



Case study "The Relay Center"



Good Practices

For the implementation of the 2030 Agenda



El futuro
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APC Colombia
Agencia Presidencial de
Cooperación Internacional



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Colombia

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of the practice

Relay Center.

1

Problem/vulnerability to be resolved

2

To allow people with hearing disabilities in the country access to the basic means of communication to facilitate their day-to-day interaction and ensure their right to the use of ICTs.

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Relay Center is part of the SDG 10. To reduce inequality within and among countries and the SDG 9. To build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

It specifically contributes to the goal of SDG 10. To empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all persons, regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic status or other status, and the SDG 9. Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020.

Leading Entity

Colombian Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies (MinTic).
www.mintic.gov.co.

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Contact Person

Andrea Gonzalez, Assistant Director of Appropriation Processes of Communications Technologies
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Other actors involved

The Colombian National Federation of the Deaf. www.fenascol.org.co.

Other contact persons

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Analyzed Municipality

National Territory

Type and number of participating citizens (beneficiaries)

People with hearing disability and hearing people of the country. Up to date more than 22,000 have been benefited and there have been more than 1.8 million contacts among this population.

Duration of the experience

2001 to the present.

9

Dedicated resources in COP

10

\$7,000'000,000 (US\$3,000,000) approximately since its creation. For the establishment of a Relay Center an investment of at least \$4,500'000,000 (US\$2'000,000) is required and its annual basic operation could be around \$1,000'000,000 (US\$500,000).

Funding Sources

Colombian Ministry of Information and Communications Technology and the Colombian National Federation of the Deaf.

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Author of this study

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Mauro Camilo Mora Núñez.



BRIEF SUMMARY

The Relay Center is an initiative of national coverage, led by the Colombian Ministry of Information and Communications technologies, MinTic, and supported by the Colombian National Federation of the Deaf (Fenascol), in the framework of the Live Digital Plan (plan Vive Digital in Spanish). The Center's objective is to attend the communication needs of people in condition of hearing impairment who, with the use of technological tools can interact with hearing people thanks to an online interpreting service that can be used by means of the web page: Www.centroderелеvo.gov.co or Mobile Application Relay Center , with free access in the country.

The Relay Center contributes directly to the sustainable development goal (SDG) 10. To reduce inequality within and among countries, as it is a way in which the people with hearing disability are guaranteed to have social, economic and political inclusion. In the same way, and as a result of its implementation, it contributes to the SDG 9. To build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, since it significantly increases the universal access to ICTs, in this case the population with hearing disabilities in the country.

Nowadays, covering all the communication needs of deaf people in the country, and by

being the entity in charge of guaranteeing the right to access information and communications technologies, the center offers four solutions: 1. Relay of calls, 2. Online interpreting service OIS (SIEL for its acronym in Spanish), 3. ICT Tools, and 4. Virtual training of interpreters.

With more than 15 years of operation, the Relay Center has become a pioneer in the offer and the sustainability of the service of free communication of deaf people with hearing people via telephone and face-to-face, in Latin America and the world; not only for its expansion model based on the consolidation of services, but by its organization to represent the interests of the deaf community in the country and because it guarantees the exercise of the rights of them through laws, plans and government programs.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the interpreters also benefit from this service, This, because they can develop their activities from any part of the country in the form of telework, thanks to the decentralization that the Relay Center has been part of.

Currently, the Center relays more than 35,000 calls a month, thus reaching more than 1'800,000 calls relayed with an investment that exceeds \$7,000 million, with more than 22,000 beneficiaries.



The Center's objective is to attend the communication needs of people in condition of hearing impairment who, with the use of technological tools can interact with hearing people thanks to an online interpreting service.

It is a way in which the people with hearing disability are guaranteed to have social, economic and political inclusion.



1 PRO CESS

1.1. Local context and problem to be solved

In Colombia, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE)¹, there are more than 2.9 million people who have some type of disability; 550,000 are deaf and close to 1'400,000 have visual disabilities. Hence, the need to generate plans, programs and projects targeted to enable the closure of gaps and the generation of opportunities that turn into equity, development and construction of social capital.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, approved by the United Nations in December 2006, has been signed by more than 150 countries and ratified today by more than 100², it aims to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”³ and defines persons with disabilities as “those who have physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments in the long-term which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”⁴. This establishes a shared regulatory framework and a

common language around this population group that pretends, by recognizing the disabilities, to generate solutions for them.

For its part, Laws 361 of 1997, 1346 of 2009 and 1618 of 2013, of Colombia; guarantee and ensure the effective exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, establishing obligations and responsibilities for the generation of initiatives that support the social integration of these people through programs, plans and projects that provide the basis for the total enjoyment of all their rights, which ensures the creation of spaces of inclusion that represent the reduction of inequality in the country and aims for universal access to ICTS as tools that allow the improvement in the quality of life of deaf people in the country.

On this basis, and in accordance with the provisions of the Law 1341 of 2009, among the functions of the MinTic is the creation of a State policy that “involves all sectors and governmental levels and society (...) to promote the access of citizens with physical limitations to the information and communication

1 Colombia, National Administrative Department of Statistics (2005). “General Census 2005. National level”.

2 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol were adopted on December 13 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and were opened for signature on March 30 2007. 82 signatures were obtained of the Convention and 44 of the Optional Protocol, as well as a ratification of the Convention. Never a United Nations convention had gathered such a large number of signatories on the day of its signature opening. Colombia signed and ratified the Convention on March 30 2007 (<http://www.un.org/spanish/disabilities/convention/list070330.pdf>). In addition, It ratified the same through the Law 1346 of 2009, “By means of which the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” is approved, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 13 2006”.

3 United States of America, United Nations (2006). “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol”, adopted in New York, United States of America, on December 13 2006.

4 Ibid.

technologies”⁵. This demonstrates the congruence between the needs reflected in the multiple disability laws in the country and the regulations for the Colombian Ministry of ICT.

Given the above, it was necessary that in Colombia a mechanism would be established in order to guarantee to the people with hearing disabilities their right to access information and communication technologies. On this basis, the Relay Center, has become the answer to the need for access to the media, so that deaf people can interact with hearing people. Additionally, there was a lack of sign language interpreters in Colombia (CSL), since there were no clear incentives for learning it.

It should also be noted, that the role of Fenascól has been fundamental in the design and the consolidation of the Relay Center, not only for being the Federation that gathers 29 associations of the deaf in the country; but also, because it has conducted socio-political advocacy actions with the purpose of joining efforts for the recognition of the rights of deaf people in the national territory. It is thanks to the recognition of the communicative needs of deaf people in the country, to the political will and to the creation of an alliance between the MinTic and Fenascól, that today they can exercise their rights through an ICT tool.

It ensures the creation of spaces of inclusion that represent the reduction of inequality in the country and aims for universal access to ICTS as tools that allow the improvement in the quality of life of deaf people in the country.

⁵ Colombia, National Congress of the Republic (2009, July 30), “Law 1341 of July 30 2009, by means of which the principles and concepts on the information society and the organization of information and communication technologies (ICT) are defined, the national agency of spectrum is established and other provisions are issued”. Official Journal No. 47.426 of July 30 2009, Bogotá.

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1.2. Identification of the solution

Countries like the United States or Brazil offer their deaf population a paid service of interpretation, which implies the acquisition of technological tools that trigger a technological dependency that involves the obsolescence of these in a short time. In Colombia, on the contrary, Fenascol has been responsible since the start of the Relay Center to ensure its gratuity under the premise of the generation of a high quality service. In 2001, the Relay Center began to operate with limited coverage, only to the city of Bogotá, through the use of text telephones and led by the Federation. In 2003, in partnership with the Bogotá Mayor's Office, an agreement was signed and it allowed people to access the relay via line 195, but the service continued to be limited to the capital city.

For 2006, in the search for allies, a cooperation agreement was signed with Telefónica Telecom. As a consequence, coverage on a national scale was expanded and a text messaging service was installed, but the lack of interpreters of LSC made the sustainability of the project difficult and the users had to pay a fee for its use. In 2009, the Colombian Ministry of Information and

Communications Technology became the final ally to ensure the sustainability of the Relay Center. Since then, the service is set as free and evolves to include the video chat and to ensure national coverage. In 2014 the four service lines that operate today were established.

For 2015 The Relay Center got focused on ensuring the bi-directionality of communications between deaf-hearing and hearing-deaf, and the Relay Center app was launched. In 2016, in the framework of the commemoration of the 15 years of its operation, the mobile application for iOS and Android operating systems was developed. This promoted greater coverage and ensured the universal access with multiple free platforms that only required an Internet connection.

Hand in hand with the expansion of services, the need for generation of knowledge on the CSL involved the creation of opportunities for interpreters to be linked to the program in the form of telework. Thanks to this and to the effective use of ICTs, some interpreters were linked and trained to ensure the decentralization of the service.



1.3. Implementation

In 2001, the communication relay was done through text telephones, specifically 10 to attend in Bogotá. With the passage of time the amount of calls attended increased, text chat started to be used and, finally, the solution that works today was found.

To put the Relay Center to work, as it currently does, an investment of approximately US\$2 million (\$4500'000.000) is needed. It should be

clarified that depends on the initial impact and coverage to the deaf population.

According to Juan Camilo Prado, who is leading the ICT initiative and Disability of the MinTic, the Relay Center began operations with chat only, then it used a one-way platform and currently is bi-directional with mobile application, which causes different technical costs. This figure includes the

development of the web platform, the Mobile application and annual operating costs (location, servers, dedicated connection to the Internet, training of interpreters, training processes and administrative costs). It should be noted that in the current model, with the implementation of telework for interpreters, it also involves costs for the suitability of location, Internet connection and formation of the interpreter in CSL.

As previously mentioned, the Relay Center now offers four types of services:

- First, the calls relay, a two-way communication system between a deaf person and a hearing one through a technological platform that has interpreters in Colombian sign language (CSL). It is a free service and the duration of the call can vary between 10 and 15 minutes, depending on the service to be used: text chat or video chat.
- Second, the Online Interpretation Service (OIS) brings together in a same space to a deaf person and a hearing one, an online interpreter, which is contacted through a mobile device connected to Internet and can have a duration of up to 30 minutes. This system guarantees the principle of universal access as, in any part of the country a deaf person can access to it, in real time, and

perform procedures or face-to-face consultations in any public or private entity in the country.

- Third, aware of the importance of the interpreters of CSL and ,taking into account the limitation of it and its importance as a link in the chain of communication between deaf and hearing people; the Relay Center provides a process of training in translation of Colombian sign language communication, deaf culture and customer service .Thus it has generated a solution designed in the sustainability of the service as well as it has become a source of employment for hearing people who are interested in working in the Relay Center. These processes of training have been essential not only to increase the number of interpreters in CSL, but also in the generation of awareness on WEB accessibility at national level.
- Finally, through WEB digital tools, focused on the technological appropriation, the Center provides content and spaces where sign language and written language prevail to access information, learning, understanding, the construction of knowledge and motivation to the use of ICTs in deaf people. In this order of ideas, they have moved from being consumers of content to be prosumers (producers and consumers) of digital content.



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2

RE
SULTS

2.1. Achieved Transformation

Consistent service delivery across the country:

Since 2001, the Relay Center has sought the mechanisms that enable it to provide the service on an ongoing basis. Due to this reason, is that after exploring partnerships with organizations from the public and private sectors in the country, the Colombian Ministry of ICT was the entity in charge of the operation of the Center, not only because it was expressly stipulated in the Law 1341 of 2009, but because it was the entity that demonstrated the political will to accompany this process, which has generated a model of strategic alliance that has transformed the operation of the Center, and that has enabled its expansion to achieve national coverage and to be an international reference in the social inclusion of deaf people through the use of technological tools.

It is the mechanism for the recognition of the communication rights of deaf people in the country: prior to its launch, more than 550,000 people with hearing disabilities could not access information and communication technologies. Now, thanks to its implementation and sustainment, deaf people are guaranteed the full exercise of their communication rights. To this effect, the Relay Center has been responsible

for ensuring that all deaf people in Colombia can express and disseminate their thoughts and their views and to inform and receive information, which consolidates the compliance of a fundamental right in accordance with the Colombian Constitution⁶. This is the main transformation that the Relay Center has offered to the Colombian deaf population.

Universal Access to ICTs: Thanks to the Relay Center the country calls upon universal access to ICTs, which ensures the full exercise of the rights of the deaf people. It should be noted that the technological platform, as it is known today, is the tool through which the access to ICTs is guaranteed in the best way for the people. It is for this reason that technology is understood as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Since 2010 up to date more than 1'800,000 calls have been relayed and more than 7,365 interpretation services on line have been provided, with an investment of more than \$10,000 million. Similarly, there has been an increase in calls from 24,000 to 35,000 per month and up to date there are more than 15,000 active users of the services offered. For 2016 at least 400,000 calls were relayed.

⁶ Colombia (1991), Political Constitution, article 20, chapter 1, title 2. Bogotá, Legis.

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The Center is the mechanism for the recognition of the communication rights of deaf people in the country.

2.2. Specific achievements

- As a mechanism for promotion, the Relay Center has signed strategic alliances to ensure universal access to their services. For example, Gas Natural Fenosa, in 2016, was the first organization that signed the alliance to provide accessible channels of attention thanks to the Relay Center in the emergency line (164) and in the customer service points in the city, thanks to the OIS, offered by the Relay Center. Similarly, Banco Davivienda became the first financial institution in providing services accessible to people with visual and hearing disabilities, by means of the adequacy of a call center and more than 600 offices in the country for the operation of the OIS.

- The OIS allows deaf people to request through their mobile device (smartphone or tablet), connected to a data plan or Internet, an interpreter of Colombian sign language to communicate with hearing people in face-to-face meetings. If any hearing person requires the service to communicate with a deaf person, they can also do it. The Relay Center has provided with OIS more than 4,700 services of interpretation on-line.

- Through the Relay Center people with basic knowledge in Colombian sign language can access

training processes to become certified interpreters. This line of work is very important, because in addition to ensure that this knowledge is transmitted through generations, it promotes employment. In addition, the Relay Center has trained more than 80 interpreters at the CSL, who once completing their cycle of learning have the opportunity to work as interpreters in the Center and the Online Interpretation Service (OIS), ensuring that the quality and coverage of services are optimal.

- The Relay Center designs, develops and disseminates audiovisual content with tips of appropriation of the new information and communication technologies for the deaf and hearing population, which encourages collaborative knowledge and interaction with the community. All contents are disseminated by social networks, videos and discussion forums that are available in Colombian sign language. It has also developed more than 350 contents of appropriation of ICTs, which can be seen on the YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/centrodererelevo/videos>.



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2.3. Not achieved Goals

Without a doubt, ensuring the sustainability of the Relay Center with financing sources external to the MinTic has become the greatest difficulty. In order to be free of contextual risks, the Center requires a greater number of financing sources and a lower budget responsibility on the part of the National Government. It is precisely for this dependence on the National Government that it cannot provide its service the whole year, since on December 31 there must be a halt on the platform until achieving the contractual process that involves the generation of a new convention.

For a future process of expansion for the Relay Center it is necessary to remove 100% of the financial burden from the Colombian Ministry of ICT. Today, the service is of quality, however, given that

public resources are scarce and limited, the project can reach a stage of stagnant in terms of growth, precisely because of this limitation. It should be noted that this is not a lack of willingness on the part of the Ministry for the financing, but it is the search for mechanisms that will allow the delivery of an even better service than the one that is provided today and the expansion of the same in the national and even international territory.

The financial responsibility has to be shared and the operation of the Relay Center must be guaranteed with multiple sources of income, because public resources are limited and only in this way the sustainability and expansion of services to national and international scales can be achieved.

2.4. Future Perspectives

When asking what is coming, the answer focuses on the provision of a better service, the improvement of the platform, the generation of mass communication campaigns to generate awareness of the service, the training of a greater number of interpreters

to give solution to the deficit that currently exists in the country, the labor link of the trained interpreters and the expansion of the service, either through advisory services to other countries or with the provision of the service internationally,

with a model of outsourcing of services; however, this implies the search for resources external to the Colombian Ministry of ICT.

In addition, the linking of companies in the private sector is essential, as well as the generation of public-private alliances that enable the expansion of services, their continuity and sustainability, which imply a larger commitment given the inclusion in the economy.

Similarly, the generation of a business model that ensures that the Relay Center is consolidated as

a service platform that can be replicated in the world, implies that the participation of companies such as Gas Natural Fenosa and Davivienda generate some kind of income, either by the OIS service or by the use of the calls relay; however, this leads to the generation of extra incentives on the part of the Government, such as a reduction of taxes on companies, therefore, the search for a business model that focuses not only on the operation, but in the expansion, is part of the vision in the medium and long term.

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3

LEARNING AND
**REPLI
CATION**
POTENTIAL

3.1. To learn from the failures

The failures have successfully led the Relay Center today to be a leader in the provision of services for deaf people from all over the world. Since its inception in 2001, and despite being backed by law and by an expressed need, the securing of resources to enable the operation of the Center has been complex.

However, it is not possible to consider this process of consolidation as a period of failures, because those involved have assumed it as a stage of mutual learning that has led to the improvement of alliances, to the consolidation of the solution and the provision of a higher quality service with the passage of time.



3.2. Key elements that other actors should take into account

For the Relay Center to work in ways that are relevant, the political will is essential. Before 2009, Fenascot tried to implement the program with multiple allies, however, it was only until 2010, with the support of the law that the Colombian Ministry of ICT took over the operation of it, allowing its consolidation and expansion in the country. The support of the law is not only a mechanism that guarantees the rights for deaf people, it is also the tool through which specific responsibilities and obligations are generated to ensure the exercise of the rights for them.

The fact that the laws previously mentioned were transformed into initiatives, plans, and programs, such as the Live Digital Plan, not only demonstrates the national political interest, but the commitment to achieve the millennium development goals up to 2015 and, subsequently, the sustainable development goals promulgated by the United Nations.

"It is essential that any country, where such service is replicated, must take into account that this should be free and that it could count with the political support necessary for it to be considered as a right and not as an added-value service offered by an operator. Also, to see reflected in a public policy the common interest of the deaf population is paramount to generate commitments expressed in the provision of the service," says Henry Mejía, Fenascot Manager

The expansion of the Center in the country meant a change in the way of thinking, because by being only linked to the capital city, the dependence on space and time were a barrier, since the service was centralized and the interpreters should be there; however, from its expansion came its transformation, the consolidation of the service meant the linkage in the teleworking model of interpreters in the country, as well as the creation of virtual training courses, the suitability of remote work places and the connection of them.

It is essential that any country, where such service is replicated, must take into account that this should be free and that it should count with the political support necessary for it to be considered as a right and not as an added-value service offered by an operator.

3.3. Relevance for the implementation of 2030 Agenda in Colombia and in other countries

The Relay Center is internationally recognized with the WSIS Prize Champion Award, in the category "linguistic diversity and local content" by the World Summit of the Information Society of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which demonstrates its commitment to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

"We don't want any person with hearing disabilities to feel their rights have been infringed and, in that context, technology is an ally to protect the life," says Andrea Gonzalez, deputy director of the Appropriation Processes of the Colombian Ministry of ICT, making clear the alignment of this objective with the SDG 10, previously explained, where the search for the reduction of inequality in developing countries is essential and the social, economic and political inclusion of people with disabilities is

fundamental. With this strategy, in the telephone, virtual and face-to-face channels, people with hearing disabilities will be attended, by providing quality and timely care, aligned with the SDG 9, which pretends to ensure universal access to ICTs.

For the Relay Center it is very important that people with hearing disabilities can effectively access the contact channels of the companies that provide key services, such as public health, police, firefighters, among others.

In the same way, it has been shown over time that the inclusion of technology is a mechanism of generation of development and empowerment of individuals⁷, allowing them to freely exercise their rights and, therefore, to generate a sense of freedom only granted by the power of sole discretion⁸.



The inclusion of technology is a mechanism of generation of development and empowerment of individuals, allowing them to freely exercise their rights.

7 United States of America, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2001). "Report on Human Development, 2001. To put the new technologies at the service of human development", New York.

8 Sen, A. (2000) Development and Freedom (Trad.) Bogotá, Planeta.

3.4. Replication capacity of the actors involved

In order for the successful implementation of the Relay Center to take place there are two key factors that allow its consolidation and that must be taken into account in case it is replicated.

According to Andrea Gonzalez, Deputy Director of Appropriation Processes of Communication Technologies, the first factor is the political will represented through laws to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities. Colombia is a world leader in the generation of spaces of inclusion; these spaces are backed by a responsibility and obligations policies that allow, through the consolidation of programs, such as the Relay Center, the guarantee of the full exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Second, the integration of the federations or associations of the deaf with the National Government is important, but it is necessary to establish that this is done only as an impulse toward sustainability. For the project to work, it must have the endorsement of the deaf population and they should participate in its implementation, as the Colombian Ministry of ICT in Colombia did through Fenascot. It is worth noting that "the platform is not everything, it

must be accompanied by a constant campaign in the various traditional and digital media, and have their own brand personality, style and way of communicating," according to Juan Camilo Prado, who is leading the initiative.

In Colombia, the replication capacity of the Relay Center is reflected in the massification of its services in the national territory, the schedule availability of the platform at the service of the citizens (Monday to Sunday from 6:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) And, finally, in the consolidation of strategic alliances with companies in the private sector which enables the massification of the tool through the integration within its portfolio of services, as Gas Natural Fenosa and Davivienda have done it.

Currently, the Relay Center provides advice to the governments of Paraguay, Peru and Ecuador for the creation and implementation of a similar system. To this effect, the emphasis is on the need for political will for the formulation of a law that regulates the service and establishes the ones responsible of the it; in the creation of a baseline to identify the demand, because it is essential to identify the number of potential

users of the service to be able to design a solution that is set and that is not more costly than necessary; and the creation of a sustainability plan designed in the medium and long term, in which the emphasis is on the identification of

financing sources, the consolidation of alliances with the private sector, the search and training of sign language interpreters for each of these countries and the need for generation of content that can be replicated.

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4

PERSONAL
**STO
RIES**

Andrés Felipe García, student and independent

Andrés Felipe is an only child, and his parents have hearing disabilities as him; his grandparents, aunts and uncles are hearing people and the only one who knows some sign language is a distant cousin. Before being mediated by the Relay Center he depended on his father, he used to describe it as a river: “Water coming down, but not going up”. Currently, thanks to this Center he believes that now it is a bridge between hearing and hearing disability people that not only guarantees the right of communication, but has made his and his parents life easier as well as giving them the necessary independence to make all their errands and monitor their business.

“The role of the Government is essential, it must prepare the ground and have everything ready to help deaf people to be able to communicate freely, but there is still a long way to go,” says Andrew, because “it is not a question of technology, it is a cultural problem of recognition of the other, to change our way of thinking; it is about feeling empathy for people different from us.” To make

known and to communicate the benefits of the Relay Center are, according to him, the appropriate ways of breaking the paradigms and that, in both the public and the private sector, are aware of the importance of the use of this tool.

Andrés Felipe is a student of analysis and development in SENA and his daily activities are now easier. He knows how to read and write in Spanish, He reads better than writing, and tries to communicate like this with hearing people when he does not have availability nor access to the service due to Internet connection problems, but thanks to the Relay Center he no longer has to go through problems such as running out of paper, not being understood or that the interpretation of what he says is wrong.

“For me the Relay Center is a source of pride and has changed my life,” he says when explaining his daily life. He also feels sad to know that in other countries there aren’t these services, as he has friends in Peru and Ecuador with whom he still cannot communicate easily.

*“ For me the Relay Center is a source of pride
and has changed my life. ”*

Andrés Felipe García

Adriana Organista, graphic designer and mother.

Adriana is a graphic designer from the School of Arts and Letters, has a 9 year-old child; for her, the Relay Center is: “The platform has helped me to have an effective communication with the hearing people, has become my voice and is the way to know what happens without the need for someone to speak for me; it is my way of understanding perfectly.

10 years ago, when she began to use the service, she only used it for text messages and relied heavily on her mom to be able to go to medical appointments or do her errands. Then, with the video chat, her life improved, by making her communication easier, as it was more fluid, saving her some time and, as the use was unlimited, she could use it many times regardless of the place. Now, with the Online Interpretation Service, which she was afraid of using at the beginning, because she didn't know how it worked, her life is simpler.

She recalls that in some of her trips she had to talk urgently with her son. In the beginning, he

did not understand the communication, as he was connected with her mom, but with the voice of an interpreter. She had to explain to him and it was with the Online Interpretation Service, OIS, how she could do it. Since then, she is no longer afraid; she feels independent and sees the Relay Center as a tool that: “gives me peace of mind to know about my son, to ask for help and, above anything else, as a tool to communicate with other people. There is no longer a barrier of communication, it was broken.”

Adriana considers that the Relay Center, with its multiple services, guarantees her right to communication; its gratuity allows it to be used freely in Colombia and therefore considers that campaigns must be done, especially targeted to hearing people in order to know about the existence of this tool; this is the only way to close the gaps. “Colombian sign language is her mother tongue and thanks to the Relay Center she can understand the information in the clearest possible manner”.

“ It has become my voice and is the way to know what happens without the need for someone to speak for me. ”
Adriana Organista

Shalem Medina, Colombian sign language interpreter

Shalem Medina is a student of arts and since July 2016 is part of the Relay Center, where she works as a Colombian sign language interpreter. She learned the language since she was little with her sister, who is deaf, and has practiced it all her life to be able to communicate with her. For three years she accompanied her, and two other people, to be the first students in condition of hearing impairment in higher education in Envigado. During that time she was their interpreter and, as a result, she decided to take on the sign language and its interpretation as her profession, which has become a constant learning process hand in hand with the Relay Center, with its training processes for interpreters and with her interaction with deaf people.

To Shalem, as a student of art, technology is “a tool that the human beings created to make life easier and accessible”, and is aware that many times we talk about inclusion, but it is not always applied; however, “the Relay Center is a truly inclusive tool that allows access to the information in an easy way,

guarantees a right and improves the quality of life of workers and deaf people ”

The magnitude of the service is a fundamental element that is valued only when the dimension of the same is understood. Being able to help deaf people in her work as an interpreter is extremely rewarding for her life, but, on the other hand, knowing that her sister communicates whenever she wants thanks to the Relay Center, is for her a source of tranquility and joy, not only for being part of the service, but because of the independence that it generates for his sister and, in general, for deaf people.

That is why she assures: “The most important thing is that this right to communicate is complied with and, thanks to the Relay Center, it is easy to interact with deaf people, as it is a tool that allows the access to communication and information”.

Shalem performs teleworking, in the evenings or nights, from her home. Thus, during the day, she can go to the classes of her career of art and only needs a computer with internet connection and a video camera to be able to form part of the Relay Center.

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