



Twenty-four years on the same hillside

Free education, nutrition and the arts for children in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá
— an organization profile and case for support.



2,049

CHILDREN REACHED
SINCE 2002

1,240

FAMILIES SUPPORTED

190

CHILDREN ENROLLED
TODAY

40

STAFF, MOST FROM THE
NEIGHBOURHOOD

Legal entity (Colombia)

Legal entity (United States)

Transparency

Founded

Fundación Cigarra · NIT 830.121.170-4

501(c)(3) public charity · EIN 68-0505337

Candid Platinum Seal #8056671 · Charity Navigator · Benevity 840-680505337

2002, Puertas del Paraíso, Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá

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WHERE WE WORK

Ciudad Bolívar

Ciudad Bolívar is a district of steep hillsides on the southern edge of Bogotá, built largely by families displaced by Colombia's armed conflict. Public services arrived late and unevenly. For most children here, the school day ends at midday — and nothing follows it.



2002. Puertas del Paraíso when Cigarra opened: an informal settlement with no running water, electricity or sewerage.



Today. The same hillside. Cigarra helped bring basic services to the neighbourhood and built two access staircases with residents.

The families we serve

Parents are between 20 and 55 years old and belong to Colombia's socio-economic strata 1 and 2 — the two lowest of six. Most work informally: construction, street vending, domestic work, piecework garment sewing and small trades. Around 30% hold formal jobs in security, retail chains, restaurants and general services. About half the families own their home; the rest live with relatives. Households have one to four children, and roughly fifteen are headed by a single mother.

What that means for a child

- **Half a school day.** District schools run in half-day shifts, so children have long unsupervised hours in a neighbourhood with high exposure to violence, recruitment and early school leaving.
- **Nutrition.** 6.2% of children under five in Ciudad Bolívar are undernourished (Bogotá Health Secretariat, SaluData), raising the risk of illness and of falling behind in school.
- **No margin for extras.** Tutoring, arts instruction, English, technology and psychological support are out of reach for these households, and are not provided publicly in the neighbourhood.
- **A hard transition at eighteen.** Adolescents who finish secondary school often have neither the funds nor the information to enter further education.

The gap Cigarra fills

We occupy the empty half of the day. Children come to us in the shift opposite their school day, every weekday of the year, and stay with us — in many cases from age one until they finish secondary school.

THE ORGANIZATION

Built with the neighbourhood, not for it

Fundación Cigarra is a Colombian non-profit that has worked without interruption since 2002 in Puertas del Paraíso, Ciudad Bolívar. We provide comprehensive care — education, nutrition, the arts, sport, technology and psychosocial support — to children, adolescents and their families, free of charge and regardless of their means.

Every building on our site was added because the community asked for it. Every staff role exists because a child needed it. More than a hundred jobs have been created for neighbourhood residents over the years, and several of our teachers are former participants. A second generation is now arriving: alumni bringing their own children through the same gate.

Our name. *Cigarra* — cicada — comes from the song *Como la cigarra*: the cicada spends years underground and returns to sing. *El resurgir de una esperanza*, the resurgence of a hope.



The music and clothing-centre building, completed 2019.

Twenty-four years, briefly

2002

Dr. Carolyn Acosta Allen founds Cigarra. The community board donates a plot; the first building opens in September for around 120 children.

2002–2010

Cigarra brings water, electricity and sewerage to the neighbourhood, builds two access staircases, runs health brigades with Médecins Sans Frontières and delivers prefabricated housing with Servivienda and Saint George School.

2003

The first major international gift arrives by telephone from a donor who has remained anonymous — and has given ever since.

2010–2013

The *Cigarrita* computer room is equipped by IRT, United Kingdom. Cigarra buys *Casa Na*, opens the community clothing centre — its first self-generated income — and creates the *Malala* room for adolescents. FUMDIR–SENA award.

2015–2019

A dining hall, classrooms and offices are added; a three-storey building for music and the clothing centre is completed; the *Greta Thunberg* building is constructed from recycled shipping containers.

2022

A Colombian NGO funds the orchestra. Cigarra records its own anthem and launches the four-house competition — Jaguar, Tiburón, Caimán and Cóndor.

2023

The youth symphony orchestra gives its first concert.

2026

218 participants and 40 staff. Next: dividing the San Jorge room to give around 30 children aged 6 to 12 a space of their own.

PROGRAMMES

One continuous path, from age one to adulthood

Children aged 1 to 5 attend full time. From age 6 they come in the shift opposite their school day. Most stay for a decade or more.



Early childhood



Technology and robotics



Music

Care and wellbeing

- **Nutrition.** Breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack every day for 192 children.
- **Psychosocial support.** Individual and family counselling with our psychologist.
- **Parenting workshops.** Monthly sessions on child development, positive discipline and nutrition.
- **Clothing centre.** Clothing, footwear and household goods for families in acute need.

Learning

- **Early childhood.** Early stimulation, play and pre-school for ages 1 to 5.
- **School reinforcement.** Literacy, numeracy and study habits in the alternate shift.
- **English.** Participatory second-language teaching.
- **Technology and robotics.** Digital literacy and an introduction to programming, as a Microsoft partner.

Expression and sport

- **Youth symphony orchestra.** 60 young musicians on strings, wind and percussion, founded 2015; first concert 2023.
- **Dance, visual arts and theatre.** Folk and contemporary dance, drawing, painting and an annual musical.
- **Sport.** Physical activity organised around four houses: Jaguar, Tiburón, Caimán and Cóndor.

Beyond the children

- **Older adults.** 28 neighbours meet weekly, exchanging skills and stories with the children.
- **Vocational guidance.** Support for adolescents entering further education or work.

Who attends today

Group	Age range	Programme	Children
Pitufos	1–2 years	Early childhood	15
Angelitos A & B	2–3 years	Early childhood	30
Tigrillos	3–4 years	Early childhood	18
Fruticas A & B	4–5 years	Early childhood	40
San Jorge	6–11 years	Alternate shift	64
Malala	12–17 years	Alternate shift	23
Older adults	60+ years	Community	28
Total participants			218

WHAT HAS COME OF IT

Twenty-four years of results

2,049

CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE REACHED

1,240

FAMILIES SUPPORTED

100+

JOBS CREATED LOCALLY

80.4%

OF TRACKED ALUMNI
CONTINUED STUDYING

Alumni outcomes

We track 46 ex-Malalas — young people who passed through our adolescent programme and remain in contact with Cigarra. **80.4% went on to study or are studying today; 19.6% did not continue.** Among those who continued, the highest level reached so far breaks down as follows:

Technical qualification		48.6%
University degree		21.6%
Secondary school completed		18.9%
Technologist qualification		10.8%

Self-reported by alumni in contact with the foundation, 2026. It is a partial cohort, not a controlled study — we report it because it is the most honest measure we currently hold, and because strengthening this tracking is one of our priorities.

I joined Cigarra in 2008, a six-month-old baby. It became my second home. I learned the violin and the piano, and there I discovered the theatre and singing. In 2025 I won a scholarship to study Performing Arts at Universidad Sergio Arboleda.

Alisson Damara Zapata Melgar · with Cigarra 2008–2024

I arrived in 2006, aged two. Music is where I found meaning; I played a lead part in the foundation's orchestra. I failed the university entrance exam the first time and did not give up. Today I am in my third semester of Fine Arts at UNIMINUTO.

Edwin Santiago Chávez Romero · with Cigarra 2006–2022



Alisson on her secondary-school graduation day, 2024.

Cigarra was, is and will remain a fundamental part of my story. The day we have children, we will bring them here too.

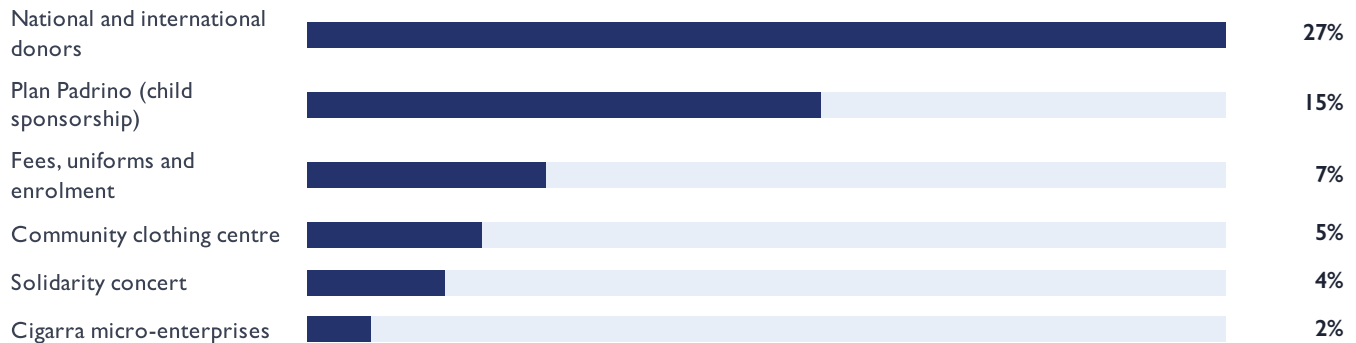
Yorlandis Paredes García · joined 2004, now a nurse

SUSTAINABILITY

Where the money comes from — and where it does not

Cigarra is financed entirely by donations and by the small enterprises it runs itself. We charge no family for a place.

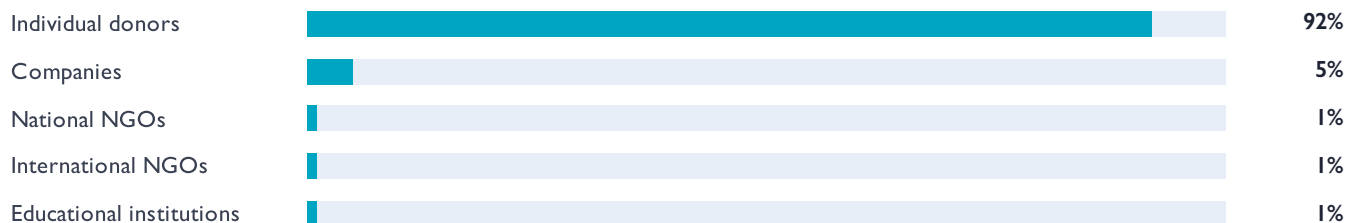
Recurring sources cover 60% of operating costs



The remaining 40% is the problem we are asking funders to help solve

The other 40% has been covered year after year by extraordinary, non-recurring support — a one-off gift, an unusually good year at the clothing centre, a single concert. It has kept the doors open, and it is not a financial base. Our priority is not to grow quickly; it is to move a meaningful share of that 40% onto recurring footing, so that a hard year does not become a year in which children lose their place.

Who supports us



92% of our allies are individuals, most of them Plan Padrino sponsors. That breadth is a strength — and a concentration risk. Institutional and corporate funding is where we are deliberately under-built.

Partners and networks

Current partners

Microsoft · Saint George School (Colegio San Jorge de Inglaterra) · Almacenes Éxito · Permoda · Makro · Aqualogic · Opperar · ABACO food bank

Networks

Bogotá District Secretariat for Social Integration · Fundación Éxito alliance network for early-childhood nutrition and development

Historic supporters

World Food Programme · Servienda · IRT, United Kingdom · FUMDIR · Médecins Sans Frontières · TECHO · an anonymous international donor supporting Cigarra continuously since 2003

Recognition

2013 — FUMDIR–SENA award · 2009 — community recognition award

GOVERNANCE

Who runs Cigarra, and how we account for money

Leadership

Dr. Carolyn Acosta Allen — Founder and Director

Esperanza Duque Castro — Administrator

Cristina Parra — Social Worker

Legal standing

Colombia	Fundación Cigarra, non-profit foundation NIT 830.121.170-4
United States	501(c)(3) public charity EIN 68-0505337
Transparency	Candid / GuideStar Platinum Seal #8056671 Listed on Charity Navigator Benevity Causes ID 840-680505337
Tax deductibility	Gifts are deductible in Colombia and in the United States

Our team

Area	Men	Women	Total
Administration	3	11	14
Teaching staff	6	10	16
Maintenance	2	0	2
General services	1	1	2
Food service	0	4	4
Security	2	0	2
Total staff	14	26	40

65% of our staff are women. Several are former participants, and many have served the foundation for more than ten years — continuity that matters enormously to children who need adults who stay.

How we work with funders

- **Restricted funds are tracked separately.** We can operate a dedicated cost centre or bank account for a grant, and report against it.
- **Reporting on your schedule.** Narrative and financial reports with supporting documentation — invoices, payroll, attendance registers and photographs.
- **Tranched disbursement.** We are willing to receive funds in instalments released against approved reports.
- **Site visits are welcome,** announced or not. The best due diligence on Cigarra is an afternoon on the premises.

Our values

Human quality — every child is heard and valued. **Collaborative work** — together we achieve more than alone. **A positive, welcoming environment** — safety, respect and warmth. **Peaceful conflict resolution** — differences handled through dialogue, never violence. **Leading by example** — children learn more from what they see than from what they hear.

WAYS TO GIVE

What support looks like

Sponsor a child — Plan Padrino

Sponsorship covers a child's education, meals and materials. Sponsors receive a six-monthly progress report on the child they support, a six-monthly activity bulletin and an annual donation certificate.

Plan	USD	Colombian pesos	Covers
Monthly	\$20	COP 65.000	1 child
Six months	\$103	COP 330.000	1 child
Annual	\$203	COP 650.000	1 child
Gold	\$375	COP 1.200.000	2 children
Platinum	\$515	COP 1.650.000	3 children
Ultra	\$656	COP 2.100.000	4 children

USD figures converted at COP 3,202.79 per US dollar (official rate, 30 August 2026). Amounts in pesos are fixed; the dollar equivalent moves with the exchange rate.

Fund a project

Six costed projects — nutrition, facility safety, a second floor for the library and classrooms, a covered multipurpose court, and a community mural — are set out in our **Project Portfolio**, from \$2,498 to \$71,344. Each has quotations, deliverables and a reporting plan.

Corporate partnership

Employee giving and matching (we are registered with Benevity, ID 840-680505337), workplace volunteering, in-kind donations, and our children's Christmas *novena* repertoire performed at your offices.

Volunteer

We need medical consultations, teaching, social work, gardening and trades. Remote skilled volunteering — translation, design, data, grant writing — is equally welcome.

In-kind

Clothing in good condition, household goods and unexpired non-perishable food. Please contact us to arrange delivery.

Contact

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Puertas del Paraíso, 2026.