

JUNTOS NEWSLETTER - March 2015

A suggestion to the readers of this newsletter: Please forward it to friends and family!

If this is the first time you are reading the Juntos Newsletter, welcome. For those who have read the previous ones, this is a return visit to the site described in January 2015.

The interviews below were conducted on Saturday, February 7th, 2015. The day of the week is important since it is not a school day. Whereas the previous interviews at the same site, Rubén Jaramillo, were conducted before Christmas on a Wednesday afternoon with few students and two teachers, this time there were 18 students and only one teacher, Oscar. None of the people who had been present in December was there.

Below a series of pictures as Oscar and the adult students set up the computers and the younger students, several in Juntos Tshirts, watch.







Although classes are supposed to begin at 10AM, the only ones present at the correct time were Will and I. Several students drifted by slowly and we stood in front of the locked door until Oscar arrived, around half an hour late, first having delivered half the computers and teachers at the other location, some 10 blocks away. On Saturdays two of the teachers, Lilia and Emanuel, do not work and the number of students, each one working individually, was overwhelming for the teacher.

While we waited, Rosa, a woman in her late fifties, perhaps early sixties, proudly showed us her new computer. She and her husband had purchased it in order to communicate with their son who has been living in the United States for 11 years. To date she has not been able to use the computer to contact him but she has been coming to the Juntos computer classes in order to learn how to do so. A complete neophyte, she is still both afraid and in awe of the computer.

Once she was set up with the computer, she clearly still needed a lot of help. Because she could not tell us if her son in Chicago had Skype or another program, he was not one of her contacts. Nevertheless, she had a very active Facebook page which her daughter had set up. Unable to open or navigate her Facebook account, it was clear that she only accessed it when she came to Juntos or when her daughter helped her. She had over 50 Facebook friends! We opened and closed Facebook many times so she could get the hang of it and then she started reading the many messages she had missed. Rosa has brothers and sisters that live in other parts of Mexico and she was able to read messages from several of them, wiping her eyes with emotion when she read her sister's message. She also looked at a whole series of photographs and was overwhelmed by emotion again. If the Juntos team had done nothing whatsoever that day, just this free connection and the information she got about her loved ones was great. Rosa has internet service at home, so let us hope that she will have the courage to attempt connecting without anyone sitting beside her and urging her on.

Rosa and her husband, a cab driver, have never met the two grandchildren they have in the United States and they have been saving for years in order to visit them. She and her husband have new Mexican passports, but she did not know how to apply for a US visa, what the requirements and payment were and the complicated paperwork involved. We were able to provide her with a sheet, printed right on the spot, that included the list of requirements, the steps needed and the paperwork required.



While Rosa read her many Facebook messages, the rest of the students were all doing their own work. Beside Rosa, there were four other adults, all in their thirties and much more adept and confident. In addition, there were five or six teenagers and some ten children, the youngest a seven year old girl. They all help each other because with only one teacher, it was just easier to ask the person beside you what to do. This cooperative learning is of great value because one of the best ways to learn something very well is to teach it to someone else.

One of the teenagers present, J.-A., is a sixteen year old, a first year secondary school student. J.-A. was doing homework for his English class and his task was to find bilingual texts on the internet. He found several lists of animals, the alphabet, and he pasted them into a document he later printed on the premises.

J.-A. studies at a technical high school where he specializes in accounting. At the end of three years he will get a diploma as an assistant accountant. He described his school, CONALEP (Colegio Nacional de Técnica en el Estado de Morelos), as a fine place. He had to take an entrance exam to get a spot at this institution and added that it is hard to get into because they only take the best students. And, if a student fails three subjects, he is asked to leave the school. Those students who are not admitted into the technical school, often go to the more general high school, called *preparatoria*, a prerequisite for university. Both the state technical and the general high schools are almost free but those who are not admitted in either have to resort to expensive private education. For most of these students, private education is not an option.

The institution where J.-A. studies also teaches computers, hotel management, and cooking and as in his case, the diploma they receive after three years is as “assistant chef”, etc. Should J.-A. wish to continue his studies at university level, he is free to do so, but neither one of his older siblings, both of whom studied at the same high school or another like it, have done so. His older brother is an assistant architect and his older sister who received a diploma as an assistant chef, now works in a store.

In answer to the question about why more of his classmates do not attend the computer classes at Juntos, he said that they had computer classes at school three times a week. His school’s computer lab was equipped with forty new desktop computers. Because he was an accounting student, they had learned many of the same programs as at Juntos, and although he liked to get ahead in the summer and learn new things, most of his classmates were not that interested. He had learned Excel last summer, so when he was taught the same program at school, it was just a review. In fact, most of the time he comes to Juntos, it is to do his homework and to learn programs that are not taught at school. The school, just like the Juntos diplomas for completing specific programs, gives out Certificates. But the school Certificates are given only after completing an examination whereas the Juntos diplomas are awarded when the teacher sees the student has completed the work.

In the picture that follows, J.-A. is at the far right and Leslie, described below, is at the far left.



Ana Maria and her daughter Leslie Marlene usually come with the third person in the family, Leslie's father. On this Saturday, he was unable to attend because he was completing an iron making course.

Below is the autobiography Leslie wrote, both in Spanish and in English. The original text, a homework assignment, had no periods or paragraphs whatsoever. By the third time she was shown where to put in a period and add a capital letter to the first word in the next sentence, she caught on. Another Juntos accomplishment!

Mi autobiografía

Leslie Marlene I. N.

Nací el 12 de Agosto de 2006 en Cuernavaca Morelos. Ahora vivo en Ampliación Lázaro Cárdenas. Vivo con mis papas. Me bautizaron cuando tenía un año de edad en la iglesia de Tlaltenango.

Mis padrinos son mi tía Zulema y mi tío Guillermo. A los dos años de edad empecé a caminar. Yo entré al kínder cuando tenía 3 años de edad. Ahora estoy en tercer año de primaria en la escuela Nicolás Bravo.

Soy muy amistosa. Mis amigas son Brenda Aylin, Katya Hernández, Ariana Ocampo e Ingrid. Estoy tomando clases de inglés belly dance, hawaiano y computación. Un compañero de inglés me está dando clases de patinaje. En la casa me gusta jugar con la bicicleta y muñecas. También me gusta ver la tele.

My autobiography

Leslie Marlene I. N.

I was born on August 12, 2006 in Cuernavaca Morelos. Now I live in Extension Lazaro Cardenas. I live with my parents. I was baptized when I was one year old at the Church of Tlaltenango.

My godparents are my aunt Zulema and my uncle Guillermo. At two years old I started walking. I went to kindergarten when I was three years old. Now I am in third grade at the Nicolás Bravo school.

I am very friendly. My friends are Brenda Aylin, Katya Hernandez, Ariana Ocampo and Ingrid. I am taking English classes belly dance, Hawaiian and computers. A fellow from my English is giving me skating lessons. At home I like to play with my bicycle and dolls. I also like to watch TV.

Leslie's mother, Ana María, is very hard working. She has only been attending the Juntos classes for three weeks, but from the description of her work and the number of extracurricular classes her only daughter has, her determination is apparent.

Ana María and her husband make their living by selling food at two schools. One of them goes to a primary school, the other to a high school. During recess, between 9.45 and 10.10 every day, they sell tacos. Each tacos they sell, they have two varieties, is accompanied by rice, vegetables and sauces. To get ready for the morning sales, they rise between 4 and 5 in the morning and get to the school to set up before recess. Their competitors for the children's snacks are a fruit vendor, a popsicle vendor and a sandwich vendor. They charge between 8 and 9 pesos for the plate of food, well under one dollar, but many children do not have the money and bring a snack from home. After their morning sales are over, they stack and pack the plates and utensils and take them home to wash. They are no longer allowed to use disposable plates and cutlery, so that gives them even more work. After they do the clean up, they shop and start cooking for the following day and because it is so exhausting, they are investigating other ways to make a living.

Ana María has taken courses in jewelry making and desserts but says neither will be profitable enough. In addition, she and her husband thought about opening a café but that too was discarded as an option. The cost of the rent, the difficulty in finding clients, the instability of the income were the reasons she gave for not going ahead with this option. Now all three members of the family are learning computers and although she has been with Juntos for less than a month, it is clearly becoming another option. But they continue to hedge their bets. In case it does not work out, her husband's iron making might be another option.

Ana María is an older mother and says she is often asked if she is her daughter Leslie's grandmother. After finishing the same high school as A.-J. with the "assistant chef"

certificate, she left for the United States. There she worked for five years cleaning houses, the only work she could get as an illegal person. She did not like living there and came back to Mexico. First she said that in the United States all people do is live to eat and pay the rent. Then she paused and added that in Mexico people did the very same thing, they lived to eat and pay the rent.

Juntos is a non-profit organization based in Canada that promotes computer literacy among the less privileged population in Cuernavaca, Morelos.

Should you wish to find out more about Juntos, please visit our website at

<http://www.juntos-together.ca/>