

The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

Tutoring | Women's Group | English & Computer Skills | Counseling
Student Stipend Program | Designing The Future

www.tolc.org.mx

www.iicaprendizaje.org

SUMMER 2012

Summer School

Hello, dear friends!

We want you to know that we are thrilled with our newly implemented summer program. From July 9th to August 11th, the Learning Center provided classes on many different subjects to students interested in continuing their education throughout the summer.

This was a very special year because we offered a diverse catalog of courses. These included classes in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Computer and English. Our workshops were: multiple intelligences, body language, origami, vocational orientation,



In May, the Center directors and coordinators met to map out the summer school program.



Nina Liduina, from San Francisco, taught an English class during our summer school.

environmental education, chess, recycling, dance, soccer and sexual education.

Classes were held Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 18:00 hours and were conducted by a cadre of resourceful volunteers, tutors and Learning Center staff. A total of 55 young women and 46 young men took part in the program.

We hosted our first monthly event July 28th, where 90 students participated. The event consisted of playing different types of sports, such as volleyball, basketball and soccer. These types of activities allow for a major integration between our students so that they may establish new friendships.

We received excellent feedback from our students and instructors/tutors, who showed great interest in their classes. At the end of the workshops, the students presented a final project to other students that included all of what they had learned during this summer.

Thank you for being part of our project and for all your support in making this program possible!

Sonia Bautista León
Director of programs at TOLC



Let's face it, pictures of students sitting in class are boring! So here are a few shots of our kids enjoying their final day of summer school at "La Bamba" last Saturday, where they entertained each other with skits and then just had fun!



Monthly Special Events

The Learning Center rewards its students for their academic perseverance by sponsoring special events on one Saturday per month. On May 26, over 100 students crowded the auditorium at the School of Fine Arts at the University of Benito Juarez for a concert featuring Alberto Revilla on classical guitar and Florence Dobois and Thibaut Surugue performing on violin and piano. Their masterful presentation kept the young people in rapt attention.



Alberto Revilla mesmerized the audience with his expertise as a classical guitarist at the special concert for our students in May.

Jaasiel Quero: Back at the Helm

After more than two years of full-time teaching and training teachers in rural schools in the mountains and on Oaxaca's coast, The Learning Center's President and co-founder, Jaasiel Quero, recently came back to the city. His return to Oaxaca is especially fortunate and timely at this moment of growth and new opportunities at the Center; but more than that, his strong but quiet leadership style, appreciated and admired by his co-workers, was much missed during his absence.

Jaasiel's style *is* distinct. He is unusually thoughtful, scholarly-looking and, at first encounter, seemingly unassertive. Wrong! Listen to him in public giving a presentation on The Oaxaca Learning Center, or watch him at work with the Learning Center's coordinators and tutors, and you realize he is not only assertive, but self-assured, insightful, exceptionally articulate and a true Leader--one who excels in *leading* his co-workers by example, not driving them. He knows that listening needs to come before speaking; and that to be heard, it is not necessary to shout.

When the Center opened in 2005, Jaasiel had already completed the equivalent of a B.A. in Accounting and Administration and gone on to earn a Masters degree in Basic Education. He and Gary had known each other off and on for some time, but it was a shared, radical vision that made them working associates. The shared vision was of a place that would provide academic tutoring, mentoring, financial aid and psychological support to promising students from marginal backgrounds—students from low-income urban families and those who had migrated to the capital from distant villages. What made this idea radical was twofold: intending that the place offer its resources to students *free of charge*; and envisioning a future for the enterprise in which it would be owned and managed by its staff and become financially self-sufficient.

Gary had a lifetime of community organizing and social work experience to bring to the task of making the vision a reality. Jaasiel, for his part, had life experience as a public-school student and then teacher. He was born in the city of Oaxaca to parents of rural origins. His mother finished secondary school, which was a woman's highest aspiration at the time, and his father, after secondary school, went into vocational training. Fortunately for Jaasiel and his only sibling, an older sister, their parents understood the value of schooling. His sister led the way into education as a career, becoming a kindergarten teacher.

The vision of the Learning Center was a compelling one for Jaasiel, who evinces a deep commitment to social justice. All through his school years, and then through his years of teaching in mountain villages, Jaasiel had seen how badly in need of extra tutoring support many students were. Because there was none affordable to be had, coupled with the exigencies of having to hold a job at the same time as studying, many promising students had to let



Jaasiel sits in on a staff planning session, asking questions and offering advice on how to proceed.

their education go and - along with it - their hopes of realizing their potential. His experience had shown him something else as well: young women had it even worse than young men, encountering more prejudice, more obstacles, more violence, and having access to fewer opportunities. Because of what he had seen, Jaasiel was determined that the Learning Center make a extra effort on behalf of women - and it does! The Center takes in somewhat more females than males, and its vital women's programs offer valuable
See "Jaasiel" on page 6.

Scholarship Program A Boon To Students

For a number of years now, the Learning Center has provided financial assistance to deserving students to help them meet their tuition expenses in either high school or college. This program is a godsend for students from poor families who otherwise would not be able to pursue their educational dreams. Most of the funds for these scholarships are provided by generous donors from various countries. In the coming academic year, the Center will give stipends to a total of 36 students - an amazing number more than double the 14 students we sponsored just last year!

If funds were available, the Center has still other deserving students whose academic and personal lives would be profoundly affected by receiving a scholarship. Should you wish to offer a scholarship to a student, we invite you to contact Gary Titus at gary@tolc.org to get more information.

In their own words, here are mini-profiles of three current scholarship students:



Angelina Hernández Mesinas

My name is Angelina Hernández Mesinas. I'm 20 years old and I'm from the town of Cuilapam de Guerrero, not too far from the city of Oaxaca. I'm in the fifth semester of the accounting program at Benito Juárez Autonomous University. I enjoy going to the Learning Center because it gives me support not only in academics but also in psychological and social areas.

I also like that we make monthly field trips to historical sites and such around the city, which is an opportunity to participate as a group and become closer. This helps motivate me to continue with my studies. My family has very limited resources, so it is hard for them to pay for the many things I need for my university courses. I am very grateful for this opportunity to study and for the support of the Learning Center.

Andrés Cruz Hernández

I'm Andrés Cruz Hernández, 15 years old and just graduated from junior high school here in Oaxaca. I am from Salina Cruz. I like to play soccer and going to school.

I go to the Learning Center because it helps clear up doubts I have in academic materials and because it motivates me to continue to study and gives me the valuable tools I need. The scholarship program has helped me a lot and I'm grateful for the support. I am excited about taking preparatory courses at LaSalle High School this coming year.



Maria García Gallegos

My name is María García Gallegos and I'm 21 years old. I come from the village of San Juan Yagila, which is in the Sierra del Norte, the mountains to the north of the city of Oaxaca, where the Zapotec indigenous language is still spoken. I'm currently in the seventh semester of the bilingual primary education program at the Bilingual Intercultural Normal School.

The scholarship group at the Learning Center has given me a lot of support in areas such as psychology and economics to help me successfully pursue my studies and achieve a degree (*licenciatura*). I am very interested in the revitalization of Latin America's indigenous cultures, particularly those of my state, and in working to help preserve them.



Why Get Involved With The Oaxaca Learning Center?

Contributors to the Learning Center come in all shapes and sizes. Some have stayed at our B&B and learned of its activities first hand. Others have never been to Oaxaca, but perhaps were introduced to the Center's work by friends, or friends of friends.

In this occasional series, we'll talk with a variety of donors about how and why they become involved. We begin with Susan Connor, a professor of law at The John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

Q. *Susan, what was your introduction to the Oaxaca Learning Center?*

A. In 2006, on my first trip to Oaxaca, I was walking along Murguía Street, where the Center is located, and the door happened to be open. Jorge was standing outside and he greeted me enthusiastically. We chatted for a few minutes and he asked if I'd like to see the Learning Center.

Q. *I should point out that Jorge is Jorge Rosario, one of the original students at the Center and its first coordinator. So, a chance encounter?*

A. Right. Gary Titus was there and we met, and the rest is history. The next day I had my first *intercambio* (informal exchange of language lessons) and I've returned more than a dozen times since then.

Q. *What was it that affected you so strongly?*

A. What moved me most is the Center's holistic approach to education. Academic advancement is important, but so is the development of values and life skills: especially the recognition of the importance of personal responsibility, integrity and community.

Q. *How did you move from visitor to volunteer to donor?*

A. Many of the kids at the Learning Center need to develop foundations which their own families do not have the resources to provide. They need to develop confidence; they need a peer group for reinforcement; and clearly they need financial support to accomplish their goals. In addition, I know that my contributions go further at the Center than when I contribute to other causes in the U.S.

I have framed in my office that wonderful quotation widely attributed to Margaret Mead: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."* We may not be able to "change the world," but I believe we can change the worlds of the young men and women who participate in our programs. And they can, in turn, pass their newfound confidence, skills and wisdom onto others behind them.

Q. *I think your words wonderfully capture the vision of the Center. How do you see your relationship with the Learning Center evolving?*

A. I do not imagine retiring from my wonderful professorial job. However, I plan to spend my month-long winter break and summers at the Center until calamity strikes. Nothing else could keep me away!



Susan Connor

Go to Oaxaca. See the fabulous sites. But don't miss out on the best part of the culture -- the warm and wonderful people who make the place so special. If you stay at TOLC, you will be able to encounter them in a relaxed, non-commercial setting, where you may actually end up being helpful, rather than a mere passive onlooker. - Susan Moore

“Jaasiel” continued

information and support for issues of health, relationships, sex, violence and gender equality.

“We have accomplished a lot in a short time,” Jaasiel is pleased to admit, noting the Center’s ever-increasing number of students, tutors and programs, its constant re-evaluation and fine-tuning of its effectiveness. “We’ve also achieved our goal of having the staff own and manage the operation.” But, he adds, with typically quiet—but firm—emphasis, this is no time for the Center to rest on its laurels. “We can see many new opportunities and possible new directions. And the time has come to work out how the Learning Center and FOLC work together to reach the objective of financial self-sufficiency. That has to become a major priority and one of my main responsibilities.”

The October newsletter will have an overview of the Center’s upcoming initiatives toward this goal of financial self-sustainability.

You Can Help!

The Oaxaca Learning

Center depends upon the goodwill and generosity of our friends and supporters to carry out our mission. Every cent that is donated will be used to help our students.

Tax-deductible donations may be sent to:

Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center

P.O. Box 926

Blue Hill, Maine 04614

You may also make an instant donation (which will incur a slight service charge) using PayPal by clicking the button below:

Donate Now!

Invitation To Our Bed & Breakfast

Did you know The Oaxaca Learning Center operates a bed & breakfast? We have two guest rooms with private baths on the main level and an apartment upstairs which are perfect for people visiting Oaxaca. We are located within easy walking distance of all the main attractions in town. And you will enjoy interacting with our friendly staff.



Go to www.tolc.org.mx for information about and reservations for the B&B.