The Chaco Chico Neighborhood

The district of Moreno is part of the northwestern section of the urban conglomerate of the Province of Buenos Aires. It is at one end of the group of communities that make up the districts of Malvinas Argentinas, José C. Paz, San Miguel, and Moreno itself. Recent social and economic surveys have established that 45% of the population live below the poverty line; 17% are indigent; and 30% are unemployed or underemployed.

The area is known as Paseo del Rey. Chaco Chico is one of the barrios in the area. It takes its name from the large numbers of Paraguayan immigrants who live in it.

Paseo del Rey, with a population in excess of 250,000, has only three schools and no kindergartens or child-care centers. There are seven health centers in the area, but not a single hospital. Many of the streets are unpaved, and many homes lack running water. Water is obtained from shallow wells, and is highly polluted.

Houses in the community are small and afford little room for leisure activities, which must be pursued in the streets and the open areas of the community. Open spaces were used as dumps where garbage would accumulate; uncollected garbage is now being burned. Young people are likely to lead lives of despair and frustration, with little chance to break through. These were the circumstances that gave birth to Defensores del Chaco Club as the response by a group of young people to the daunting challenges posed by their situation.





A typical street of the Chaco Chico neighborhood

# Defensores del Chaco: A Unique Organization

Capturing the essence of such a *sui generis* organization in its history, its activities, and its internal culture is no easy undertaking. The different sections of this case study are an attempt to showcase that essence and explain how its values were shaped and what the most outstanding elements of its strategy are.

## Life choice: to feel part of a community

*"We began as twelve young people with no hope, in a neighborhood that afforded us little opportunity to get ahead, playing soccer at a street corner, an actual garbage dump... We don't rightly know how it happened or what accounts for it, but one day we chose life and decided to build a true community."*

In the poor neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, where kindergartens and child-care centers are few, socialization mechanisms to teach children to be involved in something larger than their own immediate family, often broken up by circumstances, are conspicuously absent. Sports and organized involvement in clubs such as Defensores teach young people the rules of the game, how to live together and be part of a whole greater than each individual. Defensores del Chaco has raised from this reality an organization that seeks to integrate families and instill a sense of community in young people.

Once these twelve young people decided to take action, there was no stopping them. Doing the best they could, on an empty lot that at the time served as a garbage dump, they put up a sign: "Soon to come: Defensores del Chaco Sports Complex." They did not have a penny, did not own the land, but they had the strength of their dreams and their convictions. Their club stands today on the very spot where that defiant sign first went up more than 14 years ago. It is a true sports complex, with two soccer fields, handball, basketball, and volleyball courts, a community theater, several meeting rooms for different types of workshops, a computer center, and administrative offices and facilities. Construction of a club-owned school has already started one block away.

For a child or youth to be able to participate in the Club's programs, he must first sign up with his parents. This is a way of inviting the whole family to be involved in club activities and fostering the development of a true sense of community.



Every week, more than 1,700 people – young people, fathers, mothers – take advantage of the Defensores facilities. From a modest sports field, they have become a multipurpose facility, the Defensores del Chaco Athletic Club, including other sports in addition to soccer, and artistic and educational activities suitable for all family and community members.

The organization’s current president, Maximiliano F. Pelayes, joined Defensores at age eleven as the youngest of the twelve original members. He offers many different explanations of the true meaning of Defensores. But none is as eloquent as the fact that he is about to graduate from college, the first member of his family to do so. When asked why he devotes so many hours of his time to the organization, his answer is deeply philosophical:

*“Defensores meant going from neighborhood apathy to hope; from a gray horizon to a burst of color ... going from mere survival to the pursuit of happiness.”*

The twelve young people whose efforts gave rise to this dynamic organization are today well on their way to success and happiness. Several have graduated from college or are about to do so; some are raising their own families, which are of course actively involved in the work being done by Defensores. Even though their work keeps some of them from participating as much as they would like, all are always present for the club's big events. They realize that the example of their lives, the great lesson, the role model they represent, is the best witness to what an active and integrated community can do for its young people.

### Territorial militancy: loyalty to the community where they were born

*“Territorial militancy means that we are going to work until Moreno is the most beautiful place in the world in which to live. Why aim lower than that?”*

Fabián Ferraro uses those words to explain the meaning territorial militancy has for him. For Fabián, it means transferring the organization's strategic decisions to the young people who today lead the club. In addition to showing respect for the democratic ways of the organization, letting young leaders make the decisions is the clearest way of promoting commitment to the neighborhood. Decisions are made on the basis of their impact on the organization, the barrio, and the community.

Territorial militancy implies an ongoing search for new ways to deepen the organization's impact on the community of Chaco Chico, Moreno, without prejudice of taking advantage of other opportunities for expansion and development, guided always by their original mission. It is because of their territorial militancy that the organization's leaders remain true to their neighborhood, working from the Club that has now become the very beating heart of their community.



Poster published in La Posta Regional promoting the residents' commitment to the barrio

## Opening the field: diversification of activities

Territorial militancy has led Defensores to increased diversification, seeking ways to have a greater impact on the neighborhood and the whole of Moreno. Expansion and diversification of their activities take place anyway, because of the great success and enormous appeal of its programs – due to external demand – but never at the expense of local programs. Thus, in addition to the soccer club and its teams in different categories, Defensores today offers dozens of other activities at its Center. Some of the most popular are:

### Sports activities

- Soccer
- Street soccer
- Handball
- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Climbing

### Art activities

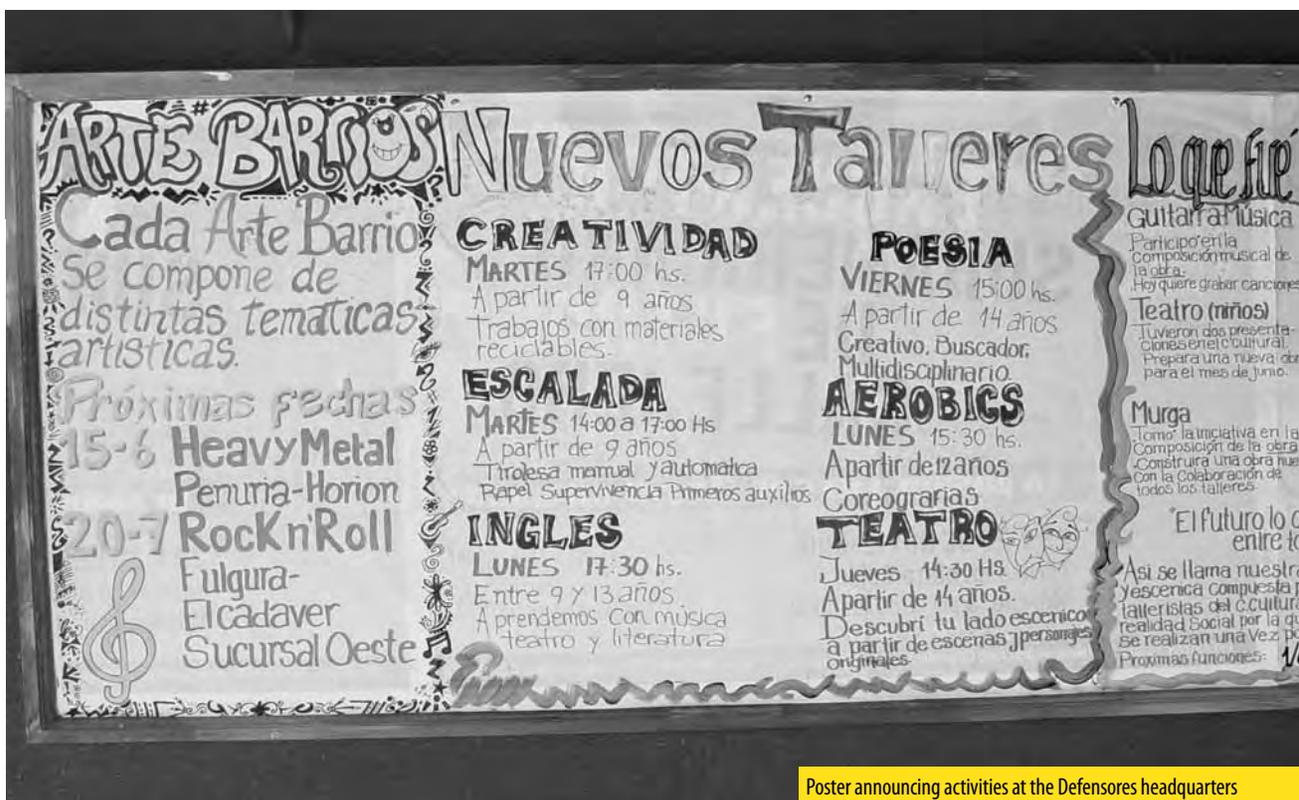
- Street musicians  
(murga)
- Music lessons:  
Guitar  
Percussion
- Poetry
- Graffiti
- Theater
- Embroidery
- Crafts

### Other activities

- Legal counseling
- Preventive medicine
- English lessons

### Facilities

- Sports fields:  
Soccer  
Handball  
Basketball  
Volleyball
- Community Theater
- Flexible workshops
- Computer center
- Meeting rooms



Poster announcing activities at the Defensores headquarters



Partial view of the interior of the Community Theater

As part of the growth of the organization and its people, a foundation has been set up. It is led by Ferraro, and its purpose is to continue expanding and diversifying the club's activities. The foundation has begun work in the area of formal education and is engaged in the establishment of a school that will begin with a kindergarten and grow from there, progressing along with its first class

In making the decision to establish a school, focus groups were organized, discussions were held in the community, and the project that would contribute the most to neighborhood families was finally selected. The project's philosophy, based on the principle of territorial militancy, has been to make the community an integral part of the decision-making process.

## **Independence and autonomy: the responsibility is ours**

Independence and autonomy were values zealously guarded by Defensores; the club did not want to depend on the priorities of others but to continue focusing its efforts on the real and expressed needs of the community.

With the passage of time, Defensores has earned the support of different organizations, both for profit and non-profit. Financing for its strategy and programs was preferred to growth as its resources allowed.

This approach has made it possible for the organization to make sure that every member understands that, ultimately, responsibility for what happens in the organization and the community lies exclusively with them and does not depend on what others may think. Defensores' budget has grown significantly, and the organization has succeeded in earning the confidence of both donors and the community in its handling of funds for their benefit.

When paving of some neighborhood streets began, Defensores brought the community together, consulted with it, and negotiated with authorities which streets should receive priority. In so doing, the club not only made sure that the streets to be paved were those residents wanted, but also assumed responsibility once again for decisions affecting all of them. They exercised their autonomy as a community and accepted responsibility for the results.

Independence and autonomy are core values of the organization. They manifest themselves through constant decision-making and, above all, through the acceptance of responsibility for the results obtained for the Athletic Club, the Foundation, and the community they represent. For Defensores, independence, autonomy, and responsibility are concepts that become meaningful only when taken as a whole, since one cannot operate in the absence of the other two.

## **New solutions to old problems: innovation and creativity**

From the very outset, Defensores has been a creative organization. The solutions it has proposed for community problems are unique in terms of both the activities they envisage and carry out, and the methods they use to convey them and facilitate teamwork.

Defensores has become a source of new methods for and approaches to the development of the communities and barrios of northwestern Greater Buenos Aires and even beyond. The Argentine version of the street soccer method they developed has extended internationally to organizations in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, and has been shared with European organizations.

The entire organization rewards creativity and works to instill it in each of the young people and families joining the club. When a young person comes to Defensores, the organization does not tell him or her what to do; rather, it offers room for growth and self-expression.

Although soccer continues to be the glue holding it together, as time has gone by, the organization has become increasingly focused on stimulating creativity through art. Beginning in 2007, Defensores offers programs for different forms of artistic expression that provide opportunities for the entire family to get involved.

A new development is the fact that Defensores is a participatory democracy where community opinions are sought to feed and strengthen the decision-making process. Not being afraid to innovate, to challenge convention, and to put creativity in the hands of the community as a useful and versatile tool makes Defensores a unique organization in its social environment.

The truly important fact is that Defensores has faced long-standing problems with fresh and creative programs. They answer old social problems with new programs and mechanisms. If anyone had formally said that street soccer was a way to address the social problems afflicting poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, he would have been ridiculed. Defensores did not propose the idea; it implemented it in a practical way and, using this tool as initial resource, has begun to change the sad history of Chaco Chico and the district of Moreno into one of hope and opportunities for the young people of those communities. Creativity and alternative thinking have paid handsome dividends.



## Street soccer: from sport to social cohesion

One of Defensores' essential tools has been the development and intensive use of a unique method of street soccer that promotes involvement, mutual respect, and the development of team spirit. Fernando Fernández Leguiza noted:

*"From the outset, soccer has been at the heart of Defensores; it has afforded many of us great opportunities. I came over from another barrio to help develop the soccer team and quickly became involved at another level of this organization ... I remember we traveled to Germany, with the German government's assistance, to learn about that country's street soccer method. It was the first time any of us had ever gotten close to an aircraft, and getting our travel documents was in itself a most enriching experience. Over here, in the barrios, it is not common for young people to have their papers up to date. ... Soccer brings us together with other social groups in the country and the region; our contexts may be different, but the problems – violence, hopelessness – are common to all. ... Our tool has been the structuring of informal soccer."*

Street soccer began in Moreno as a means of neutralizing violence at friendly soccer matches held in different neighborhoods. From being a fight-filled sport, a never-ending game (which often dissolved into violence), street soccer evolved into a sport attracting boys of all ages as well as an increasing number of girls; a sport where the rules of the game are clearly established and negotiated by the participants; a sport with a "third half" dedicated to reviewing what has just happened with the guidance of a trained mediator.

With time, older players learn to help young ones, to become trainers. The sport evolves and adapts itself to the resources available and attracts greater participation. In some places, goals scored by women are more highly valued; in others, an elegant style elicits admiration. The final outcome is the use of soccer to establish mutual respect among players, respect for the rules agreed upon, the setting of shared limits, the improvement of the participants' analytical abilities, the incorporation of

women and younger people into the process, learning to dialogue ... a true instrument of social cohesion.

### **Soccer Leagues in Favor of Tolerance**

This game method constitutes an innovative experience in relation to the use of sports as an educational and socialization tool, by promoting values such as tolerance, respect, solidarity and teamwork, participation and citizen inclusion.

#### **How to play:**

1. Mixed teams participate.
2. The players can enter and leave the soccer field without limits.
3. There is no referee. Instead, there is a social mediator who follows up on the process of participation and reflection throughout the course of the soccer game, promoting dialogue.
4. The players are the ones who must agree upon the rules before each game. When the game ends, the teams have a period of reflection, together with the social mediator, to evaluate if the rules agreed upon were followed or not.
5. Not only the sports results are valued, but also the human values with which the game is played: respect (the rules previously agreed upon at the beginning of the game), solidarity (when they can put themselves in the place of the other), and cooperation (based on attitudes within each team).

Through soccer, an experience all young people from Argentina, South America, and many other countries readily share, Defensores' influence has spread throughout the country and the region, reaching into many other communities and countries. Thirty teams, twenty of them from Argentina, competed at the last South American Street Soccer Championship. The final match was played on world-famous 9 de Julio Avenue, which was closed to traffic for the occasion. Financing was provided by private organizations including companies such as Volkswagen, Unilever, and Danone; non-profit organizations like AVINA; and other entities such as PNUD Argentina, UNICEF Argentina, the National Sports Ministry, and the City of Buenos Aires Education Department.

A milestone in the development of street soccer came when its first world championship was held in Germany, in 2006, at the same time as the World Soccer Cup. This event consolidated street soccer's role as a community development tool worthy of support at the highest levels. Street soccer has already been included in the 2010 World Soccer Cup in South Africa as part of the cultural program being promoted by the organizing committee and FIFA.



Defensores plays at the opening of the First Street Soccer World Championship

Street Soccer already boasts a South American international organization one of whose founding members is Defensores. Under its leadership, street soccer has extended throughout the region and become an increasingly prestigious international organization. The organization's current president is Luis Fernando Ramírez, from Paraguay.

### Art, a community development tool

*"Buenos Aires has a rich cultural life, but people from the barrios cannot take advantage of it, as culture in our country is an expensive proposition ... from Moreno, it is not easy to have access to art ... A family would have to pay bus fares for four or five people, not to mention admission tickets. It simply is not possible ... Through Defensores, we have made quality art available to the barrio ..."*

Matías Villavicencio, one of the club's young directors, explained in those words how Defensores had expanded its activities from the world of sports to the realm of art. As he spoke, Defensores was offering a total of ten workshops covering such diverse matters as knitting, for housewives;

guitar and percussion instruments, for young people; creativity workshops, poetry, wall-climbing; circus and theater for children and young people; and several others.

One of the club projects, Arte Barrios, offers quality entertainment once a month, addressing a different art form every month: open cinema, music discussions, rock, heavy metal, and other forms of artistic expression aimed at different sectors of the community. The goal is to come up with activities in which all community members can join.

Defensores has recently inaugurated its own theater, a cultural bay capable of holding 250 people that can be expanded by opening its doors to the handball court if the performance demands it and the weather allows it. A play is staged every year. Participants in all ten workshops are in charge of developing the script, designing and building the props and the costumes, and writing and performing the musical background. All work together to ensure a quality production that brings the whole community together.

The price of admission to the theater is between one and two pesos; the idea is for all to contribute to and feel a part of a community production being presented several times each year so that everyone can attend. This, together with the workshops and the Arte Barrios productions, opens up a valuable space for local artists. Matías went on to say:

*“Ours is a very rich art, as these barrios are a true crucible of cultures. We have immigrants from the countryside of many regions and many nations – Paraguay in our case – and this translates into richly culturally-diverse production. ... Charging the public low fees for their participation is essential, so as to get them involved in this story, and help foster their self-esteem. ... We have to offer first-rate art; the idea is to bring to the barrios the same quality downtown theaters offer.”*

Through the promotion of artistic activities, Defensores has enhanced its standing to the point where, in partnership with no less than 35 other organizations, it has participated for several years now in the Barrios Cultural Caravan. This tour takes the art of the different communities on a road trip every year, and expects to make a complete tour of Buenos Aires in the near future. Art has helped Defensores extend its influence in the area. As part of the Caravan, the Defensores *murga* (street band) has toured more than 140 barrios of Buenos Aires, turning art and music into useful tools of social development and cohesion.



Housewives from the neighborhood at a culturally diverse knitting workshop

## Social response: a community data base

For a young person or a family to participate in Club activities they must sign up at the beginning of each year. A form has to be filled out that provides increasingly detailed information about the family. Using this information, Defensores has created an active community data base providing a better understanding of the needs of its local community.

The organization conducts an in-depth review of this information and establishes its priorities. The data base thus becomes a true map of the community, enabling Defensores to more accurately respond to its most pressing needs.

The data base is updated every year, as family circumstances in barrio households can change suddenly from one year to the next for any number of reasons.

## Opening the field once again: legal and health services

One of the most significant new activities the organization has branched out into is the legal clinic it has established for community members.

In 2003, Defensores del Chaco, together with the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (Spanish initials ACIJ), created the Community Legal Support Center (Spanish initials CALC), an entity set up by social organizations, to provide free community advice and defense in group situations and cases.

Twice a week, a group of volunteer attorneys, working *pro bono* and supported by senior students from the Law School of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), review and attend to the legal needs of the community or simply advise members of the community on what steps to take in connection with different legal issues.

Following the same principle, a group of physicians hired at discounted rates once a year provides community health services at the center. Their services include general check-ups, nutrition advice, and pediatrics and cardiology services, as well as other particularly important medical services.

The cost of a visit is quite modest, thus providing the community with a level of access to preventive medicine never before seen in the barrio.

Health services are essential for a low-income community. Recently, 70 cases of tuberculosis were reported in Moreno, a clear indication of the population's vulnerability to health problems unless basic health services were provided. However, the city's public health system, held back by insufficient financial and human resources and overwhelmed by the size of the population, had been unable to meet this challenge.



A health education program

# The Organization: A Commitment to Young People and Social Development

## **Organizational development: a commitment to young people and a higher ceiling**

From the outset, one of the most outstanding features of the Defensores organization was its determination to make young people feel more responsible for their future.

Club president Maximiliano Pelayes is only 23. Under the organization's by-laws, no director of either the Club or the Cultural Center can be older than 30, and members must resign their leadership positions upon reaching that age. The purpose of this rule is to foster in young people the sense of being responsible for their own fate, to keep the organization more open to new ideas and changes, and, above all, to provide room for up-and-coming young people in the community to seek their own opportunities to create social value.

Defensores has created a second organization, the Foundation, focused on more formal activities such as the establishment and operation of the school, or the forging of partnerships with other social organizations in Northwest Buenos Aires in order to start participating in political activities.

As a part of the continuing evolution of Defensores, the founders have created a new institution, Fundación Fútbol para el Desarrollo FU.DE ([www.fundacionfude.org.ar](http://www.fundacionfude.org.ar)), leaving the younger generation in charge of the Defensores organization.

According to Ferraro:

*"If within ten years you have not provided for your succession, you have failed... at our small scale, those with more experience must move on to something else ... It was imperative for us to raise the ceiling, to move from sports and culture to formal education and neighborhood politics."*



Maximiliano Pelayes, President of Defensores del Chaco Club

Defensores had created a multitiered structure enabling it to continue to open up new fields of endeavor for young people. At the same time, its organizational expansion allowed it to tackle more activities and gain greater influence. It had the best of both worlds: innovative, open organizations attracting enthusiastic young people, and experienced leaders who could pursue territorial militancy towards their barrio and their district without depriving young people of their own space.

Its succession policy was only one of the many features Defensores del Chaco presented and explained to visitors touring its facilities. The explanation was provided by Defensores historic leader, Fabián Ferraro, who, at 36 years old, has recently joined the Defensores del Chaco Foundation, making room for other young people to move up the leadership ranks in the organization.

From his new position in the Foundation, Ferraro has already begun working to change his community at a different level. He has indeed raised the ceiling.

## Education: a goal

Defensores provided high-school and college scholarships for selected members of the organization. In 2007, twelve young people were attending college on scholarships funded by Defensores, while many more had received scholarships in the past. In most instances, scholarship beneficiaries were the first in their families to graduate from college. This has allowed community members to move to another level of professional activity.

Community surveys showed time and again that pre-school education was a community need both for established families and for young mothers wishing to complete their own education. A Defensores spin-off organization developed plans for a school and began building it, initially as a pre-school facility that would then grow by one grade level with each new incoming pre-school class until becoming a full-fledged elementary and high school.

The goal of providing formal education opportunities in response to an explicit community need was under way, and Defensores and its related organizations, such as the Foundation, were being propelled into a new influential position in the community.

## Leadership and credibility: the impact on other communities

The activities Defensores undertook in behalf of its community quickly spread beyond barrio borders and found acceptance in other communities in Northwest Buenos Aires. It was thus that Defensores extended its influence and, through partnerships and joint efforts, began working in the surrounding area.

Those private organizations that have supported Defensores initiatives have come back to it for advice on how to help neighboring communities. In a specific case, Amanco (which until March 2007 was a part of the GrupoNueva business consortium owned by VIVA Trust) with facilities located in another area very similar to Moreno, asked Defensores for help in improving its relations with the community. Defensores representatives visited the Amanco plant and its surrounding barrios. They realized the company was wrongly perceived as a polluter, and that much of the resentment stemmed from the fact that few community residents worked at the company plant.





Franz Beckenbauer, Chairman of  
the 2006 Soccer World Cup in  
Germany, meets young  
members of the Defensores  
Street Soccer club

Defensores representatives met with company managers and urged them to meet with community leaders and engage them in discussions. Since then, Amanco has maintained a lively dialogue with its community. It was easily able to show that it was not the source of the environmental pollution affecting the area, and has significantly increased the number of area residents working for it. Thanks to Defensores, they opened a new, more positive chapter in its relations with surrounding barrios.

Defensores's leadership and credibility have helped it build bridges with other social organizations, businesses, and communities. This is a strength the organization has learned to manage without deviating from its core values of territorial militancy, independence, and autonomy.

### **Partnerships and networks for growth: from the barrio to Northwest Buenos Aires and the world**

Defensores has shown a remarkable ability to enter into partnerships with kindred organizations and entities which may at some point in time be interested in implementing some of its programs.

Defensores partners with other organizations for many different reasons: to share its expertise and work methods; to enhance the scope and impact of its existing programs; to finance its activities, events, and innovations, and to expand its political influence.

The first reason is evident in Defensores' association with more than 30 other social organizations to promote and organize the Barrios Cultural Caravan. From very modest beginnings as an effort to take its cultural programs and its *murga* to a greater audience, the Caravan has become an annual event with great political visibility and impact in more than 140 barrios in the northwest of the Argentine capital. According to *La Posta Regional*, the local publication of area organizations:

*"The Barrios Cultural Caravan is the most serious effort we are jointly undertaking to open new channels for political and community action aimed at strengthening and ensuring the people's unity."*

Defensores has also established partnerships and created alliances to expand its own programs. The creation of a South American Street Soccer Network, an idea promoted by Defensores, is a good example of the way the organization enhances its impact and extends its influence. In this case, partnerships cover the whole of Argentina as well as several neighboring nations. At present, organizations representing Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay are part of the Network. They work with more than 350 grassroots organizations in the region and more than 18,000 boys, girls, and young people involved in its activities.



The Barrios Cultural Caravan

Another, more localized example of a successful program, also made possible by the establishment of partnerships, is the recent launching of the Community Legal Support Center (CALC) in cooperation with the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ).

The partnership between Defensores and El Culebrón Timbal, a producer of community art, is yet another example of an interesting collaboration. Both organizations undertook a series of cultural activities in and outside Chaco Chico. Defensores and El Culebrón, together with Mutual El Colmenar, Alternativa 3, Mutual Primavera, En Acción, and 30 more organizations from the sprawling Buenos Aires suburbs have set up the Movement for a People's Charter. These organizations were the engines pushing for the organization of the Barrios Cultural Caravan, an event designed to promote the creation and enhancement of cultural organizations in Northwest Buenos Aires.

There are many more examples, of course. But what should be underscored is how Defensores' impact, its credibility, and its ability to share the credit made it into an attractive partner for specialized organizations which, availing themselves of its services, can provide benefits for the neighborhood. Credibility, the ability to forge lasting partnerships, and territorial militancy result in a powerful combination that benefits barrio residents by providing access to services, opportunities for involvement, and even the possibility of influencing political agendas for the region.

## Partnerships for young people: exchange travel

Each year, Defensores organizes travels by men and women from its community to visit some partner organization in Argentina or abroad. The goal is to visit an organization that is pursuing a joint project with Defensores. Cultural exchanges and cross-training among participant organizations are actively promoted during these travels.

The travels offer growth opportunities for community members and are useful learning tools young people can take advantage of. At the same time, they provide parents with the opportunity to work with the



**“Third half” of the Peru-Paraguay match during the First South American Street Soccer Championship, an exchange for young people**

organization at a different level; all have the chance to “discover” new people, cultures, and regions.

In the past, groups of 40 people have traveled to Brazil, Paraguay, and to several provincial cities in Argentina. Young people who otherwise would not have an opportunity to travel can have new cultural experiences in completely new surroundings.

## Communication, a multifaceted undertaking

The will to have good communications is evident in the Defensores organization. In addition to a rather colorful and quite graphic presence in the community, represented by very clear wall messages, graffiti typical of its culture, and printed and handwritten posters throughout the club's facilities, there is a whole series of formal publications that keep area communities abreast of the organization's activities.

At a more formal level, Defensores is actively involved in the publication of *La Posta Regional*, an illustrated newspaper with regional information directly addressing the values, ideas, and programs of the organizations belonging to the Movement for the People's Charter.



Covers of some Defensores publications

Defensores also publishes brochures about its major initiatives. These brochures are widely distributed throughout the community and among the organization's members and donors to make Defensores and its strategy better understood among the reading public.

In addition to announcing its programs and activities, Defensores conducts informational and educational campaigns through its communication channels, whether in connection with some aspect of local realities or issues of such paramount importance as sexual health.

# From Micro to Macro: An Unfolding Political Agenda

## From the barrio to local politics: the Movement for a People's Charter

Possibly the biggest strategic risk the organization faces comes from having joined a political movement known as the Movement for the People's Charter (the Movement). The Movement is the umbrella association of 35 social organizations working in the communities of José C. Paz, Malvinas Argentinas, Moreno, and San Miguel, in Buenos Aires' northwest region.

Although the Movement is independent from Defensores, the credibility enjoyed by the Club and its leading role have made it into a potential target of the Movement's political opponents.

The Movement brings together residents' organizations, educational centers, cultural, academic support and child-care centers, mutual associations, cooperatives, development organizations, neighborhood sports clubs, and other entities. Its efforts have helped create and integrate the barrio communities that have developed as the result of large migrations to the capital from other Argentine provinces, neighboring countries, and even from the city itself in the wake of the financial crisis.

The Movement bases its proposals on these 35 organizations representing the communities, and on surveys of more than 1,500 people, 90% of whom agree that:

*"Involvement in the reporting, design, and control of the policies being applied in the neighborhood would improve situations in the different communities."*

The Movement first seeks support from families and communities and then works hard to attain the goals arrived at:

- Free access by residents and organizations to public information, including municipal, provincial, and national resources made available to each district every year.
- Legally empowering residents and social organizations to take part in the preparation of the municipal budget and the setting of utilities fees through a democratic debate.
- Allowing residents and social organizations to be involved in the design, implementation, and control of public policies being applied in the barrios.

A Congress of Residents and Social Organizations of Northwest Buenos Aires resulted in the formal establishment of the Movement. This meeting generated goals, proposals, focus issues, and ample participation, all of which have fostered this novel initiative and transformed it into a major political actor within the district.

The Movement has begun publishing a newspaper whose first strategic goal is the consolidation of the organization into a permanent body having its own programs and the medium-term objective of entering electoral politics in the area.

# Institutional Relations: Consolidating Autonomy and Strategy

## Donor relations: tried and true loyalty

Starting as a small, isolated organization, Defensores has become a growing force, with a sound infrastructure, great prestige, and considerable influence. Its donors include such prestigious organizations and for-profit businesses as:

- Amanco Argentina
- Ashoka
- British Council of Argentina
- Embassy of Switzerland
- AVINA Foundation
- C&A Foundation
- Navarro Viola Foundation
- Telefónica Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Football for Hope
- Nike
- Ministry of Social Development
- Volkswagen

The wide diversification of its sources of financing and strategic support has been achieved thanks to the organization's crystal-clear values. In addition to the need not to compromise its autonomy and independence, Defensores exhibits great sensitivity and loyalty in the management of its fund-raising efforts.

When in the middle of the 2001-2002 financial crisis the Argentine peso was devaluated from one to one against the dollar to three to one, Defensores suggested and implemented as its policy obtaining a matching fund equivalent to the amount of the devaluation (*i.e.*, two pesos for each peso received) so that AVINA and the other donors would get the expected full value from their investments. Instead of taking advantage of the devaluation for its own benefit, Defensores used it as a tool to grow and maintain a transparent and fair relationship with its donors. This is one more example of the value and the transparency that are the hallmarks of Defensores del Chaco.



Defensores team at the first South American Street Soccer Championship on 9 de Julio Avenue, Buenos Aires



Partnerships have been made with international companies and organizations, as shown in this young Defensores player's T-shirt and ball

# Relations with AVINA

AVINA has been one of the Defensores key supporters, contributing with financial backing, strategic guidance and institutional strengthening.

As part of the Defensores development strategy, AVINA went from providing almost 80% of the club's budget in its early years to less than 3% today. The relationship has continued to be very important for both parties, as, for AVINA, Defensores was a model of social impact, network-creation, and expanding influence; and, at the same time, for Defensores, AVINA was a source of strategic support.

The relationship between AVINA and Defensores enhanced, benefited and strengthened both organizations. In addition to being an example of AVINA's investments, Defensores is a major base for accessing underprivileged Buenos Aires communities. In addition to financial support, AVINA provides Defensores with access to networks outside the region.

The relationship with AVINA began when Defensores had been working for five years at the local level. AVINA and Defensores met through an organization from Mendoza that was looking to work with sports as a vehicle for community development. Initial support from AVINA allowed Defensores to improve its operational infrastructure and its administrative systems.

After five years of local action, Defensores recognized the need for training and team strengthening. The training process and instructors were recommended by close advisors, while AVINA provided financial support and recommendations for improving the program.

As a result of these processes, AVINA financed the purchase of computer equipment that allowed Defensores to move from paper to electronics, thus improving its controls, its management system, and, eventually, its ability to work with more people. Thanks to this support and, especially, to AVINA's ongoing advice on how to use and develop these new tools, Defensores has been able to maintain the rapid growth rate it set for itself as a goal.

As an exception to its policies, approved at the Foundation's headquarters, AVINA supported the purchase of the land where the Cultural Center and the central offices of Defensores were eventually built, a decisive consolidation of the Club presence in the very heart of the barrio. It should be noted that the staff of AVINA Argentina, acting on their own, obtained the funds that were used to secure the initial loan for the purchase of the land. This is further evidence of the level of commitment and trust resulting from the deep relationship existing between both organizations and their respective leaders.

This initiative was particularly significant for it provided for a matching donation by the European Union to finance the Cultural Center. AVINA helped Defensores put together their proposal to the European Union; up to that time the Club had never been faced with a situation demanding the level of preparation and organization required by this type of donation.

Fabian and Legui, two Defensores leaders engage in a discussion with Patricia Kistenmacher, of AVINA, at the club's headquarters



Fabián saw the change in a lighter vein:

*“Before this process, our proposals and reports were full of poems and songs; we used to express values and feelings but actually had very little to report ... we did not know what a logical framework was, although we readily understood it once it was explained to us.”*

At that point, Defensores had experienced a process of institucional growth, and the adult team of founders decided to create the Foundation to allow the young people to take charge of the Club, which would function thereafter as a school for training young social leaders.

AVINA is helping to develop the Foundations’s legal project, which has been consolidated with the purchase of the land and the European Union’s donation. AVINA’s flexibility during this stage, helping to buy the land and to provide support for legal and administrative aspects, was key for the organization’s success, for its greater impact, and for its move to the next level of strategy represented by the establishment of the Foundation

During this stage, AVINA made it possible for other donors and strategic partners to contact Defensores, a support that had a direct effect on the diversification of the club’s financing and the preservation of its autonomy and independence. AVINA’s prestige and credibility were essential in providing Defensores with credibility and access to third parties.

Once these significant milestones had been reached, AVINA and other institutions provided financial support to produce a course for “barrio coordinators”. Thanks to this initiative, area organizations are exchanging experiences at the individual and institutional levels, helping one another develop joint strategies and programs.

Thanks to this initiative, area organizations sat down together for the first time and exchanged experiences at the individual and institutional levels, helping one another develop joint strategies and programs.

Through AVINA and, eventually, through Amanco, which at the time was one of the GrupoNueva companies. Defensores was able to help in the development of communities far beyond the limits of Chaco Chico. Both AVINA and Amanco benefited from the guidance they received from Defensores as to how to understand, communicate with, and contribute to the Buenos Aires barrios.

Defensores is a case in which AVINA’s philosophy of identifying, strengthening, and expanding “islands of hope” can clearly be seen. First, AVINA identified in Fabián and Defensores those leadership traits it supports; next, it strengthened the organization in different ways.

Through this partnership with Defensores, AVINA also grew as an organization, while many of its representatives in Buenos Aires and Argentina have gained greater experience, knowledge, and capability from the relationship between both organizations, a clearly symbiotic relationship.





Some of the members of the Defensores team with AVINA members Carlos March and Patricia Kistenmacher



Defensores, an organization  
focused on the future

# Conclusion

Defensores del Chaco is a unique organization in its ability to mobilize financial and human resources and organizations in the barrios of Northwest Buenos Aires. From humble origins, born of the dream by twelve young people to take charge of their own future, it has become an innovative organization, increasingly influential, involved in national, regional, and worldwide activities in those areas it has specialized in.

Defensores shows how an action beginning at the simplest level of society – young people gathered together to form a soccer club – can, with the right leadership, support, and partnerships, grow and become a larger and more influential organization, reaching the point where it is faced with the decision whether to enter the world of politics in its district.

Defensores is also an example of a unique way of managing things. It has clearly defined values such as creativity, the focus on youth, territorial militancy, independence, autonomy, loyalty, and the ability to partner with other social organizations at the local and international levels. These values have held it in good stead when making decisions that have propelled to higher performance levels and turned it into a role model in areas such as local focus, youth involvement, leadership succession, and the establishment of bridges between businesses and social organizations.

The Club's leadership shows how, as goals are reached and the organization's influence grows, it becomes necessary to renew its focus and diversify its activities. Defensores has moved from sports to arts and on to legal and health services, formal education, and community representation; finally, it has faced the decision of what role – if any – it must play in local politics. The fork in the road leads towards a more in-depth territorial militancy in Chaco Chico, Paso del Rey, and Moreno, or a more open involvement in district and city politics. These paths are not mutually exclusive, but they are sure to earn Defensores the enemies and detractors it has so far avoided.

## Organizations mentioned in the body of the study

The following organizations are listed in the same order they were mentioned in the body of the study. AVINA partners are listed first, followed by other organizations.

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### Key partners:

Stephan Schmidheiny	<a href="http://www.stephanschmidheiny.net">www.stephanschmidheiny.net</a>
VIVA Trust	<a href="http://www.vivatrust.com">www.vivatrust.com</a>
GrupoNueva	<a href="http://www.gruponueva.com">www.gruponueva.com</a>
AVINA Foundation	<a href="http://www.avina.net">www.avina.net</a>
Club Atlético Defensores del Chaco	<a href="http://www.defensoresdelchaco.org.ar">www.defensoresdelchaco.org.ar</a>

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Volkswagen Corporation	<a href="http://www.volkswagen.com">www.volkswagen.com</a>
Nike	<a href="http://www.nike.com">www.nike.com</a>
Street Football World (includes Football for Hope and Red Sudamericana de Fútbol)	<a href="http://www.streetfootballworld.com">www.streetfootballworld.com</a>
University of Buenos Aires	<a href="http://www.uba.ar">www.uba.ar</a>
Ministry of Education of Argentina	<a href="http://www.ses.me.gov.ar">www.ses.me.gov.ar</a>
Amanco Argentina	<a href="http://www.amanco.com.ar">www.amanco.com.ar</a>
<i>La Posta Regional</i>	<a href="http://www.lapostaregional.com.ar">www.lapostaregional.com.ar</a>
Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia	<a href="http://www.acij.org.ar">www.acij.org.ar</a>
El Culebrón Timbal	<a href="http://www.culebrontimbal.com.ar">www.culebrontimbal.com.ar</a>
Ashoka	<a href="http://www.ashoka.org">www.ashoka.org</a>
British Council of Argentina	<a href="http://www.britishcouncil.org.ar">www.britishcouncil.org.ar</a>
Embassy of Switzerland in Buenos Aires	<a href="http://www.edad.admin.ch/buenosaires">www.edad.admin.ch/buenosaires</a>
C&A Foundation	<a href="http://www.fundacioncya.org.ar">www.fundacioncya.org.ar</a>
Navarro Viola Foundation	<a href="http://www.fnv.org.ar">www.fnv.org.ar</a>
Telefónica Foundation	<a href="http://www.fundacion.telefonica.com">www.fundacion.telefonica.com</a>
W.K. Kellogg Foundation	<a href="http://www.wkkf.org">www.wkkf.org</a>
Ministry of Social Development	<a href="http://www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar">www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar</a>

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