

TEOFILA'S STORY

Teofila is thirteen years old, and has lived at Talita Cumi for two years now. She is a very humble child with good character. She was born in Tinquipaya, in the department of Potosi. Potosi is one of the poorest departments in Bolivia. Teofila came to the department of Santa Cruz two and a half years ago. She makes the following comments on her life:

The truth is that I really haven't suffered any maltreatment by my parents or anyone in my family. I remember that I was born in Potosi, and grew up with my parents together with my two brothers. They were very good with me, but I saw that we had few resources; well, really, the majority of the people in my village had scarce resources.

But one day my cousin Zenaida, she talked with my dad so that she could bring me to the city of Santa Cruz to work. She said that in that city there was better opportunities to earn good money, and in this way she could help my parents economically. Truth was, I didn't like the idea, because I loved my parents a lot and didn't want to leave them.

So I came to the city to live with my cousin and started to work, selling bottled medicine in a little stand in the street. But before this my cousin had promised to pay me 400 bolivianos (\$50) a month. I remember that I worked for her a year, and in all that time she only paid me 50 bolivianos, because she was the kind of woman that spent everything.

One day, without me realizing it, my cousin just left and went back to Potosi without telling me, and I was there alone with her brother. He started to hit me a lot, until the woman who owned the house where we lived told me to run away, because she could see that he mistreated me a lot. So I did what she said and escaped. I went to the house of a woman I knew and asked her to give me work, which she did, but she never paid me either.

I had to leave that house as well, and went looking for my cousin to see if she had gotten back but I didn't find her. A friend of mine let me stay in her house for a night and I told her everything that had happened to me. My friend found a woman that worked for the Prefecture and told me she could help me.

The next day that woman took me to the Prefecture's office where they help minors, and they guided me to the home Talita Cumi, and since then I've been here.

The truth is that I like living in the home because I feel fine; I feel safe and protected and above all because I am studying at school. But because I love my family I would like very much to return to Potosi, to be with my parents. This would be my first big wish. The second would be to be able to finish my studies,

all the way until college, and be a great professional someday. The final wish would be to have my own house where I could live together with my family.