

Change Makers: Why do dreams die?

Girls are often viewed as future mothers, so their education is sacrificed for the boys

By Carol Curtis

For many Mexican girls, it is a difficult journey to fulfill their dreams. For the seven years I've lived in San Juan Cosala, I have met many girls/women through English classes. I've heard them proclaim their dreams – a doctor, a veterinarian, an owner of a clothing store, a happy marriage and two children. Then I've listened as they explained why their dreams were no longer possible. I've also listened to expats with north-of-the-border beliefs. If only they took birth control ... if only they studied harder ... if only their family supported them ... if only they got a job and saved their money.

It's taken me a while and lots of listening to understand the difficulties girls face while trying to finish their journey. Yes, birth control is free in Mexico. But the reality is that it often isn't accepted by the community. Girls who get the shot or pills are "exposed" to others in the community as wanting to have sex without consequences. Who wants this humiliation? So, they don't use birth control. Hormones are universal and a boyfriend can sway their desire to wait. Babies are loved by everyone and are viewed as a blessing. But there is only family childcare, so staying in school or getting a job is very difficult.

Don't believe that failing to

gain admittance to university means the girls didn't study. It is difficult to get the scores needed for most careers and admittance often means traveling to a university in another Mexican state. Plus, even if you gain acceptance to one in Guadalajara, the bus fair or rent in the city plus the cost of books often make it impossible.

Family support is another issue that requires a different view. The families I work with in the village often don't see a choice. Mother and father need to go to work. The little children need someone to take care of them. Who does the family turn to? Often, the oldest girl is the one who quits school and takes on the childcare. Unfair? Yes, but the family needs the in-

comes of the parents. The boys are viewed as potential wage earners, so they often are able to continue school or become assistants to family members in the trades. Girls are often viewed as future mothers, so their education is sacrificed for the boys.

If the family doesn't have the funds for university, then why doesn't the girl get a job and save for her future. Many of the families I know have not gotten into the saving idea. Many Mexican families use whatever extra money is available to fix up their home or to pay for extra medical and dental needs. Plus, jobs for girls are not plentiful and often pay very little.

So, how can we help girls reach their dream goals? No one is really sure, but a new non-profit is working on this. ChangeMakers or Creando

Cambios is partnering with both Mexican and expat women to mentor and support the 2020 group of girls. We hope to learn what it takes to guide them successfully through their journeys. Having a program designed by many people who truly understand why it is so difficult and led by a highly qualified Mexican teacher, we will develop a program that is transferable to other communities; that can be expanded to girls who are still in secondary school, to those women in the universities, and for women who are ready to start implementing their dreams within their own villages. If we provide the right community support, the girls will step up in their own villages and eventually with their own children to make the changes needed.

We are just starting and will keep the Lakeside community

informed of our successes and stumbles. We are in this for the long haul, since our first group of girls will be 16-18 years old. Dreams of becoming a child therapist, a writer, a scientist, an owner of a spa, a clothing designer ... with individual mentoring, group lessons on goal setting and ways to push aside barriers, tutoring for academic weaknesses, and attention to family needs, we believe our girls will fulfill their dreams.

Join us as we work together to make it possible.

Please contact us if you would like more information about ChangeMakers. We will be hosting small group meetings in a month or two. You can also access the volunteer form on our website.

See Facebook: ChangeMakers Lake Chapala, ChangeMakersLakeChapala.org; or email 2onadventure@gmail.com.