Oral history interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón, March 15, 2022

Interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón

Date of Interview: March 15, 2022

Interviewers: Gabrielle Armstrong &Yarelis Marcial

YM-Yarelis Marcial Acevedo

00:00:00. --> 0:00:19

The “transcript” in Spanish… Okay, Perfect.

GA- Gabrielle Armstrong

0:00:23

Okay, for purposes of the recording and transcription, today is March 15, 2022 and we are here today starting up the Come Colegial interview. I am accompanied here by Yarelis Marcial and Mrs. Lucy Serrano and this speaker, Gabrielle Armstrong.

Well, the first part of the interview is focused more in how Com–how Come Colegial began. So I ask you, in what year did this adventure begin?

LS-Lucy Serrano

0:00:56

Look, this started in 2014.

GA

0:01:03

Oka, and… what inspired the creation of Come Colegial?

LS

0:01:09

Well look um, the creation of Come Colegial started with an undergraduate student of Psychology back then…her name is Fabiola Medina. She, along with a group of students, like three youngsters more, got to the task of making the first lunch. That she herself uh–right, she covered the cost. She got it–I remember she got it from Pollo Tropical and she also gave out flyers around campus. Because she um she–she saw the need of like, there WERE students that

were going hungry. In that moment a professor, um, sent me the information, doctor Victor Siberio, whom also was once Dean of Students on campus, he sent me the information. I was impressed, right, it impacted me, and I said “contra, I wanna talk with that student.” I sent her an email, she answered that same day. I had [actually] contacted her through Facebook. That day she answered and I told her “Mira, I like what you’re doing. I’d like to help you but first I’d like to meet up with you to see if we can–if your initiative we can make it–take it further, maybe a student association but I’d like to meet, right, to see if both of us are on the same channel. that um, we more or less have the same values, that well, I want to see what you want to make of this.”

She came, we met, we talked and decided the both of us that, yes, we can make it into a student association. Immediately, by–that day I communicated [better phrasing: got in touch?] with Social Activities, I verified what the procedure was, and with the students I already had, um, the friends she [Fabiola] had which helped with the lunch, we set to the task of completing then what was missing then it was around fiv–the main ones [she refers to a directive: VP, Presi, secretary etc].

GA

0:03:39

Mjm

LS

0:03:40

We needed two more students; it was her, a friend and her boyfriend and well, “let’s go get two more students that you know” and then well, I can stay with like six and you, whatever you decide–they were all in agreement. Immediately, the next day we did all the paperwork. Well, it was so fast that in one week we were able to uh, we inscribed the association. Immediately there we started–I remember that was for the august to December 2014 semester–we were immediately then accredited. For september we did a…all this by–we did our first meeting, to the university community um… to explain what we wanted to do, right, and our mission and purpose of Come Colegia. We did in in the Monzón building. I remember that for that activity, no one came.

GA

0:04:52

No one?

LS

0:04:53

Well, no one in terms of students; there were only the 5 students and me. Only one employee was there, whom was a professor and is the present Chancellor, doctor Agustín Rullán, who, on that time was the Dean of Engineering and that memo had been sent to everyone via cartero that he was the only one who got there. We gave him the presentation and he was 100% on board to help us, right, on everything that was possible for–because–yes, the labor and mission of Come Colegial impacted him and I'm gonna tell you something, he, right, from his different positions although he's always been involved since Come Colegial began, he has always been in administrative positions as Engineering Dean and now as Chancellor, he has always supported us. Bur apart from that, although no one else from the community went, I, through social media in that time, which really was facebook, but look, the support was incredible, both from students, personnel … They did not come in person to the meeting, but the support through social media and then to gather food was, the support was massive. Um… and I tell you, my office, I, all the archives were full of food. Of beans, rice, pasta, everything. I started to use my archives were full–like I say–

GA

0:06:28

Of food. (risa corta)

LS

0:06:29

--classified on the floor, my office was all full of boxes. Well, I had to then seek help of another peer, doctor Raul Machiavelli who was my director at the Office of Graduate Studies during that time. Um, that he's now Dean of Agricultural Science. My co-workers and well, the support was massive. We did a donation drive in Figuero–in the *placita de Chardón* and look, honestly, when I say that we didn't have space to store things, but then people started to get in touch, they started to donate and gift reusable plastic bags and we prepared for the first event that we did for like the–I'd say on like two weeks of having signed up the association, to start and hand out bags of groceries, we sent a cartero and we met in front of the *placita de Celis*, and there, the first students started to arrive, each with different stories of what led them to starve. They had food needs so that. And it was a success for the first semester. Would you believe we impacted 100 students?

GA

0:08:12

Wow

LS

0:08:14

A 100 students. And we've kept going until today. Um, impacting I'd say we've surpassed the thousand students that we have impacted because we're working–we work the three semesters; the two academic semesters and the summer sessions. So that we are always collaborating and whenever someone leaves, more donors, ponsors, companies join. In the beginning, what we only did was hand out bags of groceries and non perishables and as we have been evolving, we have been able to incorporate different activities.

GA

0:09:01

Yes, like I remember—

LS

0:09:04

The association boards [directives] pass by. Like I say, I started this with five students and 10 volunteers that we had to seek out friends of friends, of the ones that were–of those who had been, of who had been part of it back then the five students for the–for Come Colegial like–And today I can tell you that we have surpassed having 200 volunteer students. This has been a total success.

GA

0:09:34

Mjm

LS

0:09:35

Mjm and right now I have over 200 students that are the ones that help the ones who are members, who are the ones that help out in the different activities. Mjm.

GA

0:09:49

So then I ask you: I know the purpose, at least when Come Colegial began, was to give food and non perishables to students who were starving. But, has something in that purpose changed throughout the years?

LS

0:10:15

Well yes, it has changed because really the first thing was hand out non perishable food items, because the logistics to prepare warm meals was a bit complicated and well, we were also learning as we went along, about different laws and policies regarding everything that had to be with food distribution. In fact, from the beginning, that first semester, we were learning because um, then after the second year well, all–well, not everyone, but most of the students take the Food management class. I also got it–we have to get certified. I also get certified but um, to be up to date and do things correctly.

Um and like I tell you, as different companies, associations and people of the university come along, or off campus depending on the donor, well the hot lunches started coming along, the breakfasts and snacks. But right, we do that as long as we have a donor that is willing to collaborate. The cost of paying for the food. Now, from the beginning, when we started that first lunch which was for the second semester–it was for…yeah, on the first–it was on the first semester of having signed up Come Colegial, we started with a Civil grad student um, in that moment her husband was a chef and he saw us on social media and he got in touch that he wanted to start making hot lunches. He donated the first lunch of Come Colegial. I remember that it was pasta and we distributed it out of my office because we didn't, we didn't have an office, we didn't have storage. We did everything out of the Come Colegial facilities and the different *placitas*. Of the facilities, excuse me, of Graduate Studies and right, with the authorization of my, my supervisors and in different *placitas* and that's how we started with the chef. He was with us for around two years, because then he dedicated himself to other things n his professional career, but immediately thanks to a group of, a sorority of professors on campus who joined to do a activity with us that we started on, I don't remember the year, but we've done more than ten, we've done like 15, *Final Felices*, which is an event we do on the last day of class, or the first–or the day of review for the final tests.

And then um, we got the Chef of Gourmet Catering, um, Ángel Soto, and he is who has stayed with us, he's been with us working on the hot lunches for years–the majority of the hot lunches, others well according to the donor, like I say, prefer doing it through the cafeteria. But when they're companies a bit of process to pay an individual is a bit complicated, so that we have an

alternative. We have this chef that gives us a special price to Come Colegial, but if you decide to do it with another supplier there's no problem with us. So that most of our lunches are made by the chef Ángel Soto of Gourmet Catering and the other, well, through the campus cafeteria.

GA

0:14:05

I mean I love those alliances you've done with different local chefs or even the same cafeteria. Of all those alliances, you told me about the first chef who was with you for a couple of years. And–

LS

0:14:21

Yes, he—I don't remember his name but it was him. He was called Pierre, I don't remember the last name but I can get it to you later, and then we have Ángel Soto. Mjm.

GA

0:14:34

Mjm, then, apart from those first alliances you had with Pierre, for example, is there any other alliance you remember, that was really important or really *chula*?

LS

0:14:47

Well, look, they've all been like…they've all been very *chulas*, you get me. Like whenever we find a free lunch, we all celebrate because well, we do make hot dog sales–we did them at the beginning…different activities. Donu sales, things, right. But um…a lunch is costly, um, and we generally try to do them for 100 people minimum, but yes, I can say that at the beginn–when César Oscar Padilla was in the group, who was vice president and the second president was Diego… damn, I forgot his name, *si el me coge, me mata*, but I can also get it to you later.

GA

0:15:44

Ok

LS

0:15:45

Um, Diego and César were already on the second year of Come Colegial, right, and they through their friends of other associations they belonged to um, made the connection so that… I think it was called Sachs… Gold and Sachs [sic Goldman Sachs], I think it's called. It's a company that has to do with Accounting and investments, it's from Empresa (referring to the Major). I know they did a lot with Empresas [sic ADEM], but I know that it's Sachs… They're in New York and in other states or hellmann's… I can, you know I can find well, if you need the names details, I can find them for you because they're on the pictures on Come Colegial's page but from years ago. And can you believe that that company, and on the second year, donated a thousand hot lunches to us?

GA

0:16:44

Wow!

LS

0:16:45

For the first, for the first Happy Ending activity. That was, wow! We couldn't believe it and employees from the company came to participate in the event.

GA

0:17:00

They're a lot.

LS

0:17:02

Yes, no, a thousand lunches. But I can tell you that we handed them all out. All of them. Every single one. We did that event in the *placita de Chardón*, but most of them now in the–after the pandemic [LS's phone rings 17:21] Excuse me. Look, Ángel is calling me, the chef that has an activity today. Don't go.

GA

0:17:29

ok don't worry

LS

0:17:30

[Speaking on the phone call] Good morning, Ángel. *Buenas, 'tas bien?* Yes. I'm at the office. Ah, but I'm here, I'm right now on an online interview but the girls agreed to arrive at around 10:15. Joyce must be about to arrive. Yes, yes, no problem. *Dale*. Bye, thank you. [Hangs up phone call 18:00] Sorry, where did I leave off?

GA

0:18:05

Ay, we were talking about the thousand lunches Golden Sachs [sic Goldman Sachs] had donated and well that none went to the trash.

LS

0:18:14

Ah yes, well we started the first event we did for Happy Ending and after that one, other companies have joined in, like Boeing has done various activities with us. Dell, Abbott, a lot of times have done activities with us. Um, super–donors like Econo supermarkets joined, the brewery, Hewlett-Packard in Aguadilla. *Ay padre*, they're a lot, a lot of companies.

GA

0:18:53

Literally.

LS

0:18:55

Goya, um, Maga products in Sabana grande, Maga and Maga products from the farm in Sabana Grande. They're so many–ah, well that's another story, no? The Food Bank, but like I say, I have a lot. We have had more than 50, you know, um, constant–constant sponsors. Mjm. Nada, y'all go ahead and ask me.

GA

0:19:27

hehe, yes, soon I'll be done with my part and then my colleague will then follow.

LS

0:19:32

Ok

GA

0:19:33

Um, you when Come Colegial started back in 2014, did you think it was going to turn into something so big that now has even spread to the other campuses?

LS

0:19:41

Well, yes, I did think so and I would tell the students: "this, this is gonna be a *pequeño monstrito*." I always called it that and about the other campuses, I always had that, right, as the different directives passed by, well we had that in mind and we even started to make arrangements. Then when Gabriela was here, right now I can't remember the year, right, but after Diego, then was César as president, that right now César is here on campus studying Industrial; he graduates next semester. Yesterday he was by my office because they're kids that always pass by here to say hi, because they turn into friends, and I–after being students, *como te digo*, one starts to care about them and they're like I say, *mis pollitos* they're even personal friends, do you get me? Then um, after César –Diego is studying, doing his doctorate in Medical Sciences.

GA

0:20:51

That's so good.

LS

0:20:52

Um, and then Gabriela. Then came Gabriela–Gabriela del Mar, who studied Biology and a group of–the directive that was under Gabriela, we started to give a bit more structure to this idea of

taking it to other campuses. I remember that Paola, who was Paola Vélez [¿ 21:16] is still also studying, she graduates next semester. She also um, was vice president in that moment and then under her, she had the assignment to start making approaches to take it to Río Piedras and start–*pa'aquel tiempo* they were gonna close the hotel, the residence of Río Piedras. And then well, there were students that did not know where they were going to find lodging and also a problem they'd confront was the foo–in terms of their food, because the had to now pay lodging–a bit more in lodging. So she started the arrangement with Río Piedras and the Student Council. But between one thing and the other, the strikes and the protests, the meetings, well with–so like she'd coordinate but the meeting couldn't be done, or it'd be suspended. Um, yes I can mention that prior to that they also got in contact and even came to this office. They came from the Católica, they came from Aguadilla because they wanted to do the same, when Come Colegial started and I would explain everything, all excited, "*ay que chévere,* they'll also open them in other campuses." Um, also, even if they aren't from the Católica, other universities, but it stayed there, I'd give them, explain everything like we did it, but it didn't, well no, maybe they didn't have the same support. And I always tell the kids that that also depends a lot on the person who's the counselor, because whomever knows me knows I'm there, there, until I acquire the thing while others stays a little bit, right, more–don't go anywhere [someone arrives at the office 23:02] Come in, I'm in an online interview but come in [in the background a young lady comes in 23:09] Yes…

EXTRA PERSON

0:23:11

Don't do what I sent you please.

LS

0:23:12

Don't do it?

EXTRA PERSON

0:23:13

No, it's that [unintelligible]

LS

0:23:19

Yes, it's ok, come over later. Um [to us] the girls that have a lunch hand out activity today. Then, um, nothing well then Gabriela started with her team of the directive and in fact, I still have it on my black board, the one in my office, the day that Paola Vélez and Gabriela del mar wrote all the names of the campuses, the campuses and how each one would be called. And I always left it there and have left it because, yes, thanks to God, well it did happen. We started with her, then, the following year we went to a–we have to go on, we have to find a way to continue it, right? So the doctor José Perdomo who had been Dean of Students here on campus and knew the work Come Colegial did, and well, he knew how it started from the beginning, Come Colegial, because student associations fall under the deanery of students. So that it is–him who goes to Río Piedras, to work directly with the, the president and he contacts me that he wants to take this farther, right? And I told him "well, perfect, you can count on me."

In that process that we had that, right, that contact, I stumble upon–in the halls of Celis–Mariglori Rodríguez, that Mariglori Rodríguez, is the director of Quality of Life (Calidad de Vida) at UPR Carolina. But MarigloriI know her since I went to elementary school because she studied with me since grade school until here–up until university here at Colegio with me. I start talking with her because it had been light years since I had last seen her. And I know that she's very dynamic and always since we were in school we were–she was very dynamic and in university as well. And so I tell her "Look, I'm with Come Colegial, I think you'd be the ideal person to be a counselor and take it to UPR in Carolina." And she told me "Count me in."

The next day we communicated and girl, in a matter of a week that woman set it up, she came, she helped me greatly because she said "No, I'm going to start with this, I'm gonna start it with you," and there we communicated again–I communicated again with Perdomo, he gave me support, right, directly from his office, he also sent me one of his assistants so she'd be with me in the meetings with different contacts he acquired for me at different universities, in the different campuses, to see if they'd be counselors. What happens? That during that process I was also receiving emails from Medical Sciences (Ciencias Médicas, one of the 11 UPR campuses), that a person wanted to also do it there. You know, everything like conspired, well I said well um, let's meet up in a meeting, *vamo' a ver,* "You wanna come to Mayagüez?" because the in-person meetings were the maximum, then well they traveled to Mayagüez, and we met with the contact person that was sent to us from vice presidency. Then well, look, it happened, we started there, we had a big meeting at UPR Carolina that Mariglori Rodríguez helped me with and from there, we called upon all the other campuses to see who wanted to join from all the other campuses.

It was a convocation of all the campuses, eh, there was a group from UPR Ponce that they have their own feeding centre (trans. comedor social) from years ago and they were like, reluctant, they didn't want to join because like, Come Colegial and the Come chapters would take down the–eliminate the feeding centres–in Río Piedras there's also a soup kitchen. And I, "Look, no, we didn't come for that, we can work hand in hand, you know? No, we didn't come to do

anything. It's to complement." Well, from there onwards and immediately they stepped out of that meeting, there were meetings, there were presentations with the university president um, but everything moved really quickly, it was between a general meeting, a meeting with–two meetings with the president, and the chapters were born. It was, come, Come Jaguar which is from Ponce, um quickly, Río Piedras also created one, UPR Bayamón, Medical Sciences. Well, everyone, but the ones still active right now are Bayamón, Utuado, Carolina, Medical Sciences, Río Piedras and us. So that from the 11 campuses, well there are 6 active. The rest well I try to meet up with the different ones, because then the president named me coordinator of Come UPR, because then I was also allowed to choose the name um, and I, consulting with my directive of that moment, um…and I try to make meetings at least once a semester with the different counselors and chapters. But well, it's just that there are some who are more, how can I say it? That are more, that aren't as active right, because that's why I tell you that it also depends on the counselor. Right, that's what I think, right, but don't put this in the information; this is here between us, but at least we have 6 working and nothing, thats, little by little. Everything has happened as we marched on. We started all that in 2018. The thing with the chapters, and the Come chapters started in 2018. In the august-december semester. Mjm. Y'all tell me.

GA

0:30:01

Well, I'm done with the questions I had prepared. Well now then, I cede the floor to Yarelis.

LS

0:30:08

Ok

GA

0:30:09

Thank you!

LS

0:30:10

You're welcome.

YM

0:30:12

Yes, hi, let me apologize first because I lost my signal and lost a part–

LS

0:30:19

It's recorded, it's recorded (short laugh)

YM

0:30:21

Um, it gives me pleasure to know more about what was Come Colegial's expansion. then um, you informed me that that expansion happened during 2018, right. Then we know that during that time, hurricane Maria, then I'd like to know how hurricane Maria impacted Come Colegial.

LS

0:30:44

Well, look, on 2017 which was when hurricane Maria arrived um, well I don't know if y'all were here for that time, but I received a communication–because well, that's in all of Puerto Rico. We were almost an entire month out of the university um, and we came back, I remember like Octobre 28 or 29 it was. Well they were gonna start–there were different orientations in two days, by faculty to orient the students. Start to look for those who were um, affected and give them different help from the university. And in that moment, the chancellor of that time, um, chancellor Wilma, Wilma, Gabriel, Gabriel–ay, dios mío I forgot the last name. But it was Wilma…that she was also an architect. Then well, she told Come Colegial, so that all help that arrived for the campus in terms of food would be channeled through Come Colegial, because according to the Memo she got to all of us, and she sent to all the community, well we've already been working on this since 2014. She had been–she also, as professor, had always cooperated with Come Colegial, helping us pick up–she'd do different food donation drives in her office with students, and with other colleagues and she'd also get um, donations for us.

Well they were really happy with Come Colegial's work, so I said "damn, this is gonna be a really complex task" but generally always–it's very rare for me to say no. When I say no it's because I know this isn't–is not gonna work or something, there's something that doesn't convince me, right? So that I made the decision, and I told–I spoke with the president and I told him "Yes, we're going to accept this task because that's going to give us more exposure. People will see how Come Colegial works" um, that, as a matter of fact, it's not *a lo loco*. We have other more things that maybe the interview now maybe I don't know, well, I won't mention them, but for example, when I–when we hand out the groceries to students it isn't willy-nilly (trans. *a lo loco*). Each student receives–each participant that receives the groceries, receives an orientation.

Each participant has a release of liability (trans. *relevo de responsabilidad*). In other words, we have other administrative things that make all of this something more formal and official, because this isn't willy-nilly, like I tell the students, and many are surprised of the administrative structure we have behind Come Colegial right, to channel and that everything is done correctly. Um, just like when we started, this was through Economic Assistance, all the officials know about Come Colegial and weekly, a referral would arrive and we have a document that's a referral, they fill it out, send the student to me, we have an appointment process to meet up with the student and explain everything to them, that kit has other things to give more formality to the process and the organization. Nothing.

Then the chancellor of that time designated us to receive all the help. And look, the first time we got the the, um, the orientation, because we had a table–a table in the Student Center for those students who needed food assistance well would come by. Look girl, the first day, a truck arrived–a freight wagon because it was full of water and produce to distribute. I contacted–we were contacted and there we started to hand out the water, the boxes of water and products that arrived. And those two days, that was an incredible thing, and only for hurricane Maria, we received over a thousand students–requests from students that needed food and I remember that César said to me "ay, Lucy I need to speak with you" and I: "tell me César" and he says to me "It's that I don't know how we're going to be able to attend all the students." Um, César is a student who's very committed with service and with helping out. And he'd tell me "I don't know Lucy, how are we gonna do this? Y'know I'm worried that we're not gonna be able to help them all." I said to him "César, relax, relax, that the support will arrive, the support will come". Look and just like that, the support–that was, my phone would not stop ringing. The assistance came, that it was such a thing that I'd say "my God" but just as they came, so they went. You get me? And we were like that from October until December.

Well, we even received a freight wagon full of food and non perishable items of … of, I recall it was a group from um, the Bronx in New York who sent us a wagon. And I was "what am I going to do with this wagon?" Because I said "Oh my god!" And then there we got in contact with the municipality of Mayagüez, that also had a collection center and they let me store the wagon in the place that they had next to the park, right next to the palacio, well there, and like that, little by little, between the co–between César's truck, my truck, the volunteers' truck, of the directive, we'd go, we'd go each couple of days, early in the morning or at midday to fill up the cars over there at the palacio, to take things out of the wagon to bring them over here, to distribute. But it was, like I tell you, thanks to God, we were able to attend to all the students at that moment and it was an infinity of assistance that arrived really, from food to clothes, non perishable items. Um, kerosene lamps (trans.*quinqué*), lamps, a bit of everything, it was a lot of support. Similarly, we received help from a group of, of, of veterans. That's when Hewlett-Packard, Abbott, would bring truckloads, but, but they were truckloads (giving emphasis on how big they were). Of water, batteries. *¡Válgame!* And thanks to God we were able to do them and hand them all out. And well, for that time, we also did not have many volunteers, but with the different campus

employees, I started to contact friends and colleagues, and amongst them we would distribute—we got to hand out items at the palacio. And we got to receive, right, that help until I remember that a van came, a van that was full, full, so full. And when I looked, d'you know who it was from? From Lin Manuel Miranda. He got it to us also from the Spanish Federation, he got food to us. And then he also got in contact with me because then he wanted to, through Come Colegial, that he was gonna send us a van full of food, so that we would decide to whom we would donate it, off-campus and well, there I did the contacts. And we also donated to different organizations that I understood and some went so that then they'd distribute it in different parts of the west side. Also um, y'know, like I tell you, they were so many donors so that like from something so small, it transformed into a little monster (trans. *pequeño monstrito*) like I always would say to the students um. Yes, also, so y'all can have an idea, we've given out scholarships but like I tell you um… that we get the moneys.

LS

0:39:52

We receive the money– well, this is off the record, because the process for the scholarships, well, the process is very bureaucratic. If we had some donors who wanted to donate – send an amount of money to some students– doing it through the campus is very, very uphill. Look, what we would do was– we contacted the student for you, and you were responsible for speaking with him. And if you wanted to give him money or go to the supermarket, or whatever, it was on you. And we have done that. You know, we have contacted students if the donator communicates, "I want to have a student to support him," then we would get them the student's name.

We have gotten students that we have found them housing, and we have gotten them free eyeglasses because they have been with broken lenses and holding them up with tape semester after semester, you know, to be able to—And look, sometimes I don't realize those things, and it is the students from the directive the ones that notice, and well, that is when they communicate with me, and I begin making the connections to find them (the student in need of help), and we find them the free eyeglasses.

Also, the university's guard refers students to us since we had one case– we had two very serious cases. Those two cases are… were… and thank God they both graduated. We had three very serious cases– because there was a student that slept in the hallways of Biology. During his shift, the guard– who that day had the night shift- ran because he saw a person and got sacred. The student said to him, " No, no, don't run. I will not do anything to you. I am sleeping here." When the guard started speaking with the student– the student did not have a place to sleep, no money, and his family had many problems. He was an excellent student of Chemical Engineering with an A grade average. The guard told the student, "Tomorrow you are going to go to Lucy in Celis, that she is going to help you." And just like that, the student came, he was honest with me and told me what was happening, and I was like, "we are going to try to help you."

Well, look, I touched base with Dr. John Van Cleve- who at that time was the chancellor- he immediately gave instructions and gave the student housing for a year in the Hotel Colegial (the university's residency). I proceeded to find the student a job- he would do his job on the lower floor of Celis in Milagrito González's support center. The boy was so good that everyone liked him so much, that he told me that… that he tells me "Look, Lucy, I leave at 12. They were looking for a student to close the study center at 12" and who else but him who was staying at the Hotel Colegial. So they gave him the job. The guard would come and get him at 12 in the night. He (the guard) would come and get him (the student) and take him to Hotel Colegial. At the time of transportation, they came and looked for him. And when he had to pick up the groceries, the university's guard would come here, pick up the grocery bags, and would take them to the Hotel Colegial so that he (the student) wouldn't be out there carrying them. Do you understand me? No, the boy was loved.

Um… we had another student that was more or less the same, and this one slept in the laboratory– he was a graduate student– he would sleep in the laboratory. This one (the student) was from Ponce. You know, he had his car– it wasn't that… one says a bit old, no, but well. (referring to the fact that the car was not new, but a bit old). Do you know what he would do? He would shower here in el coliseum– similarly, the other student would shower in the coliseum. And then his food, the little bit, because he had nowhere to heat his food– his housing did not have a microwave or stove, and he did not know how to cook– he was Campbell soup and Chef Boyardee (referring to the fact that this was all he ate). Do you know what he would do? He would place his can of Chef Boyardee on the car's dash. He would go heat it [the cans of food] there, eat there, and later he would go to his laboratory for his class. That student also came to us– I don't remember how he got to us, but we were able to attend to him and he would come and take his groceries. That boy… – they would bother me (refers to how colleagues would joke around with her). That is, internally in the office, they would tell me, "Look, your son is coming this way," because he would come and would tell me, "lend me a can-opener," and I would lend it to him. I would tell him, "Look, go and heat it up in the microwave."

"No, no, no, no" (Lucy is imitating the student's reply). And he ate his spaghetti and soups cold from the can. He would leave. He would leave and sometimes I would go and tell him, "stay here so you can eat it here, in my office." "No" (student's reply). He would go to the passageway that is between… the sidewalk that is between the Celis building… from the ROTC to Celis. He would sit in whichever of those little corners around there– I would see him from my office. He would sit with that pleasure with which he ate his cold can of spaghetti. He ate everything happily there. Later, when he bought a Cadillac, I say Cadillac of a can-opener (emphasis on how grand the can-opener was), he came to me to show me. He said, "Look, Lucy, to not bother you anymore." He was able to save up, and he bought a huge… and I told him, "Boy, and that Cadillac of a can opener?" Uh… I would even bother him with the can opener (joke with him). And he would walk with his can-opener. And my instructions were that the grocery items needed

to be things that were fast to eat. I mean, “ready to go, ready to eat.” You know, everything was from a can–He would eat it super fast.

And there are many cases like that. Um… I can tell you of indefinite cases. There are stories that one cannot imagine; lots of stories– in reality, I can make a book.

Aja, you keep asking because I think I diverted there, but whatever.

YM

0:46:07

Come Colegial has become then something more than just providing food and providing help to the students.

LS

0:46:16

Yes. In another case– I remember that one of the janitors called me earlier and told me, “Look, I have this case. Can you help her?” And I, “ Absolutely, send her over.” When we put…At that moment, the president, Joyce Lopez, meets with her (the student), and she starts asking her. So, do you know what the student asked her (Joyce)? First of all, she didn't have housing. I also moved quickly, and we found her housing in the Hotel Colegial through (better phrasing “with the help of”) Doctor Van Cleve. She didn’t have where to sleep– they had kicked her out of the housing because she did not have the means to pay for it. You know the first thing, before food, the first thing– that impacted us… Before food, she asked that we please find her a toothbrush because she did not have one. She would brush her teeth— it looked like she found toothpaste or with soap, I do not know–but she didn't have a toothbrush, and she brushed her teeth with her fingers. That shocked us. She did not have personal care items. Immediately, I acted and went to the bookshop. When I went to buy the things that we were going to give her, from sanitary pads and other things, the personnel from the bookshop said, “no, no.” I explained. “No, no, no.” They did not let me pay for it either. Between all of them, they donated the items for the student. You know, we have– how do I tell you– there are cases we have been able to impact and have helped, and not only with food, there are much more things. Apart from the fact that there are many students who also–how do I tell you– It's a thing, one… eh…–

When Manuel was here–who was the other president– Manuel Pérez, referred a student to me. The student– I tell the members of the directive certain questions, well because there are things we cannot ask–but more or less that they (the members) talk to them to that they gain experience and so that the student feels comfortable with a you and you (refers to a one on one conversation between the student and the members). Because maybe with me they would say “this old lady,” you know? But with the members, they open up, and they tell them their things; they tell them

their problems, and it is like that. And Manuel came to me with his eyes opened wide, shocked, and told me “oh Lucy! This is really bad. This case is really bad.” and I was like, “what happened?”

He tells me, “It's very bad. This kid needs help. This kid has suicide instincts, and he wants to kill others at the university.” And I was like, “What?” (shocked). I am not a psychologist, but there I went because I said let me intervene and see how I can help him (the student). I introduced myself and started speaking to him and try to like give him (the student) the trust. And can you believe that the kid wanted to take his own life? Not only did he want to take his own life; he said to me, “Before I take my life, I will go to various offices, and I will take the lives of certain people.” And I was like, “damn, wait, this is very bad.”

Thing is that I was able to persuade him to please believe in me, that we were going to help him but that he needed to receive the help. That he needed to receive psychological help and that I could not give it to him but that I could find it for him but that he had to promise me and be honest and tell me if he wanted to receive it. And he said to me, “Ay, yes, I want to receive it.” Immediately, my phone was worth gold. I called… I remember that I called the Dean of Students, that was the Dean of Students and I said, “Look, this is a case that needs to be taken care of quickly, and he (the dean) told me, “Yes, Lucy. Don’t worry um… the student to go to this office that we are going to be waiting for him.” And so, I told him (the student), “please don't stop from going.” From there, he was referred to psychological services that was… that he needed at that moment. So, there are many things. You know, at times, a lot of these students also need support, someone who will listen to them because, as I have told you, they come from… from dysfunctional families, from parents with problems, toxic problems. You know, there are many things, many, there are many other things. So, if they open up to us, if we see, we try to inquire a little more, and we try to channel the help. And so far, we have, we have succeeded.

YM

51:29

Right, when, I ask you, um…when the aid for Hurricane Maria began to arrive, how did you all manage to carry out the announcement? we know, right, that there were times there was no internet, we didn't have um…

LS

51:47

Yes, but when we returned everything was– the electricity service and internet service were already re-established, you know. We do everything through Cartero (the university’s email carrier that delivers news and information to students) and through social networks, that is with the Facebook page that we had at that moment and since the students… and we had collected the

email in that form, the communication was sent to everyone and they came at certain times that we attended them to pick up their groceries. The line was kilometric, but we would attend them. Yes, the communication flowed at that moment, well, yes… It may be the case that one those days the electricity went out, there would be a general blackout, but it would take four days, but it would come back again, and when it was restored [the electricity]we continued our work.

YM

52:42

We have not only been through Hurricane Maria, right but also earthquakes. I ask you: how different was the way you dealt with the situation compared to Hurricane Maria?

LS

52:57

Well look, for the earthquakes um… well there who really– because for that one had to go out. Eh…yes, the president at that moment, she–really her personal character— she at that moment was an athlete and with her group– from the team which she participated in–well, they went to other campuses to deliver other aids but until then we still will send the announcement. And then an agreement was made with the Dean of Students because we sent a survey. We sent a survey through Cartero– that is we sent it (the survey) to every one of the students to their email accounts. They [the students] had to indicate there [in the survey] the type of aid/help they needed. And everything that was related to food support… of food, well then, those lists of those emails the Dean of students sent them to me; then we would send a message and would indicate the date and time to pass by and pick up their groceries.

YM

54:09

¿So, uh, Come Colegial has been active even though the university was not operating?

LS

54:15

Yes, that is correct. Girl, since the beginning, there has always existed protest and strikes. Always. That has always existed in the UPR system. And we are not afraid of that either. Um…since the start, in our beginning… as I say… different years, different semesters what we do is that we communicate with the people who are in… who have initiated the strike. We communicate with the sector that is at the gates be it through email, Facebook, or through the

Facebook email– depending on who it is, if it is the council or another group, we look for whoever it is. And we send the information that we want to enter, that we want to serve the students, and we have never had any type of problem. We get to the gates and we identify ourselves and they let us enter happily.

We come and stay… because the storehouse was provided to us… the place for the storehouse, the facilities were provided to us by Dr. John Fernández Van Cleve –when he was Dean. Therefore, the storehouse is near my office near Celis. Um… and nothing–neither— For that, when these types of events occur (referring to the student strikes and protests) is not like many students come. We go in small groups, 3 or 4 with me. 3 or 2 from the directive and I. We come and pack the grocery bags. We prepare them, take them in our cars and we let the students know where, place, and time, that we will be handing them out. Generally, we do it, almost always… always we have done it in the gates of the *Finca Alzamora*– since oftentimes that is the only way in. Once we finish preparing the groceries, we settle in the corner by the…by Terrace, near the gate, and we serve [the students]. We take our roll, they sign–because they have to sign as [evidence that] they receive the groceries. Um, so… and we have handed out. We have offered our services without any problem. Similarly, during the pandemic, we let the administration know that we had to go and prepare the groceries in accordance with our protocols and procedures. Likewise, without a crowd of people; right? And they let us come in; we prepared our grocery bags–the grocery bags– and we will inform the participant. He would come, pick up his grocery, and leave.

YM

57:12

Right, now that you mention Covid-19–the pandemic. Um… uh… how did you operate during this time since there was the need for social distancing and you were working from the storehouse?

LS

57:21

Well, look, well following the procedures. No more than five people–following the protocols. All the time I had alcohol (disinfectant)–using alcohol–but we were able to keep working. Following protocols, we would receive aid from the Food Bank, the truck, the pallets. Thankfully, that's how we would keep serving. That's how we delivered the groceries.

We were able able to organize a few activities weekly–weekly from March until that full year. We were delivering warm meals weekly. No–Since we have many volunteers we would split. We always make a selection– We would send a memo to the volunteers to be able alternate them– because they need to complete a certain number of community work hours so they can initiate. And then, nothing, in organization.

As I tell the kids, “the organization, communication, and keeping in touch are very important” — but we were able to do it; we took care of it; we were able to do it. Besides that, during—I don’t know if you remember– but during 2019 –all that summer– we were delivering vans, those food vans… of food…boxes of fresh produce. That we did…that I made a proposal for Caribbean Produce and they accepted it and we delivered thousands. Thousands (emphasized by the speaker). In just a day, fifteen hundred boxes of fresh products were delivered to students in Area Blanca (parking space). We did five activities like that–delivering fifteen hundred boxes of fresh products– it was a success.

YM

59:26

Then, was there a challenge you had to face during, well, that you can remember in these moments that have marked, right–

LS

59:41

Well, during the pandemic, the challenge was that– not to infect ourselves. It was like… having to stay alert at all times– following all the time the protocols, washing our hands, the alcohol, and all that. And thank god, well, it could be done. There was only one case of a student from the directive who got infected– but as a result of that, well, we all took action and kept [social] distancing. I, who had shared spent more time with her, had to stay at home to quarantine for two weeks. Even so, everything continued because the students had to find— Well, the students from Come Colegial are very good. They are very helpful and generous. And with them– well, I always have the method of always consulting them and– Because I always remind them, well, that they are students and that at the moment of truth, right, if they do something wrong– if incorrect information is sent, or whatever– they will not look for them, whom they come to look for is me.

And how I tell them, I have been working at the campus for years, working on the campus, plus cooperating and collaborating in a bunch of philanthropic activities inside and outside the campus. And I tell them, “Look, it is not to put my name on the line either. ” You understand me? I am already big enough for that and about to retire. And they know. You know, they are really nice– nothing is sent if I don’t check. Um… you know, I always uphold that with them. You know? *Y aguarde de un acento, si ponen algo con acento, infarto.* And I am like, “no, we are at another level; we are professionals.” Do you understand me?

Um… and I try, as I tell them, “I know that there are a lot of advisers that do not show up to any activity.” I go to all of the activities that Come Colegial carries out, the ones that they come up with. I go to all of them. All of them (emphasized by the speaker). I go even if it's for 15 minutes and I have something else, but I still give face. And before each event, I like to always meet up

with them. They know that before any activity–be it lunch, or whatever– they have to meet up with me the same day early [or] before–minimum, an hour before the activity or the day before [they need to] touch base with me. Meet up: what do we have, what is missing, that everything is set. Because I say that these small things you do not learn them in the classroom, you know. This is a school for when they are in the work environment. And until the moment, they really are very good, you know. I don't have a problem that, no… that they don't want to meet up before. Because, do you know what is like that one goes to give out a meal and they ask me "where is the ice?" and you just came back from lunch and have 200 people waiting and the ice has not arrived? No, that cannot happen. Never (emphasized by the speaker).

The same with the activities. They know already that if you say at 10:30, you have to start a maximum five minutes later, but they have to begin at 10:30— because there are people that have 20 thousand things, homework, work, commitments. No. And then try to be done with the queues fast– put up two stations. I am always like, "You all show that you know everything even if you don't know anything, but you have to always demonstrate that you know everything," you know?

And I don't know, so far it has worked for me, do you understand me? Also, I believe that I owe it a bit more formality of… um… that at least one is there in the activity and that—- Right now, when I'm done with you, lunch would have been over for today, but I'll go up (to the activity) for a bit, you see. To see how everything is.

But the kids already– um… I say kids right— they already know. They run that perfectly. The same when they go prepare the groceries. This is not *a lo loco*. I found them a workshop with two professors from… from industrial engineering and it will be… it is interesting how they prepare the grocery bags. You know, before we could take sometimes up to 15 minutes packing a grocery bag. Now, they take less than a minute to prepare 2 bags– which are the ones that we give to each participant. Less than a minute (emphasized by the speaker).

YM

1:04:32

Wow.

LS

1:04:34

That is to say, I try to look for different help, you know. And I tell them, "What I don't know, you tell me if you want to improve something and I look for the help." Similarly, before this thing of picking up the groceries, go sign, this and that, no. Years ago all of this is with a barcode. You collect; you fill by a barcode; you scan it. Same with the volunteer hours, everything is by barcode. You know really I don't know, but I believe that we are doing it well. And they stay like shocked because they don't imagine the logistics and all the things that is

behind all of this, you know. And.. how do I tell you… and we have done from not having— Right now, this past year,

We have two freezers, three refrigerators— We are already receiving cold meals, frozen and cold. And on the day of the groceries when they come to pick up their… their…their groceries, right, to pick them up, we offer them. "Want cold meals?" We also have things such as sanitary pads, soap, toothpaste, toothbrush– things for personal hygiene– and we also tell "Do you need anything?" Um… we also pit a small table for them to choose from the thing that there is. Like that little by little. But we have had a great impact. And we not only give, as I have said before, we don't only give food, we give other things, other things, and love because this is a family.

Also, the students never identify themselves in any activity— that is prohibited. You know, I also speak to them about confidentiality. You know, you will treat that student in a normal manner as if he were another. We do smaller lunch activities, only for those that we have who already receive the help, who are students who are referred by different offices and the dean of students and financial aid, medical services, psychological workers, administrative employees, teachers– And sometimes we have a lunch in which we only send the email to only those people (the students who are referred to them). And it is only like, you come and get your lunch and that is it, and they continue on. But in the activities that we do to impact the student community then there they are all mixed. Obviously, we sent out to our participants the mail about two or three times so that they know and so that on that day they go. And we tell them, "Look, we will not reserve [the lunches] because it is for everyone" –but they are also not identified. They go pick up their meals but we also do not identify them. There we take pictures randomly, but it is not like we are in our [social] networks um… uploading who it was that took the lunch–the name–or nothing. Do you understand me?

YM

1:07:48

And have you considered, right, expanding outside the university community?

LS

1:07:55

Well out of college… um… it's very uphill. Yes, we have helped. We have helped because some have approached, for example, Professor Luisa Seijo– from the community that is on the campus with the home–it is like a center for abused women– They sometimes have some extreme cases there and she reaches out and tells me, "do you have this that you can give;" "look, the participant is going to… we found her a home but she has to start from zero." Well, look, yes, she comes over and we send her the groceries too.

Um… I remember that one student— who graduated from the campus that was from Come Colegial— he was going through— he had already graduated— but he was going through a very difficult situation. Divorce um… work loss and he sent me an email and explained it to me. And I… I told him, "There is no problem, come over." He came and we gave him his help for like a semester and he was outside— he was looking for–

When he got a job, he communicated and told me, "Lucy, thanks. I have found a job." Well, but we gave it (the help) to him. And I remember that after some time I met a friend of mine and he told me, " Look, there is a person who is very grateful to you and Come Colegial," and he mentioned him to me. And I was like, "Yes." He (the friend) tells me, " He always tells me, that when he was most *chavaito*, that he was in the legal process and all those things with his divorce that he did not even have enough to eat that you guys helped him as well."

And I was like, well, that is what we are here for, you understand me? But those cases, well, are dealt with internally, you know, internally. But to take it outside the university… well, we have done it through the different chapters (refers to associations) that are active right now.

I don't know if I mentioned to you that we started the under the Food Bank– I began when Come… At the beginning Come Colegial– I started to fill out the application form for the help of the Food Bank And so we got to a point in which I could not continue to fill it out because… because… it was a lot of documents and because no… well, I did not understand if we were non-profit but that we weren't— we weren't under non-profit, but whatever. Then, between one conversation and another, I found out that yes, that the university– I don't remember which president– but that there already was that the university and the student organizations that are accredited were non-profit. From the office of Dr. John Ban Cleve from the rectory which was at the time, they sent me the form and I said "Bingo! This is what I need."

So then, I filled out the application form. And while I filled out the application form, and this and that, I saw how there was no response. I sent it but there was no response, but overnight a person who worked at… at… the Food Bank contacted us that they wanted to come see us. She wanted to do an interview with me; she came. Um… we were two hours in that interview. And… well, everything she was like…. Every time she asked me something and I already had the answer; I had the evidence, I had um…She was amazed that day. And she told me "I cannot believe how you guys are so… so organized. You have everything so constituted; you guys have thought of everything, this is"—

You know, she found out about the entire system of how we deliver–of everything. She evaluated everything. And she was so impressed— when she left, I told the kids "Oh, this is good! You will see that this is for good." The next day, she calls me, that the president of the Food Bank of Puerto Rico– that have been in Puerto Rico for many years– wanted to communicate with us. And I was like, "Well, tell me the date and time" and I was like, "perfect." I took off with the group that was at that moment–which was Gabriela's group— which was, I believe, in 2017— Gabriela's group and we left for the Food Bank. We had a presentation; we had an interview. She

was delighted. Delighted (emphasized by the speaker). That same day of the interview, um… she told us–that was all so quickly– In less than a week, she told us that they will start giving us the help from the Food Bank. And I was like, "wow!" Because then the Food Bank– I believe that they will sell the pound for like 17 cents and 18 cents; it's something like that. They sell to you, but it's not to everyone–it's to organizations that are… that are non-profitable and that are registered by the Department of State. And she said to me, "No, we love how you are doing it, how you are all doing it, um… we are not going to charge you a penny either. We haven't… we have serves special communities, children, adults, but we have not yet impacted university students, and you are going to be our pilot project." But then, I told her "well, perfect." And I quickly got an appointment with Dr. Agustin Rullán–who was already chancellor–so that he could attend us so that it could be something official. She, the president, came to the appointment and at that moment well officially she—they started. They deliver to us once a month, the first week of the month and they deliver one or two pallets, but generally, two pallets of food always arrive.

What we do then is that I let her know– the week before the delivery– I let her know what products we are short of or what products we don't have so as to not repeat, because there are products that really arrive, that is you now, um… that we have for years. Um… there are others–depending, right, on how many participants have–

And I am going to be honest, the Food Bank comes with the help– we have the storehouse how we say *fletado*–full to capacity. The delivery of the groceries comes and the storehouse once again becomes empty. It is one thing that we [1:15:08 unintelligible] super full… and when we prepare the grocery bags, we deliver them, and the storehouse becomes empty that month. But thank God, we have the Food Bank that helps us, you know–it is an addition to the donations that we receive. Also, we have um… professors that have a point system, and they provide/deliver–They (the students of those professors) have to come over and deliver the groceries and I mark them off in the list, they sign or I place my initial that they have delivered and then they receive the points for their course. We have had various professors from the Mathematics department, especially Dr. Ricardo Lorenzo, who from day one of Come Colegial has always been supporting our organization. When we are short [of supplies] in the storehouse, the collaboration of the professor and his students arrives and the storehouse once again gets filled and saves us. But, well, how I have told you… it's like…it's been like a success. When… when we have little food, a little angel immediately appears and the storehouse is filled again.

YM

1:16:31

So during all these years, right, that you have been active, what achievements are you most proud of?

LS

1:16:40

Well, I believe that the most important achievement is the mission and our purpose is the student to finish his degree. That is our mission. And we have accomplished it because of the emails, the notes, the day of farewell– that gratitude on graduation day always comes from the students. Always (emphasized by the speaker). We have received infinite thanks, emails, messages– beautiful messages. Many have already left…they go study, they stay on campus doing their masters, doctorates; others leave Puerto Rico to join the work environment. And that is our greatest satisfaction–um… that the student can complete his degree; finish his degree or that he continues his studies or that he gets his job.

I would also say that the second achievement is that of taking it to another level with the other campuses. And because… if there is one campus that is very active, very active is the one from UPR Carolina. That campus… well we are very proud off because the others may not have food at some point– try, search– I try to find them, right, the connections also but the idea is that each group also does their part, you understand me. So that they can find—Because in all the towns there are twenty thousand businesses and people who want to collaborate, but they (the Come Colegial students from the different campuses) also have to form their group of donors and collaborators and alliances. But… I believe that is the other achievement of Come Colegial and I feel really happy, that we were able to expand to other campuses.

YM

1:18:34

Everything you all have done has been, right– the activities have been a success, but is there anything that you all can improve or you think you can improve?

LS

1:18:49

Yes, there are many things that can be improved, girl. A lot of things that can be improved, but I try to… I may know how to improve them sometimes but I do not lose the vision that this is a student organization and this is s little school for the students, you understand me. You know, they are the ones that… they are the ones that… need to maybe give…*poner ese granito de arena*, that creative mind to work with the thing that they study. You know a lot of those things I can improve — and I always think about it— but, you know what, they have to do it themselves because that is the idea because Come Colegial is also for that– to create leaders. You understand me? That they learn what they can contribute later when they are in their work environment, or in their community, or on a personal level; do you understand me?

So I try not to give them all the tools because it won't be worth anything, because… how do I tell you… I am already about to retire– I only have very few years left to retire. What I want is that they do their part. Yes, there are many achievements. There are achievements and from the ones I

mentioned, many are thanks to the students themselves. But this thing of taking it to the other campuses, yes, I am with them hand in hand, but I let them take action; let them give the presentations, make them, and later discuss them; we see them… "Yes. No. Eliminate this; I edit them. Um… this looks better drafted this way," you know. Um… the Free Mini Market was created by a vice president, Paola– when she told me, I was delighted. Um… and like that we have continued moving forward. Um… well yeah… you know there are different activities and things that we can improve but I try that it is the same student who does it, you understand me? *Porque si se lo doy masticado y digerido, eso no vale la pena*. Do you undertsand my point?

YM

1:21:13

Yes. Well, I think that, on my part, that would be all my questions. Um… Gabrielle, I don't know if you want to make additional—

GA

1:21:26

Well, no, I don't have any additional questions. Eh… I just wanted to thank you very much for your time Lucy and I hope that the medicine that you are taking stops negatively affecting you.

LS

1:21:39

Girl, no. I feel good now, I think what I needed was to talk. (laughs)

GA

1:21:45

Oh! Well, I am glad I could help. (laughs)

LS

1:21:48

Yes, I am fine now thank God. Well yes… let me know if anything. Keep me up to date.

GA

1:21:57

Yes, of course.

YM

1:22:00

Let me stop the recording here…

LS

1:22:05

Aha

1:22:07: [Recording Ends.]