



SUCCESS STORY

A Family Living with HIV/AIDS Finds Renewed Strength and Hope

The Dignidad project provides support and critical services to HIV/AIDS-affected families.



Hilda M. Perez, Catholic Relief Services

The Dignidad office pictured above has supported Angelica and her sons and helped them improve their lives.

The Dignidad project works in Honduras to educate communities on HIV prevention, encourage voluntary testing, provide information on home-based care, fight stigma, and provide loans that help small family businesses. The project has 6,000 direct beneficiaries and is part of a larger HIV/AIDS initiative funded by USAID and PEPFAR.

At 36 years old and pregnant, Angelica Savala's weight loss was shocking. Deathly ill and separated from her abusive second husband, Angelica depended on her 7-year-old son, Alejandro, for her care. When she delivered her second son, Daniel, he too fell ill. Angelica finally went into a coma for three months. While at the hospital, she was tested for HIV. She was positive. So was Daniel.

After coming out of her coma, Angelica had no income, and no way to provide for herself or her children in a country where the stigma of being HIV positive or having family members with HIV is high. Despite these obstacles, Angelica and her sons have made a remarkable recovery with assistance from the Dignidad project, which is implemented by Caritas Hondureña (Caritas), a partner of Catholic Relief Services, and funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Initially, Angelica went to Caritas solely for psychological support. However, she and her family ultimately gained far more than that. For example, the Dignidad project also provided Angelica and Daniel with antiretroviral therapy. It offered community support and an economic lifeline, as well. Angelica obtained a loan from Caritas, which has enabled her to start a business to support her two sons.

Angelica turned to Dignidad for additional help when Alejandro faced HIV/AIDS discrimination from students at his school and their parents. The project's psychosocial team first counseled Alejandro before talking with his teachers and holding a counseling session for parents.

Returning from the brink of death has given Angelica new hope. She puts that hope to good use serving as the provincial president of Dignidad's Human Rights Commission on HIV and AIDS. In addition, she serves as the coordinator of one of the project's self-help groups, which provides loans and home visits to people living with HIV. Encouraging community support and fighting stigma, she now believes that her life has a purpose; "as long as I have a breath left in my body, I will live out my miracle."