



La Red

When Ivet Castro was first invited to a La Red Juvenil training event by a friend, she was excited about getting the kind of training she had never received in her own youth group. Ivet had been an elected youth leader as a teenager in her home church, but had been nervous and unsure what she was supposed to do. With around 95% of the world's trained youth leaders living and working in North America, the monthly meetings with other Ecuadorian leaders were a totally new experience for her.

Ivet attended an entire year of La Red's leadership training before Russ Cline, the founder of the program, asked for volunteers for the annual National Youth Workers' Convention. She became a volunteer for the next two Conventions, getting more and more involved with the training and equipping of youth leaders. In 1999, she joined the La Red staff full time, and today she is the Director of La Red and part of Youth World's management team.

Now helping to guide and administer the program, Ivet hopes that La Red can be a bridge between churches, between ministries, and between youth leaders and their pastors. La Red Juvenil (which in Spanish means "The Youth Network") brings together national youth workers, most of whom are volunteers, for classes, fellowship, and worship through programs like the School of Youth Ministry and the National Youth Workers' Convention. This is all a part of training and caring for these leaders as they *learn* how to minister to the youth in their own church communities and as they *go forth* to do just that.

La Red is a ministry of Youth World that exists to identify, train, equip and network national youth leaders throughout Latin America.



Filling a Hole

For over 14 years, La Red has focused on youth ministry leadership development, teaching people both how to be leaders, and how to work with youth. As Ivet puts it, they are "filling a hole" in the national church. Because there has never been a major focus on youth ministry training in Ecuador, many churches and pastors are find that they do not know what youth ministry really is, nor how to effectively reach young people. "Pastors want to know your [quantitative] accomplishments. What you are doing, who you are." Through their ongoing relationships with youth leaders, La Red helps youth leaders focus instead on building relational



La Red director Ivet Castro

ministries, knowing and understanding the youth to whom they teach, disciple, and minister.

La Red offers specific training and tools for leaders that they can truly use in ministry. Gustavo and his wife Veronica are two children's/youth workers who have been through the La Red School of Youth Ministry and helped as volunteers for the National Youth Workers' Convention. Gustavo had heard about La Red in 1997, and got involved with their training programs as soon as he became a leader in his own church. What he says that La Red gave him was the very ability to really work with Youth: "They prepared me to serve."



Youth Leaders at La Red's 2009 National Youth Workers' Convention

Gustavo says he learned realistic and practical tools for ministry, like how to develop a team in his own church to help and support the ministry. He can rely on his leadership team not just to help him, but to also be a part of really building relationships with the youth. He also says that because of having a functional team, which can be a rarity in this hierarchical culture, he no longer thinks "I'm the leader, I know best." He is open to accepting help, just as he is able to give it. Ivet and the La Red team have been excited to see the leadership

team that Gustavo has built, and Gustavo is excited to see various members recognizing the calling that God is placing on their lives.

Having attended the 2007 Convention with Gustavo and then the School of Youth Ministry, Veronica is able to see her own growth in ministry. The teachers at the La Red School, she says, complement the leaders who come to learn. They made her feel supported and understood, and helped her to become a much more effective. She says the School gave her tools to better serve the kids, especially those she would have previously considered "difficult." She says she has learned to "speak their language" in a way that her local church was not equipped to train her to do. "La Red," she says "es un bendición." Simply put, "La Red is a blessing!"

Making Connections

La Red is just one of the branches of Youth World, which means they are often blessed by tapping into the resources of other areas, like Youth World's training and retreat center, Hacienda El Refugio. But one of the best resources that La Red is able to provide to the youth leaders is *other leaders*. This past October, for example, Gustavo and Veronica put on a youth event at their church, bringing in a guest speaker as well as worship band Gedeón, both because of connections made through their participation in the School of Youth Ministry. That is exactly what the La Red staff and Ivet want. "They don't have to ask us [to run every event]. They have those connections already." Because of this network of youth leaders, the resources are available to offer concerts, seminars, and all kinds of

events simply by working together. These connections are also a support network for the leaders themselves. Veronica describes the way that friends from the School of Leaders have become almost like a family, sending messages to each other and maintaining an atmosphere of care for each other.

Walking Alongside

Like all of the ministry areas of this particular International Teams ministry, the focus is on youth. La Red's specific goals, however, are to focus on, connect with, and care for youth *leaders*. Gustavo, for example, knew he had a passion for youth. But it was at the Convention that he was able to recognize the Call of God to work in youth ministry full-time. His friends and mentors at La Red helped him make this a reality as he took the step of faith of giving up his marketing job with corporate advancement opportunities to enter both seminary and youth ministry as a career.

Though those particular hurdles are over for him, Ivet still wants to stay connected with Gustavo and Veronica. They maintain a friendship as they grow together and build each other up. La Red is not simply about teaching classes and pushing people out the door, but about supporting them and creating a continued environment of care, covering them in the love of Christ as they go forward in ministry.



Gustavo and Veronica at the National Youth Workers' Convention

Prayer

Wisdom, discernment, and sensitivity to listen to the voice of God, and to be able to give support to the leaders in training.

Brand new seminar being offered to youth leaders in Quito, School of Short-term Mission, starting on February 6. We're asking God to move leaders to come and that they would be encouraged, given fresh vision and passion for ministry to young people and equipped to serve, lead and minister.

If you are led by God to give to the ministry of Youth World (we do have some big needs) you can do so online at <https://www.iteams.org/give/> from the USA or http://www.iteams.ca/give_teams.php from Canada (be sure to designate Youth World or La Red... your choice).

+ Have you checked out our website lately? www.youthworld.org.ec