



# UNITED HANDS- A Look at Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities in Cusco, Peru

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**Manos Unidas**  
INTERNATIONAL

## Peru

- Location: western coast of South America
- Population: > 30 million people
- Official language: Spanish
  - Quechua and Aymara are common aboriginal languages spoken
  - Over 40 languages are spoken in the Peruvian Amazon
- “In Peru, 70% of the population does not know what mental health means” and only ¼ of the people who need mental health care get attention (Fraser, 2007)
- A national mental health plan was initiated in 2006 that called for mental health to be seen as a fundamental right and called for universal access to community –based mental-health care (Fraser, 2007)

## Cusco

- Located in southeastern Peru in the Andes mountains
- Cusco was the capital and geographic center of the Incan empire
- Cusco means “navel of the world” in Quechuan, the language of the people native to the Andes
- Population of about 427,218. Elevation of 3,400 meters (11,200 ft)

## Project Description

- Global special studies incorporated with SW 683 evaluation course
- Volunteered at and carried out evaluations tasks with agency called Manos Unidas
- Tasks included:
  - Key informant interviews with agency leaders and staff
  - Assisted in conducting focus group to evaluate effectiveness of agency
  - Participated in meetings to evaluate and improve upon effectiveness of volunteer program
  - Conducted observational studies of school and programs
  - Assisted teachers in the classroom setting with a functional skills group for youth with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 18- 25



## Lessons Learned

- Importance of introducing practices that have been found to be evidence-based in the United States into global communities in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate
- That building relationships and getting to know people, who they are, and their stories are key to development work



## Advice

- Approach situations with a mindset of curiosity and willingness to learn
- Be open to trying new things. Put yourself out there, even though it may not be easy

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the only school in Cusco that has successfully helped students gain employment</li> <li>• The only program in Cusco that allows for students with disabilities to be placed in public schools to learn with typically-developing peers</li> <li>• Provides access to educational, functional, and vocational skills trainings for youth with disabilities</li> <li>• Offers workshops to educate community members and combat myths and stereotypes</li> <li>• Offers affordable education by accepting payments on sliding scale</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of specialized trainings required to provide safe, quality education and care</li> <li>• Lack of communication between teachers and agency leaders regarding volunteer roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Lack of training for volunteers, visitors, and educators from other countries to enhance practices that are culturally competent and reflect cultural humility</li> <li>• Challenges in integrating evidence-based practices with cultural differences</li> <li>• Funding sources and volunteer program aren't sustainable</li> </ul>
<p>SWOT</p>	
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2015, the Ministry of Health implemented new policies to support youth with disabilities to make them more of a priority</li> <li>• Peru maintains an inclusion policy for youth with disabilities</li> <li>• Enrollment for youth with disabilities into specialized schools has increased in recent years</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myths and stereotypes held by Peruvians about people with disabilities</li> <li>• Peru does not offer degrees for teachers to specialize or become trained in special education</li> <li>• Only half of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools</li> <li>• Facilities and education personnel are not equipped, prepared, or trained to work with children with disabilities</li> </ul>

“I got to know each child little by little. I learned that it is important to know how to work with each child. Some kids need more care, love, and patience than others” Fabiola- lead teacher with Pharawispa program



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