

Jóvenes Adelante Graduate Joins Queretaro Oncology Hospital Team

Andrea Daniela Colunga Navarro learned at 12 years of age what it meant to pull together as a family, when her father was seriously injured in a fall from the third floor, while working on their home. Her family's experience of caring, and her father's unwavering optimism during his 18-month rehabilitation, taught her the power of grit, perseverance, and hard work in reaching one's goals. Her desire at this young age to care for others, and to ease their suffering, propelled her into medical school and then into Biomedical Engineering. In 2018, Andrea Daniela became the first member of her family to graduate from university.

Over coffee, Andrea Daniela tells me about her five years of university. She shares how she used to worry -- as many students do -- that she was drawing too heavily on the family's resources for her studies, and that she was putting the education of her younger siblings at risk. Leaving home to pursue a program offered only in Querétaro outstripped her parents' budget. And as a young woman in a male-dominated career, finding housing and safe transportation for late nights on campus were especially costly. Fortunately, she discovered Jóvenes Adelante and as she entered second year, she had the support she needed.

With the financial burden lifted, Andrea Daniela embraced her chosen field with enthusiasm. She found her coursework stimulating and exciting, with "so many doors open, and in every area, you can help people!" After graduation, she immediately accepted a position at Querétaro's new Oncology Hospital where she is solely responsible for the effective use and maintenance of the equipment used in cancer treatment. She notes that her study of both English and German while at university have been very useful in understanding the highly technical equipment that is manufactured abroad and critical to patient care.



Andrea Daniela, fourth from right, with her team at work.

This is a story of a family dedicated to doing whatever it takes, overcoming life's obstacles to ensure that each of three children achieve academic credentials. Andrea Daniela's brother, two years younger, now studies Mechanical Engineering at university in San Miguel; her younger sister now lives with her in Querétaro, where she studies Financial Engineering.

Looking back, Andrea Daniela shares, “My father's struggle showed me the importance of medical assistance devices.” She goes on to explain, “I used to dream of making an exoskeleton, something my father could just step into that would make it possible for him to walk again.” Her sites are now set on a Masters’ degree in biomechanics, perhaps even a doctoral degree, from the Netherlands, Germany or Canada.

Andrea Daniela credits her mentor Diana Ellsworth -- whom she refers to as a dear friend today – as well as JA’s overall program, with enabling her to achieve her dream: “I know I would not be here without Jóvenes Adelante – the scholarship and the support from Diana made everything possible. Now I know that anything is possible.” And it’s clear that she means it. Throughout our conversation, she displayed such confidence and enthusiasm for her work; clearly, she is an asset to her workplace and for her future, the sky’s the limit!