

# MIGUEL NUEVEZ LOZADA

AGE 21, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

**Ever since I can remember, I've loved to draw** // It's been my passion. In elementary school, I would draw for hours in my notebook. But when I got older, I started hanging out on the street. I soon joined a gang and began to use art in a destructive manner.

My gang members and I would skateboard together, and late at night we would paint graffiti on the walls of deserted buildings around the city, which was against the law. The more time I spent with the gang, the less I cared about my school work. Finally, I just dropped out.

Last year, I heard about a program called *Ocúpate* (Get Busy!) that's run by a former gang leader. I decided to give it a try because I heard it helped people like me turn their lives around. That's just what it did.

I attended the classes and learned a lot about who I am and what I want to do with my life. Before, I was uncomfortable around most people. This program taught me to be more tolerant and to put myself in other people's shoes.



**Above:** One of the many educational postcards Miguel has designed to be distributed free to young people in Mexico City. Before joining GE's life skills program, he was a member of a youth gang that painted graffiti on buildings around the city. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIGUEL NUEVEZ LOZADA

Through the classes, I also gained more confidence in my skills as an artist. I realized I wanted to use my artistic talents in a good way and not waste them on vandalism. I now spend my time designing educational postcards that I hand out for free to young people on the street.

My cards deal with a lot of issues that all of us need to know about—like how to have positive relationships and how to stay healthy. This was my idea. I draw the illustrations on one side, and my friend Erika helps me write the messages on the other.

Some of my other cards talk about the right to have personal dignity and how important it is to take advantage of opportunities around us. Some deal with drug and alcohol addiction and how to get help. Others offer tips on how to

stop sexual abuse. One of them asks, "Do you know how you become infected with a sexual disease?" Art, for me, is an important way to communicate with my peers and also to share information. I've dropped out of my gang now because I don't feel I belong there anymore. And I'm returning to school. I want to be a professional painter. After all, it's my passion. **Y**

*In 2006, Miguel joined *Ocúpate*, a life skills and employability program for youth gang members in Mexico City. An IYF initiative supported by the GE Foundation, the program targets underserved young people in Mexico, India, Poland and Hungary. Founded in 2004, the GE Foundation Life Skills for Employability program has reached more than 5,000 young people, aiming to positively impact their future academic and career paths.*

