

1.4. WHEN QUALITATIVE APPROACHES WORK BEST

HOGAR DE CRISTO ARGENTINA



How this story represents an international-local faith partnership in MEAL



International element

International research collaboration between Argentinian Catholic university, British university, and local Catholic NGO network



Local faith element

Evaluation of a programme run by local Catholic NGO network that provides an integral response to problematic drug consumption



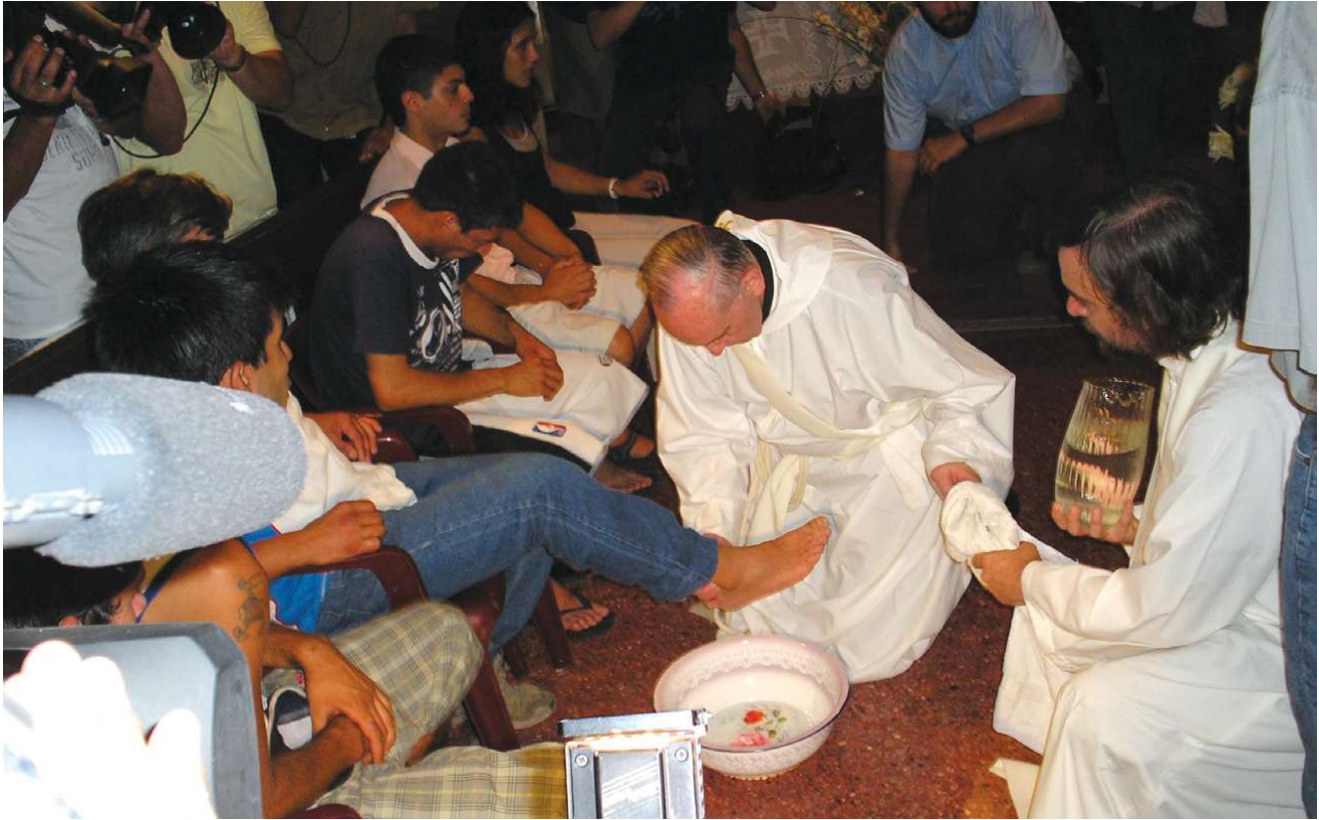
Project country

Argentina



Website

<http://hogardecristo.org.ar/>



The organisation and activities

Hogar de Cristo (Home of Christ) is an Argentinian Catholic faith-based federation of 190 neighbourhood centres that provide an integral response to drug addiction. It started with three neighbourhood centres created by Catholic priests in Buenos Aires' informal settlements in 2008. The federation is not centrally managed but takes a localised approach by incorporating organisations that already work in vulnerable neighbourhoods and decide to adopt the federation's methods. Hogar de Cristo receives financial support from the national drug prevention and assistance agency,

and some of its associated organisations, which include the CAF Development Bank of Latin America and Caritas Argentina, amongst others. Its neighbourhood centres offer meals and showers, group meetings, therapy sessions, recreational and artistic activities, training programmes, and childcare. Hogar de Cristo also has farms which serve as additional spaces for inclusion and recovery as well as homes to support the reintegration process.

The guiding principles of Hogar de Cristo are to 'welcome life as it comes,' to create a community, and to appreciate the uniqueness of each person and their path to recovery. The federation seeks

to provide an integral response in situations of social vulnerability and the problematic consumption of drugs, with a focus not just on the addiction itself, but also on underlying and related social problems, such as social exclusion, unemployment, precarious housing, violence, and health inequalities. The response of Hogar de Cristo is based on the Catholic faith and deeply rooted within local communities. Those working for the organisation have a social or religious vocation, which is reflected in how they view themselves and the people they work with, whom they do not simply want to 'help' but consider as brothers and sisters they want to enter into communion with.

Impact evaluation approach and rationale

Development of impact evaluation

The evaluation was part of a research collaboration between the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and the University of Bath (UK). A researcher from the University of Bath contributed to the development of the theoretical framework of the project, which was based on Catholic social teaching and the experience of Hogar de Cristo. Her colleague from the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina received training as a lead evaluator for the QuIP (Qualitative Impact Protocol) approach, which was developed by a professor of economics at the University of Bath. The researcher in Argentina, leading the evaluation in Buenos Aires, also provided the connection to Hogar de Cristo, which she had first come into contact with 10 years ago. While organisations usually contract services to carry out impact evaluations following the QuIP approach, in the case of this project, the researchers contacted

Hogar de Cristo due to their academic interest in the topic. The partnership between Hogar de Cristo and the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina includes an agreement that allows the university to share its research findings in the form of academic papers.

Due to the nature of the project, as an academic-practitioner collaboration with a faith element, translation between academic and practitioner terminologies, as well as between secular and faith-based concepts was constantly required. Hogar de Cristo was actively involved in the design phase of the project, which lasted four months. As QuIP evaluations use a theory of change to inform the coding process, the researchers started by creating a theory of change for Hogar de Cristo in a collaborative, participatory process. The evaluator conducted interviews with 18 people in the organisation (including the priests who had started the organisation and people working in the neighbourhood centres), in addition to observing activities at the neighbourhood centres, analysing relevant documents, and speaking with programme participants and government officials. The evaluator then developed separate theory of change modules for each of the impact dimensions, as they emerged from the interviews. Initial results were discussed with people working in the community centres prior to the main data collection phase.

Data collection

The evaluation aimed to gain a greater understanding of how Hogar de Cristo contributes to the human development and social inclusion of socially vulnerable people with drug addictions based on participants' narratives. It tried to capture the multidimensionality of the

organisation's work, by measuring its impact not just on abstinence or other indicators of drug consumption, but on multiple life dimensions, including satisfaction of basic needs, health, relationships, legal situation, education, and work. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions in the Hogar de Cristo neighbourhood centres in Buenos Aires. Using semi-structured questionnaires, participants were asked what they believed to be the most important changes in different areas of their lives, covering the six dimensions identified in the theory of change, and their perceptions of the drivers of those changes. While interviews

helped capture personal stories of change, the focus groups provided insight on how Hogar de Cristo's work compares with other forms of treatment and on changes in relationships in the neighbourhood. The QuIP approach is designed to be a transparent method that provides a strict protocol for data collection and analysis. The method notably tries to avoid confirmation bias (whereby participants may feel bound to only relate positive information or attribute change to the organization being evaluated) through blindfolding. The researchers could not apply double blindfolding so that neither participants nor evaluators are aware of the purpose of



the interviews. Rather, they adopted single blindfolding meaning interview participants were not aware that the purpose of the interviews was to evaluate the organisation.

Data analysis

The QuIP approach includes precise methods for coding data, whereby evaluators write up responses and then code them, identifying causal changes by starting with the final outcome and looking for drivers of change. Following that, evaluators analyse to what extent the change is attributed to the work of the organisation - which could be explicit or implicit - or due to other factors. The theory of change is central to the coding process. For example, if the organisation was not explicitly mentioned in the interview, but the driver of change was included in the theory of change, this is coded as implicit attribution.

All data was analysed by the research team. Hogar de Cristo participated in the interpretation of the qualitative results and the identification of lessons learned and public policy implications. The research team held three online workshops to discuss the results, which helped them to interpret the results and obtain additional insights. The QuIP approach aggregates the results of the coding process and presents the results in tables and causal map diagrams. For the purpose of this evaluation, the research team used the QuIP protocols to analyse the coded data and present the aggregated data in tables. However, their evaluation report includes a more in-depth and traditional qualitative analysis of the participant narratives and made extensive use of exact quotes, so as to describe in greater detail the diverse pathways to recovery and the connections across dimensions,

and to allow people to hear the voices of the programme participants. From this experience, the team came to the conclusion that qualitative approaches are particularly valuable for the evaluation of social interventions that respond to complex or sensitive problems in populations experiencing multiple deprivations.

Accountability and learning

The team of evaluators published one academic journal article on the project's theoretical framework in 2019 (prior to the data collection phase). The article outlines Hogar Cristo's approach and how the evaluation was conceptualised. More academic papers are planned. The team has also compiled a final report which will be shared with the organisation and the wider public. While the findings of the evaluation could not be shared with the interview participants due to the coronavirus pandemic, the team is currently considering the organisation of an outdoor event to discuss the findings with programme participants.

Lessons learned

Qualitative approaches

One key point of learning from the project is that credible impact evidence can be obtained using qualitative data, and can be especially useful for understanding complex issues, which would have been otherwise difficult to capture through purely quantitative tools.

Qualitative studies are often more in line with the beliefs of faith-based organisations which may be reluctant to adopt purely quantitative approaches out of a concern about reducing people and their rich, unique experiences to numbers.

Language matters

Language matters in academic-practitioner and faith-secular partnerships. For Hogar de Cristo, it was imperative that the academics they partnered with for the purpose of the evaluation understood their method, which is reflected in the language used. For example, this included not calling participants “beneficiaries” but rather people accompanied by the neighbourhood centres. Working in such partnerships requires sensitivity to these nuances and a willingness to act as a bridge-builder between different sub-cultures.

Recommended resources

Bath Social and Development Research Ltd.
<https://bathsdr.org/>

J. Copestake, M. Morsink, and F. Remnant (2019):
Attributing development impact. Practical
Action Publishing. Individual book chapters can
be at this link: <https://bathsdr.org/about-the-quip/quip-casebook-attributing-development-impact/#:~:text=Attributing%20Development%20Impact%20is%20based,we%20learned%20from%20each%20project>

Severine Deneulin and Ann Mitchell (2019):
Spirituality and impact evaluation design:
The case of an addiction recovery faith-based
organisation in Argentina. HTS Teologiese
Studies / Theological Studies, Vol. 75, No.
4. <https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/5482>

Una evaluación de impacto integral de los
centros barriales del Hogar de Cristo. <http://uca.edu.ar/es/facultad-de-ciencias-economicas/una-evaluacion-de-impacto-integral-de-los-centros-barriales-del-hogar-de-cristo>