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**Photo:** ©Elderly program at Rungansari-Central Kalimantan, SDI

## WORKING WITH THE AGING - THE JOY OF BEING PART OF A CARING COMMUNITY

By Virginia Thomas, Executive Director

Around the world, Subud members are creating caring communities in which to cherish and care for our elderly. In some ways this is more challenging than caring for the very young, but equally rewarding. Caring for our elderly brings us face to face with our own mortality, as we ask ourselves: 'how do I want to be treated and cared for when I am old?' Thank you to our wonderful, thoughtful carers, organisers and writers for their stories of creating joyful, caring communities for and with the elderly from around the Subud world - Japan, Indonesia, Colombia, Germany and Cuba. You inspire us.

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News from  
SD around the world!

## STILL NEEDED, STILL MEANINGFUL...

By Alina Fay

Chair of Susila Dharma Indonesia

Everyone will eventually grow old. But the question is: how do we grow old happily? How do we remain healthy, independent, meaningful, and not feel like a burden to others?

In many places where I live and work in Indonesia, aging is often seen as something frightening. Many elderly people fear loneliness, losing the attention of their children, and feeling no longer needed. I often meet older people who slowly withdraw from society and accept this sadness as if it were simply a part of life.

In the Subud community, we are fortunate to still have regular gatherings through our spiritual latihan. Interestingly, nearly 70% of Subud Indonesia members are elderly people. Through them, I see many different ways people face aging — some remain full of spirit, while others quietly struggle with loneliness.

Everything felt different when I visited Okinawa, especially Ogimi Village in Japan, one of the world's Blue Zones. There, growing old is not considered a burden, but a blessing. Elderly people remain active, connected, and joyful even at the age of 80, 90, or over 100 years old. I was deeply inspired by the philosophy of *ikigai* — having a reason to wake up every morning with purpose and happiness. During my visit, I met an elderly man named Arisato-san, who shared stories about the daily lives of older people in the village. They continue gardening, walking, laughing, cooking, gathering together and contributing to their community.

That experience made me reflect deeply on elderly life in Indonesia.

For me, the most important thing is not only helping people live longer, but helping them continue to feel useful, loved, productive and connected to others.

That is why I started in SD Indonesia with simple activities: inviting elderly people to gather every week for light exercise, games, shared meals, storytelling and companionship. Small moments like these can help them feel alive again.

In the future, I dream of building communities where younger and older generations can grow together. Young people can learn resilience and wisdom from the elderly, while older people can continue feeling energized and valued within society.

I believe elderly people should never be isolated or made to feel that life is over because of age. Every person still wants to feel useful.

And perhaps the secret to aging happily is simply this: to continue feeling needed, loved and still able to give something meaningful to others.



**Photo:** ©Alina (left) with Mrs Kazuki- an 89-year-old artist, Okinawa, Japan

## THE BIRTH OF A PROGRAM CALLED "GRATITUDE" AIMED AT OUR SUBUD SENIORS AND THEIR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES.

"To Love Those Who Have Loved."

By Mónica Ramírez-Carrington

Chair of Susila Dharma Colombia

2026-2027

Director of Educational and Social Programs  
at CEA INTERNATIONAL.

One afternoon in 2018, standing at the door of what was then the Amanecer Foundation office in the Great Hall, there in front of me was the "green sea", as I call it—the lush vegetation of my Quindío region in its various shades of green. With a somewhat lost look in my eyes, I said to myself: "I am sure that Bapak would not want his children to live out their last years in this world in this way."

I am not sure if it was a "receiving" or my experience developing and directing educational and social projects and programs throughout my professional life (both within and outside of Subud), or a combination of the two.

But something inside me was very clear: "I have to embrace them and organize a program for them."

That day, I had been out from very early in the morning, visiting most of my brothers' and sisters' homes in the gated Subud community called "Centro Internacional Amanecer". Suddenly, I found myself thinking, "Twenty-five years have passed since I brought children and young people from the Amor Educational Foundation (Fundación Educativa Amor) to this place. Some came to perform at the opening



Photo: ©Mónica Ramírez and Halim Barreto, Amanecer, Colombia

ceremony of the 1993 Subud World Congress. Others came to experience the transition from living in a poor, depressed area like the one south of Bogotá, to living in a beautiful place like Amanecer. I also brought some to live in a house that a brother generously gave me for the orphaned children of Fundación Amor. I named that house "Casa Hogar Amor", and those children lived and grew up there for a time.

Later, after a terrible and devastating earthquake struck this region, and to support its reconstruction, we were able to organize another Colegio Amor for many children who were left without a school to attend because their schools had collapsed. We opened a school for 250 children in 1999.

Now I was here again at the request of the National President of Subud Colombia and other members who, during the last National Congress, had asked me to take charge of the Amanecer Foundation (Fundación Amanecer). The foundation had no assets, no place to operate, and no programs. It was on the verge of liquidation. This information came from the accountant and auditor of Subud Colombia at the time. I decided to do some testing during the National Congress. The results were so clear and positive that I decided to follow this guidance and "take a leap of faith".

Here I was again in the Subud community, before my brothers and sisters. They had grown older. The years had passed for all of us, yet neither they nor I had realized it.

I had just begun internal and external assessments of the community to understand its needs and how the Foundation could address them.

As I visited them in their homes that day—homes that had also been touched by the passage of time—and spoke with them, listened to them, and observed them with great attention and respect, I found human beings within those homes: my Subud brothers and sisters. Some were lonely, some had mobility issues, some needed medication that they could not afford, some needed food, and some, though they had their medication, lived alone, woke up late, and lacked the discipline or routine to take it as prescribed.

At sunset that day, I went to the office I had set up for the Foundation. Within me, I had built up a whole picture of their needs, loneliness, and sadness. A feeling of pain and love for them all washed over me.

I knew many of them as Bapak's helpers, project leaders, and committee members. Others had faithfully followed this Subud path to become better human beings. Each one had a long family history, personal story, and shared experiences within the Subud community. I also noticed that some had become solitary and unsociable. From this tapestry of loneliness, needs, and resistance to aging, was born a program called GRATITUDE. Immense gratitude to Bapak, the inspiration behind this dream, for his unconditional love for us, his children, which now inspired me to respond to the visible and real need before me—a need that I felt compelled to make visible to all of us. I was overcome by a sense of reality—that this phenomenon was not unique to this place. How many other cities and Subud groups, both nationally and internationally, were experiencing the same thing?

And I felt Gratitude: Toward my brothers and sisters, who had received the title of Honorary Helpers, but who were alone, in need, abandoned, and sick, somewhere on the planet.

Gratitude: To those who had worked on Subud programs and projects.

Gratitude: To those who had served as national and local presidents, secretaries, treasurers, and committee members in general.

Gratitude: To those of us who have grown older, following this long path of Subud to become better human beings.

And on that day, the slogan of what is now the Gratitude Program, Socio-Emotional Model came into being:

### **“To Love Those Who Have Loved.”**

I remember that night, I could not sleep, so I got up and wrote the description of what would become the beginning of this pilot project. In the days that followed, I prepared for its launch. I sent out beautiful invitation cards to everyone for this special event.

I set up tables, laid tablecloths on them, bought flowers, and placed a photo of Bapak, my inspiration, on top. (I had found it in a box, abandoned, among the Foundation's archives.)

I prepared a delicious breakfast and laid the tables elegantly. In front of that magnificent hall, which belonged to the Muhammad Subuh Foundation (MSF) at the time and had been kindly lent to me, I launched: Gratitude.

### **How was the project funded?**

That is another interesting story. I remembered Bapak saying: "You are the enterprise". So, I searched for resources within myself and in my environment. And the pilot phase for that first year, 2018, was implemented. (There is a short video, about seven minutes long, from that time, on YouTube. It is called the Gratitude Pilot Project for Our Seniors.



You will hear the seniors themselves say: "Wonderful," "spectacular," and you will see their happy faces, and see them dancing, singing, and expressing their gratitude.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X10Y\\_KplURk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X10Y_KplURk)

The project was fully implemented in 2019. It was truly marvelous!

Then the pandemic hit, and I stepped down as director of the Amanecer Foundation. But not before negotiating with Subud Colombia, an important agreement: **a 20-year LEASE for an area of land** within the International Center, where the Amanecer Foundation could continue to pursue its social objectives.

Neither of the two programs founded at that time continued after that. This included Gratitude and After School, the latter of which "had a positive impact on the lives of children and youth in the rural area of the municipality of La Tebaida", according to the lady mayoress, parents, teachers, and children. There is also an article in the regional press about it, as well as a short video on YouTube about the 2018 evaluation of the After School pilot project.

In 2023, I donated GRATITUDE and AFTER SCHOOL to the International Corporation Entrepreneurs in Action (Empresarios en Acción), CEA INTERNATIONAL. <https://youtu.be/698oEwvT3D0?si=LQgfnXP83rRu4HXO>

CEA INTERNATIONAL is dedicated to supporting and promoting enterprises and follows Bapak's guidelines in this regard. However, we are very clear about the social responsibility that entrepreneurs and enterprises have—a responsibility which Bapak spoke to us about so often.

CEA International has embraced and protected these two programs, Gratitude and After School, which are now part of the corporation's community outreach efforts. These good seeds have been entrusted to a good steward, so that they may be planted in every country, Subud house, Subud member, and Subud and non-Subud community that needs them.

In 2024, Gratitude ceased to be a project and became the Gratitude Program, returning to Amanecer under the umbrella of CEA International. It continues under my direction and is coordinated by volunteers.

That same year, we successfully negotiated a comprehensive agreement with the University of Quindío and began accepting final year Gerontology Program students. By the beginning of 2025, we had completed assessments for all Program members. This enabled us to provide personalized responses to each individual's needs based on all areas of human well-being.

We already had a well-structured program. Care continued to be provided at home, and the intervention model was clear: physical, social and socio-emotional.

The areas of care for members were defined:

- Individual home-based care that also engages the family.
- Group care involving workshops, socialization, education, recreation, etc.
- An interinstitutional and multidisciplinary network of public, civic, and private institutions that embrace the program, such as universities, NGOs, the government, schools, youth groups, Subud and non-Subud organizations, hospitals, municipal offices and friends.

This same year, 2025, CEA INTERNATIONAL decided to hire its own gerontologist to coordinate the Program for us. It remains under my direction.

With the support of SDIA, we held a series of three conversations through the GRATITUDE Program. SDIA provided us with the Zoom platform and initial interpretation. The University of Quindío presented interesting topics related to aging and old age for the local, national, and international community. (These conversations are available on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/Vo787VH2m6Y>

<https://youtu.be/KM-CBpHZXl8>

<https://youtu.be/rEBXccgr-hY>

In 2026, we became Associate Members of SUSILA DHARMA INTERNATIONAL.

We established our rented office in the Quindío Hall in Amanecer.

In partnership with the Quindío Governor's Office, we are currently training our members and external community participants on a project called 50 Plus: Digital Independence for Older Adults.

We have just received approval from the Gran Colombia University and its School of Architecture for our project to create an architectural design that ensures safe mobility for older adults as well as benefitting the entire community. Currently, the communal areas of the Amanecer International Center pose serious accident risks, causing some of our members to be reluctant to leave their homes.

There are also requests to expand the Program to other locations in 2026.

And when it comes to spreading the seed of GRATITUDE:

**WE WILL BE THERE TO EMBRACE AND SUPPORT ITS IMPLEMENTATION.**

**GRATITUDE IS NOW A SUBUD HERITAGE.**

**WHEREVER IT IS NEEDED, THAT IS WHERE WE WILL DELIVER IT!**



## AGING AS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

By Anna Maimer

International SIHA Coordinator

2024-2028

As a medical doctor, I often find it remarkable that during my years at medical school, aging itself was hardly ever discussed as a subject. We learned extensively about diseases of old age, but very little about the actual human experience of aging — physically, emotionally, mentally, and certainly not spiritually. And yet, aging is one of the few experiences that unites all of humanity.

Modern medicine has become increasingly successful at extending lifespan. However, many people are still profoundly unprepared for the inner transition that aging brings. In my daily work, I often meet patients who experience this phase as a crisis. Physical decline suddenly becomes visible. Familiar routines change after retirement. A sense of identity strongly connected to work or productivity may begin to fade. Friendships diminish over time and losses accumulate. Many people find themselves confronted not only with bodily limitations but also with existential questions.

The Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, Carl Gustav Jung, reflected deeply on this transition in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: “Thoroughly unprepared, we take the step into the afternoon of life. Worse still, we take this step with the false presupposition that our truths and our ideals will serve us as hitherto.”

In many traditional cultures, aging was understood not merely as decline, but as transformation. Traditional Chinese Medicine, for example, describes life as a rhythmic process: the first half of life is oriented toward expansion, achievement and building identity; the second half invites us to move inward, toward essence, wisdom, and deeper understanding.

From this perspective, aging asks for a different kind of intelligence — not the intelligence of constant doing, but the intelligence of alignment, acceptance and inner growth. If we allow it, aging may gradually shift our attention from external achievement toward a deeper connection with our *jiwa*.

I always enjoy seeing that my rather young staff at the practice often finds conversations with elderly patients deeply enriching. When older people feel genuine interest and connection from younger generations, they frequently open up and share important life experiences, wisdom and lessons learned. These encounters give me hope that our society can heal itself by reconnecting young and old — and by restoring respect and dignity toward elderly people so they can age gracefully.



**Photo:** ©Anna (white t-shirt) with representatives of the International SIHA Team at Zone 4 Gathering, Hübingen, Germany, 2025

## A LEGACY OF A CARING HEART

By Isabel Cristina Rengifo

Mis Corazones Alegres Foundation

The story of the Mis Corazones Alegres Foundation began with love, a sense of need, and a deep respect for old age. Its founder, Matilde, understood from her family, personal, and professional experiences that growing old should not mean abandonment, loneliness, or a loss of dignity. With courage and immense sensitivity, she decided to make caregiving her life's purpose, creating a space where older adults would be treated with the same love and respect with which one cares for a mother, a grandparent, or a loved one.



**"My Parents... My legacy is the deep love between them"**

But this journey has not been undertaken by human strength alone. God's presence has been the pillar that has sustained every step of this story. Amid difficulties, economic uncertainties, 10 changes of location, and moments of weariness, faith has been a refuge, a guide, and a source of hope. The Foundation was also born out of a deep spiritual conviction: serving older adults is serving God through love, compassion, and dedication to those who most need care and companionship.

In a world where aging is advancing rapidly, this work is becoming increasingly necessary. According to the World Health Organization, more than 55 million people currently live with some form of dementia, and it is estimated that the population over 60 will exceed 2 billion by the year 2050. In Colombia, the growing number of older adults has also brought to light a silent reality: the burden of care falls primarily on women. Daughters, mothers, wives, and caregivers bear an emotional and physical responsibility that often goes unnoticed.

The Mis Corazones Alegres Foundation understands this reality deeply. It has faced significant challenges in providing comprehensive care to older adults with neurodegenerative diseases, physical dependence, and profound emotional needs.

However, every obstacle has further strengthened the purpose that inspired this project: to offer dignity, love, and a home filled with humanity.

And that is precisely where Matilde's legacy takes on immense value. More than just establishing a foundation, she has left behind a way of life. She teaches us—as children, grandchildren, family, and friends—that serving others is not an obligation, but a calling from the heart and a mission guided by God. She shows us every day that strength can dwell in tenderness and that caring for those who need it most requires immense love and unshakable faith.



To speak of her is to speak of an EXTRAORDINARY woman, one of those people who give their lives without expecting anything in return. A woman capable of transforming others' pain into companionship and vulnerability into dignity. As a daughter, I feel a great pride in having a mother who is so human, so strong, and so filled with God. Her example inspires us every day to continue on this path, understanding that true legacy is not measured in material goods, but in the lives we touch, in the love we sow, the embrace we offer, the loving glances, and the mark we leave on the hearts of others.

Mis Corazones Alegres not only cares for the elderly; it preserves stories, honors memories, and reminds us that one day, we too will need care. And as long as there is love, faith, and service, there will always be hope for aging with dignity.

## HELPING THE VULNERABLE IN THE CARIBBEAN

By Yoanka Maricela Pérez Quintana (Louisa)

SD Cuba

Among Susila Dharma's projects in Cuba, the most noble and rewarding is the one dedicated to vulnerable elderly people, which helps alleviate the limited resources of its SUBUD members. These are older adults with a minimal pension, little family support and health problems that affect their quality of life. Their need for food and medication is a major challenge in their daily lives.

Thanks to the joint support of Susila Dharma (SD) in several countries, these basic needs have been met more effectively. We initially sought help from Spain, and thanks to contributions from SD Spain and the efforts of our dear Olga Ramírez—a doctor and then-president—medications and food began arriving. Later, SD France and SD Netherlands joined this initiative. Very soon, our brothers and sisters at SD Canada threw themselves into fundraising so that Olga could continue sending medicine on a regular basis. Then, as if that weren't enough, Andrew Hall and Elora from SD Canada traveled to Havana, bringing us many essential supplies in person, along with their affection and love.

And once again, we recently received a visit from Andrew, who brought a load of medicine, batteries and financial aid for everyone—especially our vulnerable elderly. Andrew, a true Subud brother with a Susila Dharma spirit, brought great peace and harmony to Havana, and his visit was deeply appreciated by all. We would certainly like to highlight that Susila Dharma Canada has, for years, made it possible to carry out projects to help Cuba's most vulnerable, providing financial assistance to meet their basic needs.

Sometimes we don't know the faces of the donors, but through the Latihan we trust that the light of gratitude and love from our Cuban brothers and sisters will reach all the Susila Dharma teams and Subud members who help us. Simply... Thank you!!!

For the past two years, I have held the position of Susila Dharma Cuba amid great challenges in carrying out my work, but I believe it has helped me grow with Subud courage to fulfill my duties in collaboration with the Subud Committee of Cuba.

## News from SD around the world!

We warmly welcome Maria Lloyd and Olivia Lorot, who have recently joined the network as the new chair and vice chair of Susila Dharma Norway.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Roseanna Naeshagen and Elias Elias Ryberg, who have stepped down from their positions after many years of service. Roseanna concludes her work after 46 years of service to Susila Dharma. We hope that the blessings of Almighty God will accompany them and richly reward all the effort and dedication they have given to others.

In the same spirit, we joyfully welcome Angélica Majos, who, coincidentally, is also originally from Norway but resides in Alicante, Spain. Angélica previously served as the Susila Dharma Chair many years ago, when our beloved Rosanna Hille was the president of SDIA. Angélica is in the process of finalizing her board of directors and her team. At the same time, she is preparing some new projects and activities that will focus on senior Subud members in Spain.

She will be joined in this work by Irene Sánchez as Vice chair.

We are very excited to be able to support them in their endeavours.

## Building with Humanity

These stories are made possible by people like you — donors, volunteers, allies — who believe the world can be better. Thank you for being part of this network.

Thank you to all our readers and donors.

Please share your thoughts with us at [stories@susiladharma.org](mailto:stories@susiladharma.org)

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