

# Project: “Me Fui” - Lima, Perú

Connecticut College

Camila Adrianzén Yndigoyen '23 - Rímac, Lima - Perú

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Me Fui's goal was to build stronger relationships between the Venezuelan and Peruvian populations through neighborhood work that benefited both communities. The project was held in a community in San Juan de Lurigancho in Lima, Peru.

My city has a great number of Andean migrants along with Venezuelan refugees living in slums. Both groups have a lot of experience with dislocation and have been hit harder than others in the city by the COVID-19 pandemic. After working with the organization, TECHO, before I came to the United States for college, I knew that it would be an ideal organization to work with back home on this project and we tried our best to plan something that responded to the changing needs of the community. TECHO is a youth-led organization that seeks to overcome poverty in Latin-American economically distressed neighborhoods through community efforts between residents and volunteers.

I think systems of oppression are - unfortunately - always present. In big urban centers like Lima; you can see them everywhere. I believe that the fact that our city is not responding appropriately to the impoverished conditions of both Peruvian and Venezuelan communities is rooted in the unequal distribution of economic, housing, food, and work resources in our country and in our Latin American region. This project is a response to the food shortages that are endemic to policies based in class and racial discrimination that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Most of the people living in these communities are migrants of Color, either from Venezuela or from the Andes of Peru who were forced to migrate for different reasons that push people out of their hometowns to seek refuge for themselves and their loved ones.

Lima is the city where I was born and that saw me grow up until I was 18. I knew that there were many needs for support back home and after my 3 years of experience working with TECHO, I knew they could help me connect with these communities from afar. It was definitely weird at first not to be physically in Lima during this project. This was a very hands-on type of work, so it was tough to feel that I wasn't doing enough initially. However, we knew it was the best decision to keep everyone safe from the risk of COVID. Even with that, it's always a pleasure to work with TECHO. We made it work from afar because we knew each other and have worked together for years now and we managed to adapt to what the context of the pandemic mandated and still be in constant contact with the communities and team on the ground to be sure the project worked well. Although we had intended to build an outdoor recreational space and run workshops on cross-cultural understanding, the current circumstances with the pandemic led us to place food scarcity as the immediate concern. For this reason, we changed our focus to constructing a shelter for a community soup kitchen and worked on providing the resources to make sure the soup kitchen was able to supply regular meals to the community members. We finished building the shelter, painted the outside of it and are now actively using the kitchen and drawing on the food supplies it needed. Besides that, we also painted the stairs near the shelter so that they are more visible to community members and make the community soup kitchen more accessible. Finally, we also provided food kits for a month to each family of another community nearby the area, as there was also a big need for food access and it was pretty close to the area in which we were already working.

I never really doubted that our collaboration would work, but I was definitely scared of how we would make it work when COVID hit Peru. I knew we didn't have the same resources as countries like the United States to protect its population. I think one of the hardest things during the project overall has been the constant concern about the safety of everyone in these communities. TECHO itself, just like Lima, has been going through a very rough time since the pandemic started.

The community now has an indoor space to use for their community soup kitchen that provides meals to the Venezuelan and Peruvian families in that area. Another community in the district was also

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provided with food supplies for every family. In the future, re-visiting the space built would be needed to see how it is being used as COVID keeps developing in Lima.

We had to pivot from the original infrastructure community project that focused on building an outdoor center and instead focus on the more acute needs of the community once we saw the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Constant and honest communication with the community and organization members and constantly checking the news in Lima and the United States were key actions to navigate this project remotely during the pandemic, as we needed to know if traveling would be possible or if I would need to stay remote and which things we needed to adapt. It became quite clear that immediate food access and support of daily meal provision were the absolute priorities for the communities we were seeking to help. Providing these reliable sources of food for both the Peruvian and Venezuelan communities under the same roof ended up being a way of bringing better relations and more interactions among these different groups. This is why we pivoted from building an outdoor recreational space to constructing a shelter for the community soup kitchen.

My advice for future PfP grantees is to actively listen to the people with whom you are working. Especially if you're remote, it is imperative to listen to the people on the ground and keep clear communication regarding expectations. This keeps everyone on the same page about what will happen or not and what has changed and why. One should always keep in mind the core focus of the project (which in our case was bringing disparate communities together). Keeping this focus will allow you to remain true to your mission, even when many variables change and you are forced to adapt and shift your tactics and activities.

For me, peace is part of the work for justice. I think peace is something we can feel in those moments when we are working for a society where we can all have access to the necessities of life, such as adequate food, housing, work, and education. Peace provides a break from all the things going wrong in the world and something that can help us to recharge to keep doing the work. I think peace at an even larger scale won't truly come until justice is achieved everywhere, which is why this project has provoked a mixture of many feelings. I have felt anger and frustration at seeing the injustices that the Venezuelan and Peruvian population in San Juan de Lurigancho human settlements have had to endure, but there were also moments of joy and peace in how we found ways to work together even when physically separated. This project has definitely made me go deeper into the type of social justice work I want to keep being involved in during and after college, both in the United States and when I return to my country.

“This project has reaffirmed to me the necessity of applying my college work to deepen my understanding of the daily injustices going on in my home city and everywhere else. It has also helped me to think more about the ways I want to keep supporting sustainable efforts to improve these situations by always following the lead and listening to the people on the ground.”

Name: Camila Cristina Adrianzén Yndigoyen

Email: [dmcm2812@gmail.com](mailto:dmcm2812@gmail.com)

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