



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Projects from around the world](#) - Sendas, a dispensary in Buenos Aires

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November 24, 2007, a neighborhood gathering took place in Los Ceibos shanty-town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, for the opening of "Sendas", a center for primary health care and the prevention of malnutrition. The Diocesan Bishop blessed the premises and evoked the memory of St Josemaria, founder of Opus Dei. "St Josemaria," he said, "was always very keen to help the needy. I am grateful for the silent, effective and fruitful work of this charitable center, which is carried out as a result of St Josemaria's teachings and the generosity of many people."

The work of the new health center extends to several other shanty-towns in the same area, all characterized by poverty and a rapidly increasing migrant population. Some of these settlements are built on rubbish-tips, meaning that any available water-supply is contaminated and the land is infertile. Most of the shacks are made of corrugated iron, and people live in the most precarious conditions.

The Sendas clinics specialize in childcare, basic clinical medicine, prevention of malnutrition, psychiatric support, social care, and virtues and values training for adolescents and mothers. Sendas also runs a craft workshop and a free pharmacy.

For some years back a group of health professionals and medical students, from all different specializations, came to a place near Los Ceibos every Saturday to do voluntary work. To begin with they just had the use of one room, but the project grew and so did the numbers of patients; the work done by the volunteers increased and donations kept coming in. They managed to construct a small building about three kilometers away from their original post, at Los Ceibos itself, where the need was greatest. There was neither drinking-water, drains, nor gas-supply, still less any kind of health insurance or medical cover. Every patient was suffering not only from dire poverty but the lack of spiritual resources.

Monica and Haydee, who live locally, are in charge of the cleaning in Sendas and

look after the plants which the locals have contributed to brighten up the dispensary and its little garden.

Every Saturday three of the neighbors help to transport the boxes of medical supplies from Buenos Aires. The people who live closest to Sendas take charge of guarding the building. Since November 2007 the number of patients has quadrupled and there are many different activities on other days of the week. Marcela offered to teach weaving; they also began giving talks for young people about human and Christian virtues and values.

After reading about Sendas on the internet, a dentist contacted them to say that he had been looking for a worthwhile voluntary project to contribute to. He visited the dispensary and as well as donating money to set up a dental clinic, he offered to come and work there every Saturday with his wife, who is a child dentist, and other colleagues.

The Sendas project inspires students, young workers, businessmen and medical staff to come and help. The standing advice is: "Come once, because we know you'll come again." The head of public relations of a firm that contributed seventy per cent of the money for the building, came to the opening ceremony and offered to donate the wool for the weaving workshop every month.

On one of the walls in the entrance hangs a picture of St Josemaria, as a sign of gratitude and of the devotion to him that has taken root in people of the district.