

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

Winter 2013 Newsletter

Tutoring: Heart Of The Learning Center

The Oaxaca Learning Center provides a variety of programs and services to its students. Every year, it seems, as the number of clients grows, so does the number of programs offered. But the Center began with the idea of giving free tutoring to students between the ages of 14 and 24, and that is still the main focus and principal endeavor. The tutoring program is the heart of the enterprise.



Here are nine of the ten young men and women who are the tutors at the Learning Center.

The college students who are the tutors are carefully and thoroughly screened and receive training in the Center's academic mentoring methodology prior to working with our students. Some of them were recipients of the mentoring provided by the Center in their earlier years. Because of this, they have a personal experience of the value of tutoring and understand the process. They are also motivated by the desire to give back something to the Center for the benefits they received. Lastly, all of the tutors come from a low economic background and appreciate the monetary stipends they get for their work.

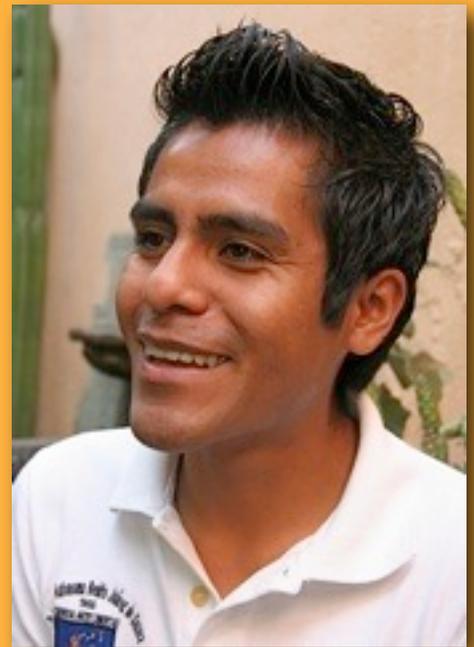
Tutors work 18 hours each week -- 15 hours of tutoring and a 3-hour team evaluation session each Saturday. They receive a stipend equivalent to \$160.00 USD per month, which helps them with their daily expenses and allows them to stay in university. The team works to help each student succeed, refine the tutoring process and assure that students with personal problems receive extra support and guidance.

The operation of the tutoring program is a challenging thing. The tutors, while full of good will, are not professional teachers. They need guidance and supervision as they work with their

younger charges. Student applicants to the tutoring program need to be personally interviewed and evaluated. And the tutoring program itself has to mesh seamlessly with the counseling program, the women's program, the many workshops offered at the Center, and the various meetings that are required of the college students receiving aid. Watching over the tutoring program and giving it vitality is Armando Cruz Carmona, the charismatic coordinator. He is a key part of the team of senior staff members who direct the entire operation of the Learning Center.

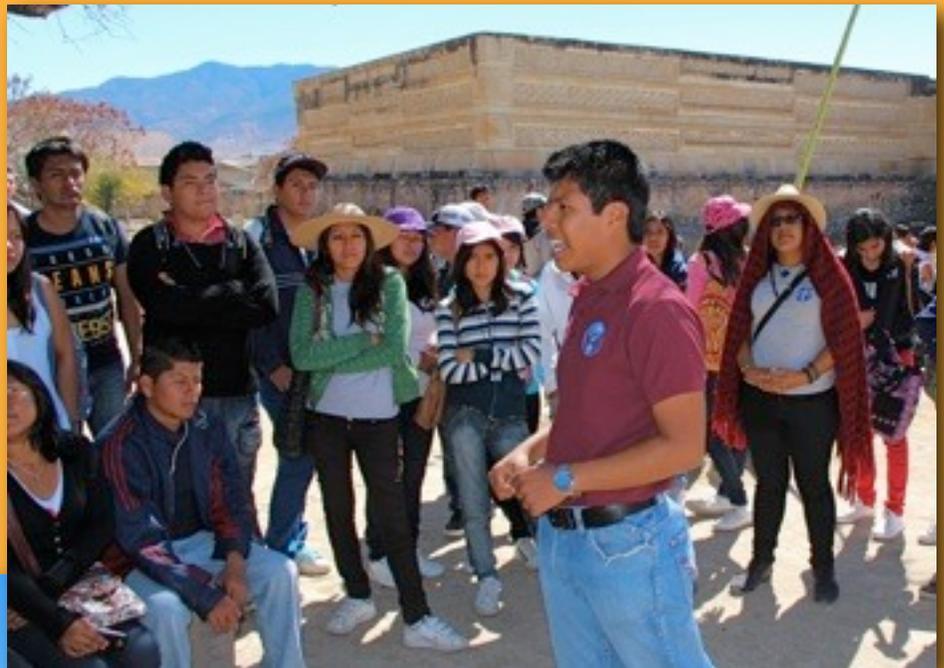
The Center presently has ten tutors on the staff and hopes to increase that number in the coming year, if the budget allows. Contributions made to the Center will enable the hiring of additional tutors, which in turn will permit even more students to be helped by the mentoring process.

Armando Carmona, right, is the indefatigable coordinator of the Center's excellent tutoring program. His enthusiasm and expertise are vital to the success of the operation.



Tule And Mitla

The first Saturday in February found the students and staff of the Learning Center on a field trip to Tule and Mitla. At Tule, the 115 students engaged in group activities before viewing the gargantuan old tree in the churchyard there. In Mitla, they toured the archeological ruins of what was once the Zapotec religious capital of the region following the decline of Monte Alban after 700 C.E.



ABOVE: Cesar, one of our students, works part time as a tour guide. He capably explained the significance of the Mitla complex to the rest of his fellow travelers.

LEFT: Part of the large group moves through the palace of the six columns to view some of the interior rooms.

A Shining Star In The Center's Constellation

Far off the beaten path in a remote, mountainous area of Oaxaca state lies the tiny Zapotec village of San Juan Yagila. That is where Maria Garcia Gallegos was born and raised, the oldest of four daughters in her family. Her father is a peasant farmer and mason; her mother tends the home. Growing up, Mari and her younger sisters would sometimes play a game of make-believe. In the imaginary world of children, Mari would be the schoolteacher to her younger siblings.

Fast-forward to the present. Mari is now in her last semester in college at the Escuela Normal Bilingue Intercultural de Oaxaca (ENBIO) in Tlacoahuaya, a small town a few kilometers east of Oaxaca city. She left home four years ago at age 18 to pursue that dream of becoming a teacher. A star pupil, she has the highest grade point average in her class. She is presently doing a student-teaching practicum in Cuajimoloyas, one of the eight villages of the Pueblos Mancomunados in the mountains nearby, where she alternates six weeks of teaching with three-week interludes of class-work and analysis back at ENBIO.



Maria Garcia Gallegos

March through early May. She was selected on the basis of her excellent academic record, the recommendation of her teachers, an essay she composed, personal interviews and the project she designed and is implementing during her teacher-training in Cuajimoloyas. Needless to say, Mari is very excited about this spectacular opportunity! This will be her first journey outside Mexico (and first time on an airplane). As a student of languages, she is curious to note how Spanish is spoken in Spain as compared with Mexico. She wants to spend time in Barcelona and Madrid, and hopes to have a chance to visit Paris, too.

Mari will graduate this July and embark on a teaching career. She would like to spend a couple of years in her home village, finally making real that childhood fantasy of long ago. Then she plans to pursue a master's degree in applied linguistics and ultimately wants to teach at the university level.

Like many other aspiring young people from the hill country, Mari came to the capital with high hopes, but with few friends and resources. She already knew about The Oaxaca Learning Center, though, for our director, Sonia Bautista, came from a village close by Yagila and had gone to high school there. After renewing contact with Sonia, Maria started taking part in the Center's workshops and student activities. She qualified for a scholarship in college on her own, based on her excellent high school grades. The scholarship, however, covered only her tuition. She still had to cover books, supplies and living expenses. The Center arranged for her to receive a student stipend, the gift of two sisters living in Canada. Staff at the Center also saw to her having a place to live rent-free with an expatriate couple residing in Oaxaca. With this kind of support, Mari was able to concentrate on her studies. Not only has she excelled in her academic endeavors, but she has blossomed into a charming, vivacious and self-assured young woman.

Next month, Mari's horizons will expand again as she takes part in a student exchange program sponsored by the University of Granada. She is one of four students from Oaxaca state chosen to spend six weeks in Spain from mid-

Share Our Story!

Share the Center's inspiring story of helping young people realize their dream of a good education. Mention our work to family, friends and co-workers. Send them the link to the YouTube video produced by Sylvia Hines and encourage them to watch it. To view the video, click on this link:

<http://vimeo.com/40553509>

Lending A Hand In Doing The Center's Work

This is a continuation in a series of occasional pieces showing how different individuals have found ways to help The Oaxaca Learning Center achieve its goals by volunteering their services.

Susan O'Brien's volunteer work at the Center began two years ago with her signing up for a language intercambio. It seemed a simple, straightforward proposition, but it was, as the saying goes, the camel's nose under the tent. With a whole career devoted to public health and social services, Susan quickly realized that the bright young man she was assigned, whom we'll call here Roderigo, was wrestling not only with the English language, but also with a number of emotional issues that cried out for understanding and support. From Roderigo's point of view, a simple intercambio had turned into a chance encounter with someone he could trust, in whom he could confide, and who had experience that could help him.

When Susan returned to Massachusetts, she and Roderigo kept in close communication by email. Knowing that he would benefit in his university studies as an engineering student by having a laptop, she got him one. When Roderigo's sponsors could no longer continue their support, Susan stepped in to fill the gap, even though she admits it is "a bit of a financial challenge." And to lessen the burden, Susan engaged in some creative fundraising. First, she conducted an email campaign among her friends, introducing them to Roderigo, laying out his needs and describing her support. From this, she netted about \$1200. In another initiative, Susan invited a group to come together on Roderigo's behalf, and she raised another \$1300. Individual donations have ranged from \$500 to \$25, and Roderigo's education moves forward. In March, which is designated "Immigration Month," Susan plans to reach out for help from her church community with a talk about Oaxaca and the Center, a description of Roderigo's challenging journey, and the sale of artifacts she brought back from her recent visit.



Susan O'Brien

On this past visit, Susan and Roderigo spent a lot of time together, and he invited her home to have dinner with his family. Their supportive friendship is sure to continue, with Susan planning to return to Oaxaca for a spell each year. Says she: "I am determined to see him through to his degree completion and to help him with emotional support however I can, even from a distance."



The Oaxaca Learning Center

Our bed & breakfast has two bedrooms, one with a double bed and the other with two twin beds. Both have private baths and access to the patio. We also have a rooftop apartment for rent. 100% of the funds raised from the B&B support the programs and operation of The Oaxaca Learning Center.

For more information or to make a reservation, go to www.bedandbreakfastoax.org

2012 Financial Report

It's time to wrap up the books for 2012 and take stock of how things went financially for The Oaxaca Learning Center. Overall, it was a good year, though income from the Bed & Breakfast continued the decline of the past several years. Total income increased \$10,000.00 over 2011, thanks to Halloran Philanthropies raising their generous grant to \$25,000.00 and individual donors stepping forward with more and larger gifts. Here are the key figures.

INCOME SOURCES

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Bed & breakfast | \$ 14,170.00 |
| Sale of cookbooks | \$ 5,068.00 |
| Individual donations | \$ 55,849.80 |
| PayPal gifts | \$ 2,427.00 |
| Foundation grants | \$ 33,000.00 |
| Government grants | <u>\$ 14,276.00</u> |
| Total income: | \$124,790.80 |

As you can see, the support the Center receives from individual donors is absolutely crucial. It is far and away the biggest piece of the income pie. Thank you! Thank you! A special word of appreciation to those who contributed more than \$1,000.00 each to support our students. More donors are very much needed! Please make a gift if you can.



Dalia López, left, receives one-on-one English lessons from Nancy Jacobs, who donates time each week while on winter holiday in Oaxaca.

FOLC Board Meeting

The "Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center" board met on January 8, 2013. Four of its seven members who were in Oaxaca were present. Our discussion centered around fund raising success to date and priorities for framing future funding proposals in 2013. The renewal of our grant from Halloran Philanthropies (now the Harry R. Halloran, Jr. Fund) - with a generous increase to \$25,000 - was a validation of the Center's successful 2012 implementation of their initial grant. FOLC's funding priorities for the present year were set based on the recommendations of the Center's Mexican administrative staff. FOLC will seek U.S. foundation and individual funding for "coaching" training for the staff, coordinators and tutors to strengthen our mentoring activities and will seek additional funding to increase our tutoring staff. FOLC will support further initiatives once the Center's Mexican leaders have completed the "Five Year Strategic Plan" for long-term sustainability in March 2013. Jaasiel Quero, President of the Learning Center and also a member of the FOLC Board, reported that the Center's Mexican NGO is in the final phase of legalizing its ability to provide tax deductions to Mexican individuals and foundations who donate to support The Oaxaca Learning Center's activities. Our updated website and new promotional brochures for the Center were discussed. The revised website is now online at www.tolc.org.mx thanks to the diligent work of a team of volunteers. The brochures, both paper and online versions, will be available in mid-March.

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:

FOLC

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 on the button below:

Donate Now!