

History Highlights



Set the Captives Free

When visitors going down to Mexico heard Pastor Von mention all the ways that Americans could be scammed by the Mexican kids, they quickly realized that the little cherubs they had pictured might not be angels. Indeed, some of these kids were later picked up by the police for serious crimes, minor offenses, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time – a dangerous situation when your country considers you guilty until proven innocent.

By the mid-1990s Von knew several kids at Tijuana's juvenile jail, which led him to begin a weekly ministry there. He and his crew brought games, candy, caring, a Biblical lesson, and some basic medical care, treating athlete's foot, scabies, and minor skin infections. Although technically the jail was for ages 12 and older, it was not uncommon to see boys under 12. Most of the 275 to 340 inmates were boys, although there were usually a few girls housed separately. Some inmates were in their 20s – if they were well behaved, they could finish their sentences there.

When Von grew tired of the bureaucracy of the jail and passed the ministry to Aaron, Aaron decided that since we couldn't take these boys to camp, we would bring camp to them by hosting a retreat in the jail, complete with games, a speaker, music, and

food – the only thing missing was the sleep-away aspect. One of the officials specifically asked Aaron to include the boys who never had visitors. A few years later, Carlos began to work at the jail as well. As an ex-convict, he understood being behind bars. Carlos focused on Bible study and expanded the retreats. Another man began to help him, and Robin and another lady began working consistently with the girls.

Several years ago Mexico instituted some judicial reforms, among them the presumption of innocence. Some of those in jail had never been sentenced, and some were accused of crimes without witnesses or evidence. Many Mexican jails released such inmates, and now the population at the juvenile jail hovers around 30. Under these improved conditions, the need for Spectrum to provide medical care dropped dramatically, and although there are fewer kids, more than half of them participate in the weekly Bible study and listen to the team share about Jesus, who sets us free from our captivity to sin.

Carlos and Robin try to maintain contact with the youth when they leave the jail. Although some have gone back into the system, they have also seen people set free and prepared for a life of service, like Ricardo, who serves in a church plant, and Angela, who attends Bible school.

