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Social cohesion in a multicultural neighborhood

Braval, a social project inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría, seeks to help young immigrants in Barcelona, Spain, integrate into society and overcome employment difficulties and marginalization. An account of Braval's inaugural year follows.

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Victor, a 12-year-old Peruvian, wants to be a mechanic or doctor. Youssef, a Moroccan of 13, wants to play with the national soccer team of his country, where he would like to return each summer. Braval is directed at young immigrants who, like Victor and Youssef, have aspirations of improving themselves and turning their dreams to reality.

Braval is a social project of the NGO, Iniciatives de Solidaritat i Promoció, and is funded by the Raval Solidari Foundation, a non-profit set up on the occasion of the centennial of St. Josemaría Escrivá's birth (2002). Braval works on providing socio-educative support to youths and helping them become part of the workforce. Its objectives are to promote social cohesion, fight against marginalization, and foster the incorporation of immigrants into society.

El Raval of Barcelona

“I am not one of those people who are looking for trouble. I don't hang around with the kids on the street, because they can get me in messes,” explains Jorge, a 13-year-old Dominican, referring to the streets of El Raval, which can be dangerous for boys his age. El Raval is an old neighborhood situated in the center of Barcelona. It is the doorway for many of the thousands of immigrants who have come to the city in recent years. Around 42,000 people live in the neighborhood, of which slightly more than a third are of foreign origin. The district is splintered into ghettos with people of very different nationalities with difficulties of all types, including a high rate of unemployment.

Braval is trying to contribute to a change of course for El Ravel. In the first year of operation nearly 200

boys from twenty different countries participated in Braval's programs. The center is open to the whole neighborhood, for people of any origin or creed. It seeks to have a particular impact with recent immigrants, who are the most likely to become marginalized. In fact, 70% of the young men coming to Braval are children of immigrants.

The programs

All Braval's programs are directed by education professionals, with the support of a large number of volunteers. Braval's workers are aware that the project was started to commemorate the centennial of St. Josemaría's birth, and they are consciously trying to carry out the teaching of the founder of Opus Dei, that each Christian should be "one more among his fellow men, sharing their way of life, their joys and happiness; working with them,

loving the world and all the good things that exist in it."

Braval began its activities with a multi-ethnic sports program, because of the importance that sports have in bringing about social cohesion. Playing sports together unites intentions, creates friendships and teaches people how to live in a healthy way. Other educational programs of various lengths are also offered during the summer. With these programs, the sponsors of the project seek to motivate youths in their studies, by inculcating a positive vision of work and an eagerness to achieve and to serve. Josep Masabeu, director of Braval, explains that Braval's volunteers "accompany and follow up with the students so that they really get something out of the program and so that they can be effectively introduced to the workforce."

Inauguration of the new premises

More than 200 people, mainly families of the neighborhood, attended the inauguration of Braval's activities on June 5, 2002. The President of the autonomous government of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol, stated that "integration is accomplished much more easily as soon as a person coming to Catalonia has a little training and a job, and that is what this NGO is doing." Cardinal Ricard Maria Carles, archbishop of Barcelona, blessed the new premises.
