

# The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

Tutoring | Women's Group | English & Computer Skills | Counseling  
Work/Study Sponsorships

[www.tolc.org.mx](http://www.tolc.org.mx)

[www.iicaprendizaje.org](http://www.iicaprendizaje.org)

## SUMMER 2013 Newsletter

### An Oasis Of Equity

From Andorra to Zambia, cultures worldwide are wrestling with the fact and fallout of gender inequity. Smack in the middle of the alphabet of nations lies Mexico, better than some and worse than others in matters of male-female equality. With its long history of male dominance in all spheres of life, however, Mexico is a textbook example of the arduous efforts it takes to begin to redress such a culturally entrenched imbalance.

Oaxaca has been slower than some other Mexican states to address urgently needed social change; it still can present a bleak landscape for a woman. The Oaxaca Learning Center, here in the state's capital, stands out as an oasis—and a burgeoning one it is, sending green tendrils of equity out into the arid land beyond its doors.



*Betsy (in the purple blouse) with some of the young people in the Gender Equity class in the summer school program at the Center.*

ignorant or badly misinformed about a number of other gender matters—for example: sexual preferences, sexually transmitted diseases, violence in dating relationships, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment and legal rights. All these matters are now openly addressed under an umbrella program, supervised by Betsaida Arango Canseco, the Center's Coordinator for what is now called "Youth for a Better Future".

In the program's ongoing development and administration, Betsy works closely with Edith López Nicolás, the Center's Psychology Coordinator. Both women have extensive backgrounds in gender counseling and are deeply aware of the complexity and sensitivity of the subject, as well as the traps

"Gender equity has been a priority issue for us from our start in 2005," says Jaasiel Quero, The Center's President. "From the beginning, we gave space preference to young women, because, hard as it may be for males here, there are many less opportunities and much less educational support for women than for men." Soon after opening, Center staff put in place a Women's Group which met regularly for lectures, films and discussions on sexual and reproductive rights, teenage pregnancy and family violence.

It quickly became clear that the Center's youngsters, both female *and* male, were either

and challenges that language and custom bring to the counseling task. Their bedrock premise, however, is simple: that men and women offer one another, and be offered by others, the same respect, rights and opportunities. "Gender equity here at the Center," says Jaasiel, with justifiable pride, "is no longer a program separate from, say, physics or English. We make it part of *all* our programs, part of everything we teach and say and do."

Betsy and her co-workers have already taken gender equity out into the public, secondary-school arena, and there will be a workshop devoted to it in this year's summer program. In addition, working with Fay Henderson de Diaz, President of Friends of the Learning Center, they are completing a proposal to fund further staff training and community outreach—including the considerable benefits men stand to gain from true gender equity. The staff acknowledges that these Center initiatives are not about to change laws or reform Oaxaca society. But they also know that down the road a ways, thanks to what they are doing today, there may be Center alumni out there helping to realize just those outcomes.

## You Can Help!

*The Oaxaca Learning Center depends upon the 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:*

**FOLC**

**P.O. Box 926**

**Blue Hill, Maine 04614**

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

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

**Donate Now!**



*Ruth Tavlin*

## Staff Empowerment

When, at the suggestion of friends, Ruth Tavlin visited The Learning Center, she had an immediate feeling of being among kindred spirits. Not surprising for someone with the unusual title of "Assistant Director of Student Success" at Occidental College in Los Angeles. A psychotherapist by profession, Ruth's job at Oxy—as Occidental is affectionately known—is working with students who are experiencing academic or stress-related problems, including providing support to students with learning and emotional disabilities. Says Ruth: "My work starts where students get stuck."

It was natural for Ruth to feel the gravitational pull of another institution dedicated to student success, and she decided she wanted to make a hands-on contribution to the Center by sharing her expertise. On a recent return visit to Oaxaca, she conducted a two-hour workshop with senior staff. "What I had to offer was a different approach to learning and thinking that centers on mindfulness and even meditation." From that core, says Ruth, come powerful applications for time management, organization and study skills.

The seeds Ruth sowed during that brief workshop fell on fertile ground, leaving the participants craving more. By incorporating Ruth's teachings into their everyday lives and work, they cite many benefits: improved use of time; better organization and management of tasks; heightened evaluation of effectiveness; lower levels of stress; greater sense of enjoyment and fulfillment in performing their duties; and a new appreciation for techniques of conscious breathing and meditation.

The heartfelt plea from the Coordinators and Tutors who took part was unanimous: "Come back, please, Ruth!"

## Caution: Learning Center Magic At Work!

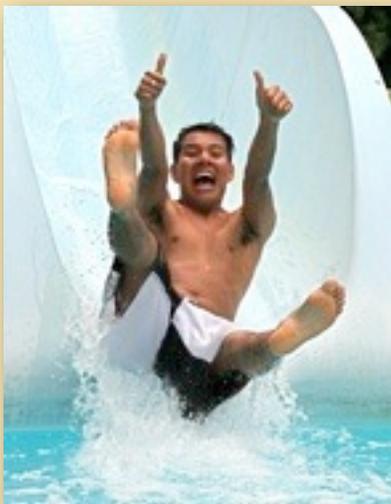
Eva Rito was tired of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her drunken husband. The mother of three teen boys and a seven-year-old daughter, she could not see much hope in the future. Finally, her situation became desperate. She decided to flee from her home in San Francisco Cozoaltepec, a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean not far from the fishing and resort village of Puerto Escondido. The family boarded a bus for the capital. They arrived in Oaxaca penniless and became squatters, living beneath one of the bridges crossing the Atoyac river. Eva could not help wondering if she and her family had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. ❀ ❀ ❀

As the oldest of the three Rito boys, Omar, then 18, felt responsible for his family. A bright student, he had given up a full college scholarship and a part-time job in Puerto Escondido to flee with them to Oaxaca. Now he was despondent because he could not find enough work to support the family. Then his former employer told him about a place in Oaxaca that offered scholarships to deserving students. Omar applied to the Learning Center and was accepted. The staff helped him qualify for a partial scholarship at the Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca, where he enrolled as a student in civil engineering. The Center also arranged for an American donor to pay the remainder of his college tuition and provide a stipend for living expenses. Another retired American expat gave him free room and board. ❀ ❀ ❀

Omar excelled in his studies and thrived in the supportive environment of the Learning Center. He spent many weekend hours attending the various counseling sessions and workshops the Center offers and requires of its scholarship recipients. He became good friends with Center staffers and other students. At various times he tutored younger students in math and science. Now, after four years, he has completed his academic courses, achieving high marks in all his classes. This summer he is teaching in the summer program. In the fall he will embark on a professional internship with a construction company in Oaxaca and will earn a bachelor's degree in January. After that, he will pursue state certification as a civil engineer, finally realizing a long-sought dream. ❀ ❀ ❀



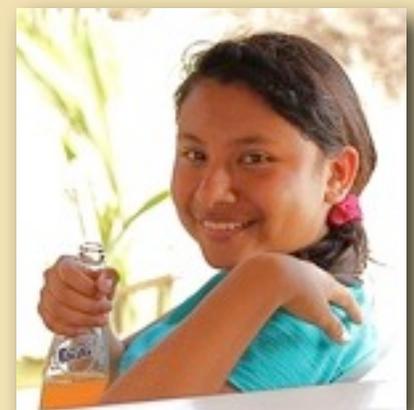
*Omar Rito*



*Rafa Rito*

Eva's second son, Marco, chose a career in law enforcement but the youngest, Rafa, has fallen under the spell of the Center. After graduating from high school, he worked for a time as a mechanic at an auto repair shop near his home, but solid employment was hard to come by. He was frustrated and aimless. This past year Rafa worked at the Center's bed & breakfast, caring for guests and doing maintenance work. In the Center's family atmosphere he has blossomed into a happy, gregarious and hard-working young man. He spent many hours taking English lessons at the Cambridge Academy and studying for the entrance exam at the Tecnológico, where he hopes to enroll in mechanical engineering. Luz, their baby sister, now 14, is in junior high. She, too, is looking forward to participating in the educational and social programs sponsored by the Center. ❀ ❀ ❀

Eva now works as a housekeeper and the family has a modest apartment on Cerro Fortin overlooking Oaxaca. She is incredibly grateful that her children are so involved at the Learning Center and have such high hopes for the future.



*Luz Rito*

## Touting Our Tutors

*The tutoring program is the very soul of the Learning Center. Individualized, personal instruction is still at the heart of what the Center does, despite all the other excellent programs that have been added over the years. Here we continue to introduce the university students who constitute our corps of tutors, and whose efforts make the Center the resounding success that it is.*

### Alejandra Hernández Mazas

Alejandra is 22 years old and has just completed her last semester as a biology major at the Technological University of the Valley of Oaxaca. She was born in Oaxaca and lives with her mother and sister in public housing.

“During my university studies, I have been an outstanding student, with a 9.0 grade point average. I am looking forward to completing my degree because I want to work with and support sustainable development projects in communities in the state of Oaxaca and to help my mother with the family expenses. I hope to continue studying and do graduate work in environmental conservation and preservation of indigenous traditions, raising consciousness about the importance of Oaxaca’s multi-cultural diversity.

From the moment I became part of The Learning Center, I changed my perspective on many things and it has helped me to strengthen my will to succeed and to help others to succeed. I have found a family at the Center that, for various reasons, I have never found in my own home. The training and workshops have been important in my development, in working as a team member and in communicating better with others. This summer I am working as a tutor in mathematics and chemistry and in workshops about the environment, sexual education and reading at the summer school program of the new for-profit business the Center has started. I am also studying English on a scholarship the Center helped me get at the Cambridge Academy.

My father died of a stroke in 2007, and since then my mother has supported the family. The stipend I receive as a tutor has allowed me to buy eyeglasses and to replace an old computer. I was also able to participate in a field trip to Chiapas with my ethnobiology class that I otherwise could not have afforded.”



*Alejandra Hernández Mazas*

### Getting The Word Out

The word about the good work accomplished at the Learning Center has spread widely among the young people of Oaxaca. Our challenge now is to make more people around the world aware of and willing to support this worthwhile enterprise. Please tell your friends about The Oaxaca Learning Center by passing along these easy references:

Web site -

[www.tolc.org.mx](http://www.tolc.org.mx)

Facebook page -

[www.facebook.com/oaxacalearningcenter](http://www.facebook.com/oaxacalearningcenter)

YouTube video -

<http://vimeo.com/40553509>

Bed & Breakfast at the Center -

[www.bedandbreakfastoax.org](http://www.bedandbreakfastoax.org)

### Summer School

Things are hopping at the Learning Center these days! Summer school classes began on Monday, July 8 and will run through August 9. This year there are 118 young people enrolled in the five-week program. Classes in math, physics, chemistry and English are held daily, Monday through Friday. There are also courses in typing, computer literacy and accounting. In addition, there are special workshops on a variety of topics designed to build personal character and socially responsible relationships. That young people are willing to give up their summer “time off” from school to spend eight hours a day in a classroom setting speaks volumes about their commitment to education and the quality of the program put together by the staff at the Center.

Best wishes to all these “summer scholars”!