

JUNTOS NEWSLETTER – October 2017

JUNTOS continues to thrive. Everyone has had a very good summer and now that school has resumed, the JUNTOS team is working at all the sites they had before plus one new one, the Salvation Army Shelter.

This Newsletter has two distinct parts, the first about an individual student, the second about a new site.

Part I

Whereas most of the students in the JUNTOS classes live at home and attend the computer classes after school, we also have a couple of sites where the children are wards of the state. In Mexico, like elsewhere, many different factors lead to children being removed from their parents' care. All of them are to protect the children from danger. We know the children as individuals and have never inquired as to the reason they have been removed from their homes.

María de Jesús, nicknamed Chuy, is one of the girls we have been following over several years. When she was first introduced in this Newsletter, she lived at an institution called Amor para Compartir where she had been since she was five or six years old. While she was there, she was one of two girls who began their secondary studies. No girls from Amor had ever attended secondary school. Due to unforeseen events, totally beyond our control, all the children at Amor para Compartir, were moved. Some, like Chuy, went to a state institution called DIF, while others went to the Salvation Army Shelter. Chuy has been at the DIF since February 2015.

Her education can be called patchy at best. While at the first institution she completed primary and middle school, on the premises. She then did a little over one semester of secondary school, was moved, continued secondary school through on-line distance learning and attended a beauticians. By law children who are wards of the state stay in the institutions until their eighteenth birthday. And since Chuy was eighteen in August of this year, she was discharged.

Very fortunately we have Gerardo, an employee of JUNTOS, following Chuy very closely. He has written two reports, the first is about Chuy's birthday, the very day she was able to walk out the DIF gates and the second, written two weeks later, on the day she started school.

Gerardo's first report:

"Yesterday morning I went to DIF joyfully representing JUNTOS to celebrate Chuy's 18th birthday and to be there to witness her outing!

The psychologist Dora had told me that she might be out the same day of her birthday, and she was!...being the first person to do that, since it always takes

more paper work and time for kids to go out of DIF. So, Chuy was really happy and almost incredulous that it was really happening.

She had a cake with her peers, packed a small bag with all her belongings (almost nothing), said emotional good-byes and crossed the gates with me and her sister/host Dulce María, who was also there to sign some release papers.

I talked to her sister, who seems nice and responsible about taking care and guiding Chuy. We exchanged phone numbers to be in touch to keep supporting Chuy in school matters. I gave Chuy a present on behalf of JUNTOS. It's a book, the autobiography of Malala, the young pakistani girl (Nobel Peace winner 2014) who has been fighting globally for women's rights and education.

Chuy's mother was also there outside the DIF building waiting for her and her sister. She gave Chuy a very warm hug and Chuy reciprocated. I think the mother is going to be part of Chuy's life again, even though she hasn't had too much contact with her all these years. We can only hope that this is a new, good beginning."

Gerardo's second report:

"This past Saturday Chuy had her first day of school. I went to see her at the end of the day so I could have a feedback of her first week.



She liked the classes and her classmates. I paid for the materials she is going to use as topic books, and for the school's polo shirt which she is wearing in the picture. We talked to the director and there is also the possibility of her joining the women soccer team so she can practice a sport.

She also sounded happy about her family. She told me all last week she was getting to know relatives and that she went to play soccer with some of them to a field close by. Concerning the beauty school, she doesn't want to attend anymore

because she is not passionate about it and the materials for practices are expensive. I told her as long as she concentrates in her Prepa (secondary) studies and get good marks, we will be happy to support her.

I asked about her immediate needs...if she needed a cell phone, a laptop, etc. She mentioned that she is not crazy about a cell phone, she can survive without it, but a laptop will be of great help for her homework and subjects research.

I may meet with her every two weeks to help her catch up with some subjects like history and social sciences and to get feedback about her housing/family situation.

Overall, she seems an adaptable person, but let see how these first months develop.

Please let me know your suggestions about the laptop..."

Gerardo has written that she has in fact stayed in the beautician school, despite having mixed feelings about it. In addition, she will be getting a computer from JUNTOS in the next few weeks.

Part II

The Salvation Army Shelter.

JUNTOS has been involved with the shelter since some of the children from Amor para Compartir were transferred there. All the JUNTOS volunteers were most impressed with the director of the shelter, Major Guadalupe, a wonderful energetic woman who really put the lives of the children under her care as her first priority. Like JUNTOS, she felt that only through education could they get ahead. Everyone at the shelter attended school, primary, middle and secondary. She worked out an agreement with a private secondary school right around the corner and paid only token tuition for all the children that were enrolled there. Nevertheless, in May tragedy struck. The Major's husband, who ran the shelter with her, died very suddenly and the Salvation Army decided that two people were required for 42 children. Major Guadalupe has retired and moved from Cuernavaca back to San Luis Potosí and a younger woman, a Captain, has taken over.

We were in the middle of discussions about bringing the computer programme to the shelter when all of these events occurred. During the summer months the teachers began going but it is only now that the shelter has been integrated into the official schedule and JUNTOS is there two afternoons a week.

Like at the other sites, we are using assistants here and in this case they are Jacqueline and Dulce. Like Chuy, the girl who has just left the DIF, Jacqueline has been in care since an early age. Along with Chuy she began high school, but



luckily for her she was able to continue her studies full time while living at the Salvation Army.

The second assistant is Dulce, a sixteen year old who also has been in a state institution since she was four. Apparently she is Jacqueline's cousin. She spent eleven years at Amor para Compartir and has been at the Salvation Army shelter since February, 2015. A smart girl, Dulce, is right on track as far as her studies go. She is in first year prepa, a three year programme that is equivalent to high school. Her favorite subject in school is math although she says she also loves to draw. As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she ran to bring her latest acrylic painting. Her favorite musician is Marcos Witt.

We include some photographs of the JUNTOS team at the Salvation Army Shelter.





P.S.

An earthquake hit Cuernavaca on Tuesday, the 19th of September, causing a lot of physical damage to the city and surrounding communities. Fortunately, none of our tutors or friends were injured. The JUNTOS programs were suspended for the remainder of the week. Some of the community centres were used to temporarily house families whose homes were badly damaged. Our tutors worked to help clear the rubble in their communities and distribute food.

The following Monday classes resumed.

<http://www.JUNTOS-together.ca/donate>