



Planting the **Seeds** for Change





Milvia first met WJI's Programs Director, Elvia Raquec, when she was 11 years old. Elvia was teaching girls in the rural community where Milvia grew up. "I remember the image I had of Elvia," she said. **"I hoped that one day I could work like she did."**





Now working at WJI with Elvia, Milvia reflects, “I close my eyes and remember that 11-year-old girl who admired Elvia’s work. That 11-year-old girl has fulfilled what she said she would. Seeing myself work with a person I have long admired is very gratifying.”





Milvia teaches WJI's Adolescent Girls Program, a six-month course that teaches girls the skills to assert their rights, delay marriage, and achieve their personal goals, while workshops with parents ensure girls have the support they need in their homes.





In Guatemala, only **one in ten Indigenous women work in the formal sector**, highlighting the necessity of programs that enhance their public speaking, advocacy, and leadership skills, bridging the gap between women and opportunity (UN Women).

Milvia believes, “**WJI is planting a seed** – a seed we hope will germinate and sprout beautifully to break these norms and stereotypes.”





Milvia's proximity to the girls she teaches and her ability to relate to their lived experiences is a major asset. "These girls see me succeed — [someone] with their same skin color, last name, clothing, and language." Milvia sees herself in the girls that she teaches. "[I hope] they think to themselves, she is Indigenous and she is a professional, and she is wearing traditional clothing, like me, the corte, the huipil. **We're the same.**"





Milvia remembers the lessons that she learned as a girl and the aspirations she had for her future. “What we dream of when we are little, we often see it [as something] far away. But, I want to leave the girls with the message that I was told when I was little, that with a lot of effort, [our dreams] can be achieved.”





“It is a constant challenge for girls to believe that they are worthwhile, that they also have the right to play, the right to go out, to learn new things.”





WJI's success is due to sustainable, community-led programming. "The change happens, not instantaneously, but over time," Milvia says. "It is satisfying for our team to see girls studying. Or to see a woman who is now asserting her rights and says, 'I am worth it and I put me first.'"





Among WJI participants of the Adolescent Girls Program, only **3% of participants were married or in unions by the time they turned 18, compared to the national average of 30%** (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

“The success of WJI is highlighted when we go back to the community and see a change.”





Milvia is a strong leader in her community who is changing the lives of young girls.

“I want them to know, you have worth as a woman, and you have worth as a girl.”





Established in 2015, the Adolescent Girls Program has reached over 1,500 girls and trained over 1,600 mothers, fathers, and community leaders to prevent child marriages and early unions. Through working at the individual, family, and community levels, WJI teaches girls skills to assert their rights, delay marriage, and achieve their personal goals.





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