

Juntos Newsletter February 2015

The focus of this newsletter is the **Casa Hogar “Amor para compartir”** (House - home “Share the Love”).

Several members of the Juntos board visited Amor para Compartir on January 7th, 2015 and the information and pictures included are from that day.



Amor para Compartir is completely different from the other sites where Juntos provides computer instruction. It is a sheltered home, an institution for children that have been removed from their families. The 100 odd children that live at Amor para Compartir are there full time and all of them are under court orders to be separated from their parents. The majority of the children are in the eight to fourteen year range, but there are some very young children as well as older teenagers.

Amor para Compartir is run by a couple, Lulú (Lurdes) Fuentes and Sagid Rivera and their three children, Sagid Jr., Sarahi and Kaleb. Lulú and Sagid are a remarkable couple with a huge amount of energy and optimism. Lulú has always helped the poor and began some twenty years ago at the local dump, situated in Tetlama, near Xochicalco. There she found entire families living at the dump, their lives dedicated to

sorting and selling the goods and her concern was for the children. Because the children did not go to school, she petitioned the local authorities to allow these children to do so. As a result, she took a couple of children home with her and from this experience was born Amor para Compartir.

Like those children that Lulú first met at the dump, there are many children in Cuernavaca in need of care. The local social services, called DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia / Integrated Family Development), is in charge. In Canada these children are now placed in foster care, although we also have other facilities such as group homes. In Cuernavaca, there are two levels of government, municipal and state (the state is Morelos) that are in charge of vulnerable children. The first, the municipal government, does not have any group homes and the second, the state, has two. The first group home is for younger children, from birth to twelve years and the second is for children aged thirteen to eighteen. At present there are about 100 children in each of these institutions. In addition, there are 19 private institutions that house and provide care for these children and Amor para Compartir is one of them. Since Amor para Compartir is a private center, it receives some monies from the government but must raise additional funds.

Amor para Compartir is a long term facility and does not accept children for short stays. Most of the children have lived there for seven or eight years. Their parents have visiting rights, but they are court regulated and parents can only come Tuesdays and Saturdays and stay for one hour. The parents are urged to bring food and share a meal with their children but Lulú feels that the parental visits are counterproductive. She explained that the parents were not regular in their visits and that the children tended to idealize the parents since the bulk of the work, the real parenting, was left to Amor para Compartir.

Raising 100 children is a huge challenge for Lulú and Sagid and they must be commended. As Lulú explained, the facility is based on discipline and respect. The rooms are orderly, the beds are made, the children and the sleeping facilities are clean. One of the volunteers said she had never seen a fight. Lulú stressed that the children all came from homes where there was no order and the most basic thing they had to learn was order.

The physical site. Buildings and location.

In 2013 and 2014, thanks to the help provided by the Rotary Club, they had procured a house in the suburb of Vista Hermosa, in the heart of Cuernavaca. Nevertheless the municipal government was no longer able, or perhaps willing, to pay the rent, so they will have vacated this lovely house by January 15th, 2015. This house was a big

improvement on their previous location, also in the city, but the good fortune they had in Vista Hermosa was short lived.



The location of Amor para Compartir has been in flux for the last few years and it is our hope that with the latest move and the new building, this will no longer be such a problem. They are now located in Huizilac, north of Cuernavaca, in a wooded, mountainous area. The new location, although some 30 minutes straight up the mountain on a dirt road, may be the solution to their housing problems.

Although the older boys have been in Huizilac for over a year, all 100 children and the volunteers are now going to live here. To that end a new building is being built, and that at great speed, for all the children must be accommodated. On the site there are several houses already, all essentially one room structures that serve for sleeping, eating, and schooling areas. Lulú and Sagid's home is also on the site.



The new building, seen in these pictures that follow, will be much larger, with a second story as well as a kitchen and dining area. On the day we visited, several of the bedrooms were already being used and there were mattresses piled high in the other rooms, to be put in place as soon as possible. In addition, we saw where the bathrooms and showers were going to go. There is a septic tank in place, laundry facilities are planned as well as a water recycling system.



The children

Since the children who live at Amor para Compartir are there under court protection, it was not appropriate to interview or photograph them individually. Many of them arrive

with very little education; some were illiterate when they first came. Schooling, like everything else, takes place on the premises. Classes are taught by volunteer teachers, which is always problematic since they often come and go. Nevertheless, education is a priority for these children. In the eleven years they have been in operation, ninety children have finished primary school and fifty middle school. At present two boys attend secondary school, the Preparatoria Abierta del Estado de Morelos, and one girl is learning how to be a teaching aide.

Many of the children did not know the names of their parents, having simply addressed them as Mamá and Papá. They are taught their names as well as their own birthdays. Birthdays are celebrated once a month with a cake. All the children who have had a birthday that month come forward and are applauded. The Rotarians have been celebrating Christmas for the last three years, complete with a Santa Claus and gifts for all.

Caring for 100 children also implies medical and dental care, often neglected by their biological parents. The figures we have are for 2013 and a few months of 2014. During that time there were 500 dental visits that included fluoride treatment, fillings as well as some extractions for those with severe dental problems.





Volunteer programmes

The soccer program. During the Christmas and New Year weeks, December 2013 – January 2014, two young Canadian volunteers stayed with the girls and taught them soccer. Sophie, granddaughter of one of the Juntos Board members, Janet Boeckh, and Xin were both Dawson College students at the time, both soccer players and coaches, and both convinced that mental health can be promoted through disciplined physical exercise. They taught the girls soccer drills and a great deal about playing soccer, but more than that, and much more importantly, befriended the girls. Since they lived at Amor para Compartir during their stay, they got to know and love many of them. The positive results of this daily contact are immeasurable.

Should you wish to read more about these talented young women and the work they do, please visit the website they created. www.passtheballtomexico.co.nr



As a result of the training begun by Sophie and Xin, the Amor para Compartir teenage girls now play in a local soccer league. Their new skills have allowed them to enjoy the matches, win or lose, and generally have a more normal childhood experience.

In addition, Amor para Compartir has also had further Canadian help. **The Alliance Church**, a church that is strong in Western Canada, has sent teams of volunteers. In one case, one of the one room houses on the property was built in one week by a group of carpenters from Saskatchewan. During the winter months of 2014, a young volunteer from British Columbia spent over four months in the girls' house in Cuernavaca. They have also had a group of men from Alberta, but most of them knew little about building and they did what they could, hauling bricks and moving cement. One of the Canadian

volunteers was so unhappy they were mixing cement by hand that he took Sagid to a local hardware store and bought a small cement mixer. Another young volunteer fell in love with Lulú and Sagid's daughter, Sarahi, and he now lives full time at Amor para Compartir. The two will celebrate their wedding in February 2015.

The children have attended two other programmes, taekwondo and music, since 2013. In both cases the teachers came to the house in Vista Hermosa. Now that they will all be in Huizilac, other arrangements will have to be made.

Taekwondo about 35 children participate

Music between 15-18 children participate in the Cuernavaca Youth Orchestra (Banda Sinfónica Juvenil de Cuernavaca)

Last but not least is the **Juntos computer programme**. An average of twenty children attend every week. They are quiet and disciplined and the atmosphere is different from the cheerful banter that takes place in the classes at the community centres throughout Cuernavaca. The girls and the boys are always separated, sitting at different tables. There is always a person from Amor para Compartir who watches them. Attendance at the computer classes is used as an incentive for good behavior and the right to attend is withdrawn for poor behavior.



The children who attend have all made good progress and obviously this is the only chance they have to be on a computer. Many of them have mastered Word, as well as other programmes such as Excel and Power Point. They have all made cards on several occasions, thank you cards, Christmas cards and the like, where each sheet has four different parts that are then folded into a card.

Amor para Compartir in facts

Number of children: about 100 live at the institution

Juntos computer classes: four times a week, about 20 attend each time The girls and the boys have separate computer classes

Internet access: provided by Juntos

Soccer: provided by families of the volunteers last year