

The Oaxaca Learning Center



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Spring 2015 Newsletter

The Oaxaca Learning Center Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary!

Many families mark off their kids' heights year by year, noting with lines on a wall their growth between birthdays. The marks creep up the wall so slowly, it seems. But then one day ten years have gone by and the new mark notes the height of a fully-fledged adult, riding far above those earlier marks of childhood.

So it seemed at the end of February when The Oaxaca Learning Center hosted a festive gathering of staff, volunteers and donors to mark its 10th anniversary. When it opened its doors in 2005, the Center had one coordinator, one tutor and 30 students. Now the Center staff comprises 23 people with different skills -- the president and three senior staff, eight program coordinators, ten tutors and an accountant. In the course of these ten years, the Center has provided support to more than 2000 young people seeking help in furthering their education. Bald numbers though, even impressive ones, are like those height marks on the wall: they say nothing about the truly important aspects of growing—the inner growth and development that should take place in any healthy organism.

The Center began by offering practical assistance in Math, the Sciences and computer literacy. English courses soon followed. In 2008 came the Center's increasing awareness that personal development was an inseparable part of academic achievement. A group study program began within the Center focusing on the particular barriers women face in this society. Soon, this initiative grew into a Center-wide program focusing on Gender Equality which in turn spawned frank, no-holds-barred workshops on Machismo, dating, sexuality, drug use, and AIDS and other STDs. By 2010, the Center was pro-

viding psychological support to any student with self-concept uncertainties or other personal concerns. In other words, the Center took as its mission the support of the total person. This has led naturally into the Center's helping students with vocational counseling and the discovery of their individual talents, talents sometimes buried beneath layers of cultural traditions and expectations. The Center is now a kind of collegial family, supporting its members academically and emotionally even as it insists on high standards of accountability and performance by students and staff alike.



Surrounded by staff and students, Gary Titus cuts into the Learning Center's 10th Anniversary cake.

As that rising mark on the wall reaches adult height, it inevitably signals that the time has come to take responsibility for one's future—to go out into the big world and “make a living.” It is no different for the Center. In 2013 core Center staff launched a satellite enterprise offering fee-based academic support to young people from families with resources in the greater Oaxaca community. Other profit-making initiatives are in the offing, all contributing to the original Center's self-sustainability. In addition, a Capital Campaign is currently underway to enable the Center to purchase outright the building that houses it, thus giving the Center an assured home.

The atmosphere at the February anniversary party was quietly

celebratory. Several of the staff present were at the Center when its doors opened. They'd grown from kids into responsible adults with ten years under their belts helping others do the same. There was every justification for the shared warmth of self-satisfaction and pride. Everyone's marks on the wall had risen many notches. No one, however, was resting on his or her laurels. A video presentation hit the decade's highlights, concluding on a note that summed up the feeling of the evening: "We have a Learning Center with both youth and experience. We still have dreams to make real, goals to achieve, and young people to help move toward their full potential!"

And the Center's founder, Gary Titus? He was there, of course, and an honored star of the event. Gary is an unusually tall man whose marks on the wall of growth are well above most others. He is also a man of few words. One of the attendees turned to him in the course of the evening and said, "Oh, Gary, this must all give you so much pleasure and satisfaction!" Gary thought about that for a moment. Then with a quiet smile worth at least a thousand words, said: "You bet!"



The magic of the Learning Center is an intangible quality that cannot be programmed or quantified with numbers.

Even descriptive words like "spirit" or "family atmosphere" fail to capture the sense of what transpires here. Kids come to the Center to study and learn to solve problems in math, chemistry and physics. It is undeniable that the Center makes great demands on them in terms of time, effort and commitment. The tutors and staff (from the same social class as the students) work diligently to provide both academic instruction and personal support for their charges. Our young people change in the process of being tutored. Because of our unique participation / opportunity organizing model, they quickly realize they are intelligent. This realization creates a new energy, which is contagious. They yearn to learn more! Their happy faces tell the true story of the Learning Center!

TOLC's 10th Anniversary

We're celebrating our 10th anniversary! It's incredible how quickly time passes. It seems like it was just yesterday that Gary brought me to 703 Murguia and announced that this was his new house where the room at the front would be a space for students to be tutored in academic subjects, computers and English.

Our 10th year celebration is also a time of growth at the Center, both internal and external. We have lived through stages of designing and fine tuning our activities and now we face new challenges that will demand the best of us. Internally we are renewing and improving our processes and strengthening and expanding our programs. We see revitalization as a natural and necessary process in moving ahead. The Center is a space where all of us have something to teach and -- more importantly -- something to learn.

Our current tutors, coordinators and the senior staff began as beneficiaries of the Center when they were high school students or in the first years of university. As beneficiaries, they had the opportunity to share in work activities around the Center and receive a small stipend. This has allowed a process of growth and professionalization. Students who initially needed financial aid have, over time, become tutors; tutors have become coordinators; and coordinators have become senior staff members.

In the external aspect, our Five Year Strategic Plan for financial sustainability of the Center's free tutoring and activities is the responsibility of the senior staff. The creation of the first social business (The Community Learning Center) in 2013 and its incremental movement toward profit-making status is a sign that we are on a sure path.

- Jaasiel Quero, Director of The Oaxaca Learning Center



Jaasiel Quero, TOLC Director

Capital Campaign Reaches 70% Of Its Goal -- Push Is On To Raise The Remainder!

As you know, we are in the midst of a campaign to raise the money needed for The Oaxaca Learning Center to purchase the building that is its home. Thanks to over 60 donors, we have reached almost 70% of our goal of \$200,000. That last 30% is always the toughest. A sincere THANK YOU to all who have donated or promised a contribution!

Now is the time to give if you haven't already, as we want to have the building in the hands of the nonprofit before the year is out and these things take time to wind their way through the system.

I recently attended the 10-year anniversary of The Oaxaca Learning Center. In attendance were a number of young Oaxacans who had benefited from the holistic programs Gary started a decade ago. One is now an engineer; a number have become lawyers; one or two are accountants; a good number are still pursuing their education; some are working to save money to start their own business; and others are starting families. ALL of them could not say enough about how important participating in The Center was to their lives. The Center gave them the confidence to move forward and the tools and support to overcome the obstacles that are inevitable. Purchase of the building will ensure the nonprofit can focus on delivery of meaningful programs unencumbered by facilities issues.

I feel strongly that we must do everything we can to ensure the future of The Oaxaca Learning Center because there are hundreds of youth involved now and many hundreds who will be involved in the future. Our next anniversary should be in the building owned by the non-profit. I urge you to donate whatever you can to the Capital Campaign now so that we can complete the purchase as soon as possible.

Thank you for your support!

-Bob Anyon, Chair of the Capital Campaign



Bob Anyon, from San Francisco, California, is one of the many dedicated supporters of The Oaxaca Learning Center. Bob volunteers his time and expertise by chairing the Capital Campaign committee.

To make an instant donation to the "Ensuring The Future" capital campaign, just click on the button below:

Donate Now!

You will be making Bob's job easier and the Center's future more secure.

Planning Workshop For FOLC Board

The Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center held their first-ever planning workshop this past January. It was led by Sandra Thomson, a development consultant from Canada with years of experience in helping nonprofit boards maximize their effectiveness. Board members attending were Gary Titus, Fay Henderson, Jaasiel Quero and Susan Connor. Also participating were Bob Anyon, chairman of the Capital Campaign, and Mary Stecher and John Goodman, of the fund-raising committee. Our four-hour discussion included an organizational assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats and a mini-workshop on fundraising.

The session culminated in a shared vision of FOLC in 2020 -- where we want to be and the work needed to reach our goal. Elements of that vision of the future include:

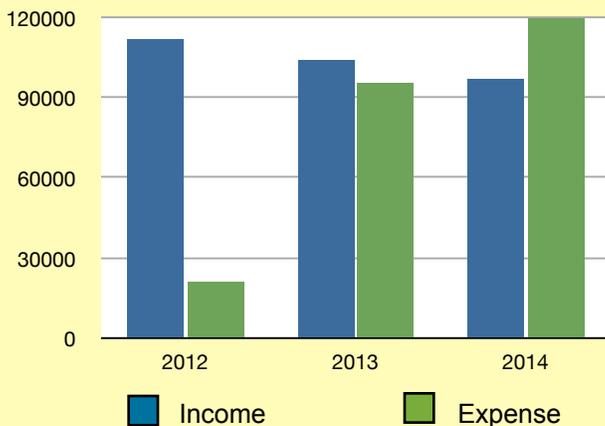
- * A sustainable funding base
- * A network of committed individual donors
- * An excellent donor renewal rate
- * Building ownership in the hands of the Mexican NGO
- * Established fundraising base including foundation funding
- * A well connected and diverse board
- * A board committed to "giving and getting"
- * A board with a succession plan
- * A board with clear job descriptions and terms of reference for committees.

We plan to make a workshop of this sort an annual event. And FOLC is committed to do whatever it takes to realize this vision.



FOLC board members plan for the future.

Chart 1



Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center Financial Report

The U.S. based "Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center," was founded in 2012 to accept donations from American citizens to be channeled to The Oaxaca Learning Center in Oaxaca. The chart on the left reflects the experience of the last three years. Donations have fallen somewhat year-to-year, while expenses have risen dramatically -- mainly because of the start-up costs associated with the new for-profit social business.

This year the Center is struggling to meet its financial commitments because falling oil prices have forced the Mexican government to cut back on social funding and Halloran Philanthropies to suspend its annual grant to the Center.



The Learning Center is always looking for ways to help students expand their educational horizons. Doug Favero, far left above, is the Oaxaca representative for EducationUSA, a program of the U.S. State Department which promotes college students studying abroad. Doug met with Jaasiel Quero, Larry Ginzkey, Jauri Sanchez and Fay Henderson Diaz to discuss how the Center can take advantage of the programs offered by EducationUSA, perhaps securing U.S. scholarships for our students.

You Can Help!

The Oaxaca Learning Center gets most of its revenue from donations. Americans can send tax-deductible gifts to:

FOLC
P. O. Box 926
Blue Hill, ME 04614

Canadians can send tax-deductible gifts to:

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Please be sure to include your e-mail address on your check!

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