

## **“No one had shown concern for their situation”**

In the Raval neighborhood of Barcelona, half of the people are immigrants and unemployment is over 30%. Nuria recounts what she is doing at Terral to help as many of these people as possible.

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Nuria is the first face that parents and young women see when they enter the door of Terral, a center

dedicated to offering social and educational assistance and facilitating equal opportunities for young women and families from the neighborhood of Raval in Barcelona.

Nuria spends much of her day working in administrative tasks, but she tries to go a step further and become well acquainted with all the families. She is the one who registers the girls when they come with their families to take part in the programs at Terral. “This a good opportunity to inform them about our activities and also for me to take an interest in the families, since I think that what makes our program so special is that the families themselves are an important part of Terral,” she explains.

But now, with the health crisis due to COVID-19, the help offered is not face-to-face but by phone. “Each week I speak with all the families of

Terral. Right from the start of the confinement, I was well informed about their situation and needs, whether material or psychological.

“In speaking with so many families and getting to know their situation more deeply, and their often precarious job situation, with little in the way of economic resources, I began to realize that some of them didn’t have enough to eat. So I helped the families get in contact with the state’s social services and Montalegre Social Action.” Terral and Montalegre carry out their activities near the church of Our Lady of Montalegre, site of the old Home of Charity, entrusted to Opus Dei in 1967. Braval, a nearby center for young men with aims similar to Terral’s, assists in the distribution of food to the families in need.

The most pressing needs now “are requests for food and help in paying an urgent bill.”

The educational support that Terral ordinarily offers has been more difficult to keep going during the crisis. “These families have a cell phone, but normally few have internet in their home. So some of the girls have had problems following the classes.” Terral continues doing all it can to accompany the girls who normally attend the center by providing tutorials online with the help of volunteers.

Ana is a 5th grade girl who attends activities at Terral. Her parents, Pedro and Isabel, are not well off. Pedro works in hotel security in Barcelona and his salary has also been greatly reduced, although he has recently found a new job. Isabel suffers from a chronic illness and

can only work in part-time jobs, when she can find them.

Nuria spoke with the family about their precarious situation during the confinement. “We got in contact with Montalegre Social Action, and in a few days we provided them with the food they needed most urgently,” Nuria says. Ana’s family was very grateful since “no one had shown concern for their situation.”

Last March 16th the Terral telephone number was transferred to Nuria’s phone so that the families could let those in charge of the center and the volunteers know about their needs. The calls and messages have been arriving non-stop.

30 primary school girls and 31 secondary school girls are enrolled in Terral’s programs. Nuria calls all of them each week and from the first days of confinement it was clear that, besides the health emergency from

Covid-19, the economic situation of these families was very problematic.

Most of the mothers work in domestic service and many do not have immigration papers. While many of the fathers work in construction and hotels. The pandemic has led to many of them being affected by the right of employers to decrease salary and lay off workers with subsequent compensation, which up to now few of them have been able to collect. Their situation is aggravated by the fact that families who have a right to this cannot solicit any other type of compensation.

There are many stories like that of the family of Camille. She has a brother 19 years old with a severe learning disability. In July the lease for their apartment expires and they are on the waiting list to move to social housing. Of the four in the

family, only the father is now working, “so we are going to try to help them,” Nuria says with a determined look.

The Terral Center opened in 2002, for the centenary of the birth of Saint Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei.

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