



Until we are all equal

Andréina, 12,  
is a young leader  
in her community  
in Chuquisaca.



# ARRIBA

Helping girls realize their self-worth  
and embrace their right to equality  
and a life free from violence

The Achieving  
Reproductive Rights for  
Bolivian Adolescents  
(ARRIBA) project is  
almost complete.



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Often the youngest in the room, Andreína commands it, thanks to what she has realized about herself through Champions of Change.

Erika, 19, is a former sponsored child living in Batallas.

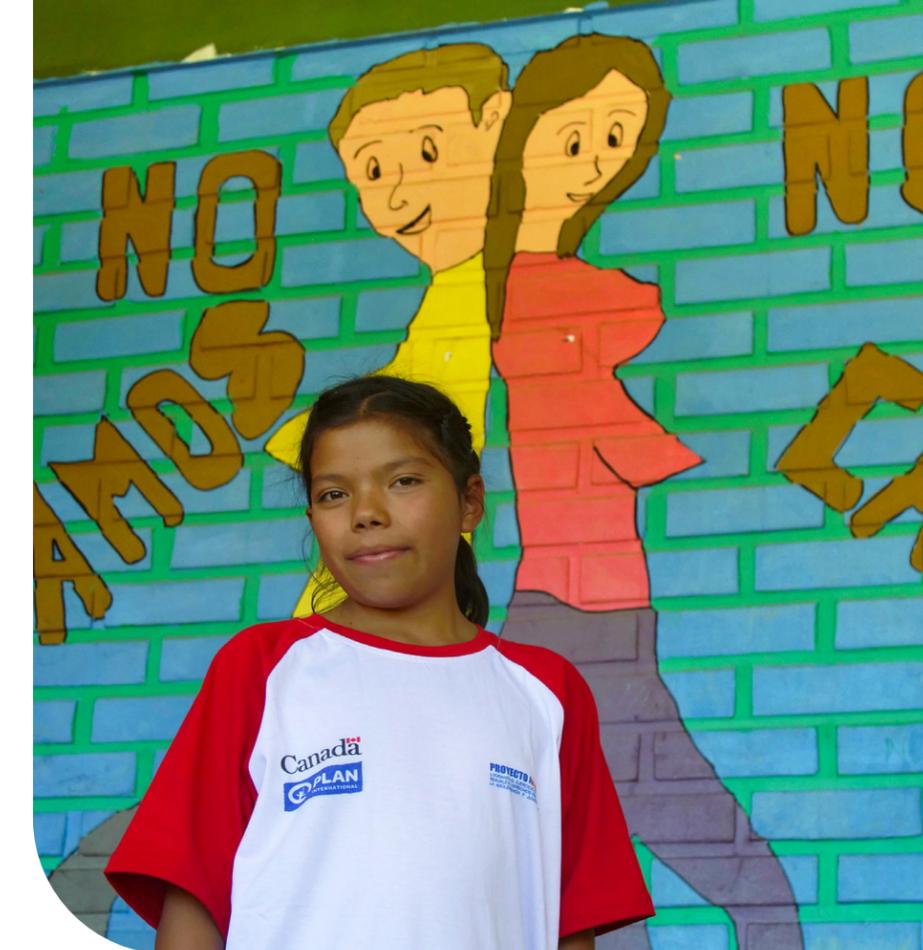
## The First Word

With your support, a generation of girls and young women can now proudly and confidently step into their future.

*“I have a say over my body and sexuality.”* This is the kind of statement you’d rarely hear from a girl or woman in Bolivia. In a country still contending with the effects of centuries of colonialism, more than a quarter of girls are mothers before they turn 19, and 67% of women in remote communities have experienced violence at the hands of their partners. Bolivia also has the highest infant-mortality rate in the Americas. But the tides, at last, are starting to turn.

Now in its fifth and final year, the ARRIBA project has helped thousands of girls and women across the country realize their self-worth and embrace their right to equality and a life free from violence. While creating access to new and improved sexual health care options, the project has also made strides in dismantling traditional gender roles with boys, men and entire communities.

As a supporter of ARRIBA, you are helping create a generation of girls who are valued in their communities and who are free to choose their own path in life. In these pages, you’ll meet a few of them – like Andreína, a 12-year-old who champions equal rights and the importance of sexual education among her peers and elders alike (p. 10). You’ll also



Andreína stands in front of a mural that says, “If we don’t lean on each other, we fall.”

hear from Bernarda, Juan and Marcela, three doctors united in their vision to better serve the health needs of teens (p. 9), and Mr. Primo, a father, bus driver and passionate home cook who has stepped up to address machismo in his community (p. 8).

### THANK YOU

Plan International is immensely grateful for your trust in our work. Your dedication will support girls and women in Bolivia to make their own choices about their bodies and their futures in communities that are becoming increasingly supportive of their right to choose. Thank you for your commitment.

## Project Facts

### WHO:

**PARTICIPANTS:** Adolescents and women of reproductive age

**FUNDERS:** Plan International Canada, Plan International Bolivia and Global Affairs Canada

**WHAT:** Focus on health and protection from violence

**WHERE:** 12 municipalities across Bolivia

**WHEN:** March 2018 to December 2023

**WHY:** The ARRIBA project has three goals:

1. Increase awareness in teen girls, teen boys and women of women's right to protection from violence and to healthy sexual and reproductive health decisions and experiences.
2. Improve health care services to deliver high-quality care to adolescents and women.
3. Work with government institutions to adapt policies and practices to meet the needs of young people and women.



A woman wears a traditional "polleras" skirt.

PlanCanada.ca



Dr. Marcela demonstrates how an intrauterine device works at a youth clinic in Tomina.



An Indigenous family stands outside their home in an Andean village.

PlanCanada.ca

## The Scene

### Life in the long shadow of colonialism

Bolivia is home to the largest Indigenous population in South America – it accounts for 42% of the population. Many of the country's Indigenous peoples, including its large populations of Quechua- and Aymaran-speaking peoples, are congregated in remote regions like the Andes. They live in the mountain range, in arid valleys between the peaks and on high plains.

The election of the country's first Indigenous president (who served from 2005 to 2019) was a sign of a more promising future. But centuries of racist colonial oppression that barred Indigenous people from voting, owning land and accessing public spaces and services have taken a toll. Today, discrimination manifests as a lack of modern medicine and jobs in rural areas, resulting in massive migration. Even if they don't leave the region, many farming families are nomadic, travelling to lower altitudes in the cold season to avoid frosts and returning higher up the mountains in warmer periods to allow the lower grazing land to renew.

### Did you know?

► More than 60% of girls in Bolivia who are married by age 18 also become mothers before they turn 18.

► 67% of women in remote communities have experienced violence at the hands of their partners.

► Three of every five Indigenous women in rural communities don't have a health professional present when giving birth. That's partly why Bolivia has the highest newborn mortality rate in the Americas.

# Project Highlights



One of the ARRIBA project's Champions of Change peer counsellors

**19,400** people participated in the fifth year of the project, and **64,500** people have been reached since the beginning of the project

**12,900** teens attended sessions on sexual health care and services and their rights to protection and to make decisions

**6,500** teens learned from their peers through activities organized by adolescent networks

**24,600** households were visited by health personnel

**1,700** women and 4,300 partners and family members learned about women's right to decide what happens to their bodies and their right to access health services

**2,400** traditional leaders and health workers learned to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights

**655** safe-birth plans were made by women and their health workers and families

**814** health workers were trained in specialized care for adolescents, particularly girls and survivors of gender-based violence

**1,200** teens and women took part in activities that helped them develop their leadership and advocacy skills as well as increase their community participation

**1,700** members of women's and teens' networks learned to monitor and report on the quality and delivery of health services



Dr. Juan chats with women at a health fair in Camargo.

“ I feel empowered. [Young people] come to talk to us with confidence. This year I have only seen one teenage pregnancy. The clinic used to care for four or five before.”

– Dr. Juan, one of the doctors involved in the ARRIBA project



**Machismo is the social belief that men have superiority over women. It's how boys have been raised for generations, and it dictates how men are "supposed to" behave and what roles men and women should fill.**

More than 1,000 male community leaders participated in the training, which promotes equal rights and protection.

Through parents' and boys' clubs, as well as via peer training with adolescent networks, the project reached more than 3,000 men and family members with activities that helped address how to prevent violence in their homes and communities. "Some boys used to be violent; they would hit more timid boys," says Joel. "But our peer leaders guided us onto the right path. The boys are already nicer."

Not only is it getting safer for women and girls on the street, but at-home dynamics are shifting as well. Now, Primo cooks joyously and without shame. "I'm going to the farm with my children to dig up potatoes!" he says. "My wife's taken up her career again and is studying, and I want her to focus on that."

Primo challenges social norms that set down rules on how men are to behave.

#### LEARN MORE

In this video, hear more from Joel and his peer Miguel, who is also on the path to ending harmful gender roles.



Dr. Marcela talks about different contraception methods at a youth clinic in Tomina.

#### A STORY OF CHANGE

## The Good Doctors

How three doctors transformed their approach to meeting the health needs of teens

Having sex and being pregnant should be positive and rewarding experiences. But they can't be if you aren't ready or you don't choose to have them. This may seem obvious, but for many girls in Bolivia, having a choice and having control over their own bodies are not givens.

According to Bernarda, a doctor in Batallas, authorities, parents and teachers don't want to address adolescent sex education and sexual health care. "Discussing sex is taboo, especially for girls," she explains. "Youth don't want to come to a clinic out of fear or embarrassment."

Those who do seek out resources, like confidential care or free contraception, often leave empty-handed because health centres, especially those in remote areas like Batallas, tend to lack staff and equipment and are often in poor condition. It's a situation that sets girls up to lose control of what happens to their body and their future.

To help flip this damaging script, the ARRIBA project contributed to the renovation of 50 health facilities, creating private consultation areas and equipping them with contraceptives, medical tools (like stethoscopes, scales and female and male anatomical models) and informational printouts curated for young people. "Now it is a pleasure to work there, and we can provide comprehensive care," says Marcela, a doctor from Tomina who, after participating in >

**One in five girls under 18 in Bolivia is married, and 60% of those girls give birth before they turn 18.**

#### A STORY OF CHANGE

## Macho No More

Helping boys and bus drivers hit the brakes on toxic masculinity

"I always liked to cook," says Mr. Primo, a father, a bus driver and the president of the Pucarani transportation union. "But my friends made fun of me for it."

Primo's not being able to cook for his family is one small example of how gender norms and machismo limit people's freedom and ability to flourish. It can also lead to abuse or parental neglect, something Joel, a teen boy living in La Paz with his mother and older siblings, understands first-hand. "My father left us," he shares. "It's been painful to forge ahead. And my mom didn't get what she wanted out of life."

Changing the societal norms that put girls and boys and men and women into separate boxes required an outside-the-box approach. ARRIBA partnered with community leaders of male-dominated groups and essential public services, like Primo's transportation union, to make change happen.

A study in the *Journal of Transport & Health* found that 21% of women have been sexually assaulted while using the El Alto transit system.

Making efforts to accommodate the union workers' shifts, the ARRIBA team put together a schedule for workshops on gender equality and preventing violence. "The workshops helped us understand what gender is, what machismo is and what we can do to change," says Primo.

sensitivity training, realized she could reach teens better by speaking like them and being more relatable.

Training changed Bernarda’s approach as well. “I used to ask adolescents to come with their parents. This prevented them from opening up to me,” she says. Now, she talks to her young patients one-on-one about topics like self-esteem, goals and avoiding teen pregnancy. “If they are suffering, they have a doctor they can come to and trust like a friend,” she says.

Through ARRIBA, 800 health care workers received specialized sexual and reproductive health training focused on birth plans, traditional medicine and contraception. In addition, they learned how to care for survivors of gender-based violence and work with authorities to protect and further support their patients. Some even learned how to administer long-term contraceptive methods, like IUDs (intrauterine devices), in an intensive five-day course.

“I feel empowered,” says Juan, a doctor from Camargo, of his training. He has also witnessed a change in the young people in his area. “They come to talk to us with confidence.”

He is seeing results too. “This year, I’ve only seen one teenage pregnancy,” he says. “The clinic used to care for four or five before.”

Doctor Marcela is pregnant with her second child and can’t wait for his arrival. “I want every woman to be able to experience a joyful pregnancy – one that is planned – without fear and with all the information and attention they need,” she says. “That’s why I believe my work is important: so no girl gets her dreams cut short.”

**LEARN MORE**  
Scan here to watch an interview with Dr. Juan and see his work.




Dr. Bernarda meets with teens privately so they can openly discuss issues their parents may consider taboo.

A STORY OF CHANGE

# 12 Going on Teacher

Often the youngest person in the room, Andreína commands it, thanks to what she has realized about herself through Champions of Change.

In rural Chuquisaca, many young adolescents – some as young as 12 – migrate to cities to find work. They leave home before completing school and becoming aware of their rights. This limits their job options and exposes them to risks. In 2022, teen girls made up the majority of reported sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the region.

“If they migrate, we want them to know about contraception and STIs so they aren’t in jeopardy,” says project staff member Mariela.

Andreína, 12, is going places, but she’s not migrating. Instead, she’s staying in Chuquisaca to help take on the challenges her communities face. “The girls listen,” says Andreína, proudly describing the talks about sexual education and rights she runs at schools. Although she’s often the youngest person in the room, she takes the lead when it comes to urging teenagers and parents to respect girls’ rights.

“Andreína is an example of resilience,” says Mariela. “She overcame difficulties at a young age, including the loss of her

brother to kidney failure and being separated from her mother, and is now teaching other children how to face their challenges.”

Where does Andreína’s strength come from? From within her – she just needed reminding that it was there. That’s where Champions of Change, Plan International’s cornerstone program for young people, came in. The course helps teens build their self-esteem and leadership skills and gain knowledge on children’s rights, gender equality and protection from violence.

The ARRIBA project has trained 70 Champions of Change facilitators, who in turn have shared what they learned about body confidence, girls’ rights, sexual health and activism with 760 adolescents who have successfully completed the program. These young people, along with their counterparts from adolescent networks also trained by the project, have gone on to inform 6,500 other youths about their health rights

and to lobby local governing bodies for policy change.

“More than anything, I want girls to know their rights so they can defend themselves,” says Andreína. She says she wants to be a teacher when she grows up, but from what we’ve seen, she already is one.

Andreína is one of the youngest role models in her community.



These girls are happy to be together at a health fair held at their school.



**LEARN MORE**  
Remember Liz? We profiled her in last year’s report. Scan the code to watch a video about her.



## Thank You!

Thank you for your support. It is not only transforming individual lives but also contributing to a brighter, more equitable future for our global community. For a complete picture of the progress you’ve championed in Bolivia, stay tuned for your final impact report in 2024.

**Thank you again for your continued support.**



Until we are all equal



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**Adolescent girls and boys learn about sexual health at a health fair.**

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## About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada strives for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind or not equally valued. Plan International and Plan International Canada have no political or religious affiliations; however, we do believe in the power of global citizenship. We are a member of a global organization that partners with youth, families, communities, local organizations, supporters, celebrated ambassadors and governments. We collaborate with women-led groups and youth councils in shaping our programs. We work to ensure that children, especially girls, are safe, healthy, educated and empowered.