

This series takes an in-depth look at facets of the work of EPES in Chile

NO. 1: EPES CONCEPCIÓN

A HOME FOR HOPE IN HUALPÉN

Now in its permanent home in the district of Hualpén, EPES Concepción provides hope and skills to the poor and dispossessed of Chile's second largest province (population 2 million, located 500 km from the capital city of Santiago).

EPES began its work in the Bio Bio region in 1983 in Caleta Lo Rojas, a fishing village near the coal-mining town of Coronel. A time of military rule, repression and human rights violations, the early 1980s saw the emergence of a broad-based social movement to restore democratic freedoms interrupted by the 1973 military coup against President Salvador Allende. Organizing around demands for health was one of many ways to join the struggle against the dictatorship.

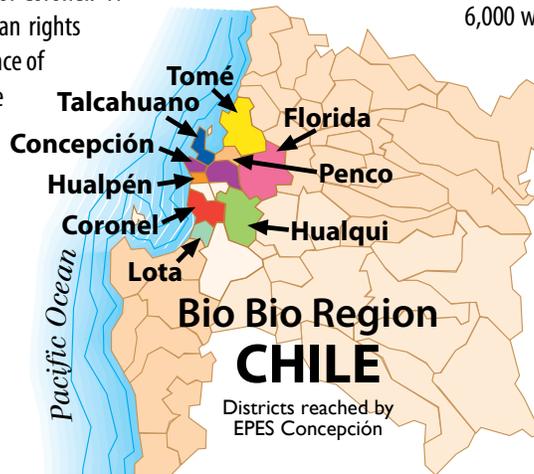
In its first years, EPES was a project of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) in coastal towns and rural sectors, training its first health promotion team and responding to the urgent health needs of a population under siege.

By the late 1980s, EPES had narrowed its focus to the shantytowns of Hualpencillo (now Hualpén, population 87,000) and Talcahuano (population 164,000), on the outskirts of Concepción. More recently, EPES incorporated the neighboring districts of Penco (population 46,000) and Tomé (population 52,000) into its sphere of action, doubling its outreach.

EPES has a vision: Through education, empowerment, organization and collective action, people can make long-term and sustainable changes to improve not only their health, but the quality of life for themselves, for society and for future generations.

Today, the work of EPES Concepción directly transforms the lives of some 6,000 women and their families. Collaboration between EPES and the Bio Bio regional and Talcahuano municipal health services reaches an additional 30,000.

But numbers don't express the true depth of EPES' reach into lives and collective hopes. Ask the woman who describes participating in a workshop on gender and sexuality as her "rebirth." Or volunteers at a shelter who credit the EPES Community Fund with "keeping our doors open to needy women and their children." Or the environmental activists who EPES drew together and who now meet regularly in its community hall.



"Hard-working and poor" is the way Haydé Alvial Puiñán describes herself and her neighbors. Confined to a wheelchair, Haydé maneuvers herself to a nearby school to sell homemade chocolates. Fortunately, her street remains free from the violence of drug-traffickers who have invaded the sector.

The award for leadership she received from city officials in 2006 bemuses her. "I was just another isolated woman, afraid to face the world. Then EPES awakened me and I discovered that I am strong."



HUALPÉN: "Look Around You"

Located at the mouth of the Bio Bio River, Hualpén takes its name from the Mapudungun word "look around you." The view from its low hills stretches across the bay to fishmeal factories, the Talcahuano dockyards and Chile's largest petrochemical complex.

Most days, the air is grey with chemical haze. Last year, residents awoke to find houses and streets covered with a white powder spewing from the fire-belching smokestacks of the ENAP national oil refinery. Environmental hazards are the focus of new organizing efforts in the community,



such as the El Triángulo Delegate Council, which funded its research and information campaign with support from the EPES Community Project Fund.

The names of neighborhoods tell their stories: Población Esfuerzo Unido ("United Effort"); Población Emergencia ("Emergency"). With the creation of the new Hualpén municipal district in 2004, more roads have been paved and street lights added to the treeless alleys. Illegal garbage dumps are a constant target for the EPES health teams. More permanent victories are visible in the creation of neighborhood parks and preservation of the *humedales* (wetlands) that protect the streets from flooding.



Forming community health teams to promote the right to health has been the cornerstone of EPES' educational and transformative strategy.

EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT

Training health teams

EPES-trained health promoters are a familiar and respected presence in the community centers, church halls and health clinics of Concepción for their plain-talking workshops on teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS or domestic violence; for organizing neighborhood campaigns against cholera, meningitis and breast cancer; and for mobilizing neighbors to clean up garbage dumps and denounce hazardous industrial emissions.

The health teams belonging to the Zenobia Cerda Zapata (ZCZ) Coordinating Group proudly celebrated the organization's 10th anniversary in 2008. That so many women still make time to participate in community health teams is impressive. Growing numbers of women in the district now work outside their homes. Unemployment among industrial workers is on the rise, forcing wives

So many young women never get the chance to study. Getting training later as a health team promoter is like getting a second chance in life. Who else can give you that?

– Haydée Alvial Puiñán, former ZCZ President

to take jobs—mostly seasonal, low-paid work. And one-third of all households have a single woman at the helm.

But in a new trend, the health teams are seeing their membership renewed by the daughters, and even granddaughters, of long-time participants. The growing number of older women joining the groups helps raise the visibility of senior issues—like depression in ageing, and sexuality over age 60.

For Hualpén women intent upon breaking the isolation of discrimination and poverty, the EPES-trained health teams continue to provide a space in which to build empowerment, solidarity and dignity among women, families and neighbors.

The EPES Concepción team workshops train community members to:

- Understand how changes in national health care policies affect their lives, and how to claim benefits.
- Overcome the obstacles to providing emergency contraception to teens.
- Conduct nutrition workshops for senior citizens and rural health workers.
- Develop and use community media.



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

EPES Fund for Community Projects

EPES launched an annual grant initiative in 2003 in Concepción and 45 grants have been awarded to date. Though small (under US\$600), the grants go a long way toward financing workshops, brochures, murals, field trips and web pages. EPES provides recipients with intensive training in project development, budgeting and evaluation. At the end of each project, participants present the outcomes and propose actions in public seminars.

EPES community grants have mobilized grassroots groups in Concepción to claim the rights of:

- Women to be free from domestic violence
- Children to a healthy diet and recreational activities
- Patients to holistic health care
- Teens to information on contraceptive use
- Talcahuano residents to reclaim and clean polluted public beaches

We thought participation meant showing up when invited, then listening. The EPES leadership training opened my eyes. As community groups, we can decide, we can act.

– Bartolomé Coll Soto, Chronic Illness Support Group

Leadership Training

EPES plays an important educational role for community leaders and patient advocacy/support groups based in the neighborhood health clinics and hospitals of the Talcahuano municipal health service.

The First EPES School for Community Health Leaders ran for five months with 60 activists from Hualpén, Talcahuano, Penco and Tomé meeting to study community diagnosis, participatory planning, structure of the national public health system and community participation processes. A closing seminar discussed the obstacles to participation in Chile's health care services and laid the foundation for a network of community leaders.

A three-day "Women, Health and Leadership" course taught advocacy and communication strategies to women (average age 50) from neighborhood associations, self-help groups, volunteer associations and others.

The EPES Open School for Community Work shared techniques in adult education and participatory learning with grassroots activists.

What gives me hope? The capacity of our communities to organize ourselves, to make ourselves heard, to take to the streets to press for our demands.

– Ximena Valverde, EPES Community Project Fund recipient

SHAPING POLICY

EPES employs innovative methods, including multisectoral dialogue and participatory budgeting, to improve municipal health services and make community voices heard. Some recent examples include:

- The collaboration between EPES and the Talcahuano Health Service, whose pioneering model of public consultation and allocation of resources to community-run initiatives has received national recognition. EPES participated in this process by preparing materials and training modules designed to meet community demand for sex education.
- EPES worked with the Health Ministry's Vida Chile health promotion program to facilitate and evaluate community involvement in participatory budgeting initiatives. Evaluation results led EPES to develop its 2008 School for Community Health Leaders.
- EPES participates actively in the Primary Health Care and Environmental Health committees of the Bio Bio Regional Health Advisory Council of NGOs, universities, churches, community associations and businesses convened by the Health Ministry for civil society input in regional health policies.



Panel presentation at the EPES School for Community Health Leaders. From left to right: Medical Director of Health Service Talcahuano, trained community leaders from the Council of Social Services, and the director of EPES Concepción.



EDUCACIÓN POPULAR EN SALUD
POPULAR EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

SNAPSHOTS: EPES CONCEPCIÓN IN ACTION

HIV/AIDS prevention

EPES Concepción is a local pioneer of HIV/AIDS prevention in the Bio Bio region, creating the first activist network in the early 1990s. EPES health promotion teams have since brought awareness to teachers, youths and women from poor communities using murals, marches, workshops and other popular education techniques. In 2009, EPES Concepción convened ecumenical groups in its Mobilizing Faith Communities in the Context of HIV/AIDS, an initiative developed with the Lutheran church in Chile and the Argentine Ecumenical Pastoral Project on HIV/AIDS.

A Healthy Environment

Community diagnosis of environmental hazards to health is key to the process of empowerment, education and collective action. In Talcahuano, recipients of EPES community project grants are leading the clean-up of Rocuant Beach and pressuring authorities to improve air quality, despite the enormous economic power of local industries. Local authorities turn to EPES to provide informative, attractive and easily-understood materials on environmental issues, including thousands of fliers on safe consumption of shellfish following an outbreak of the *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* bacteria in coastal waters.

Sex Education Programs for Local Health Clinics

"Families Talking About Sexuality" is the name of the manual and workshops designed by EPES for use in the health clinics of Hualpén, Talcahuano, Penco and Tomé. The course, which covers sexuality at different stages of life, gender, rights and communication in the family, was developed in response to needs identified in consultation with community members.



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CONCEPCIÓN

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Volunteer work brigades from several U.S. congregations have participated in building projects at the EPES Center.



Climbers raise money for the EPES Center in Concepción by climbing Mt. Aconcagua.

The work of EPES commands enormous respect among the people it serves, their organizations, the community at large, and public health services. EPES was born as a project of the Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Chile, but it no longer belongs solely to the Church. EPES belongs wherever men and women need the tools to claim their rights, organize for dignity, and achieve the full and abundant life that Jesus proclaimed.

— Rev Oscar Sanhueza, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH)

EPES BUILDS A HOME

Thanks to the generosity and creativity of its supporters, EPES' long-standing commitment to the Concepción community is now based in a permanent home and meeting space for community groups. Construction of the "Gaston Toledo" Popular Education Center, inaugurated in January 2006, was made possible by individual donors; the fundraising efforts of folk singer Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul & Mary) and his daughter Bethany; a sponsored climb of Mt. Aconcagua; and volunteer work brigades from St. Luke's United Methodist (Indianapolis), Prince of Peace Lutheran (Clifton Park, NY) and Trinity Lutheran (Owatonna, MN) churches.

A Mural of Empowerment

Art has always been a way for EPES to express its gratitude, affection and hopes. EPES sought a permanent expression of these aspirations for its Concepción center in a city that is famous for its murals. Thanks to the collaboration of Minnesota artists Steve DeLaitsch and Rev. Scott Duffus

with local artists Rodrigo Quevedo, Luis Almendra Villagrán and Angela Rivera Soto, the EPES center now claims a special place in this tradition. In brilliant colors and fanciful imagery, the 10-meter mural that graces the EPES community hall depicts the history of women's evolution from discrimination to empowerment to the construction of new communities where human rights are fully respected.



Chilean artist Luis Almendra Villagrán works on the mural in the EPES center.

SUSTAINABILITY

As the EPES Foundation looks to the challenges of the future, we hope for continued support of our vision and work to build healthier lives and communities. We are grateful to the agencies, foundations, churches and friends who have so generously supported us. Their support and collaboration is vital to us and the communities we serve.

Special Thanks

Action for Health in the Americas (AHA)
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 Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church
 Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
 Learning ZoneXpress, Owatonna, MN

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 Prince of Peace, Clifton Park, NY
 St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, IN
 St. Peters Lutheran Church, North Plainsfield, NJ
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Owatonna, MN
 United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
 Wheatridge Ministries

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More about EPES at: Action for Health in the Americas (AHA)
www.actionforhealth.org

EPES Concepción is excited to host the first EPES International Training Course on Popular Education in Health in January 2010.



EDUCACIÓN POPULAR EN SALUD

Escuela Internacional

International Training Course on Popular Education in Health

