

## **Juntos Newsletter June 2015**

This month the focus is on a site on the eastern end of Cuernavaca, off the road to Cuatla, called Constitución. Like every one of the sites, it has its own characteristics and unique flavor. In this case there are two important factors, first Ruth, the mayor and second the large number of adult learners, especially compared to all the other sites.

### **The ayudante, the mayor's assistant**

Ruth is a very hard working mayor with the best interests of her citizens at heart. She heard about the Juntos computer classes and was adamant that her community should benefit from the classes. Ruth began her campaign by visiting another site, Lomas de Juitepec in order to meet Lilia Estrada, the head teacher and watch the computer class in action. She stayed the entire class, was impressed not only by what the students were learning, but also by the respectful way Lilia treated every person there. Ruth then petitioned, wrote letters and lobbied for Juntos. Juntos has been at Constitución for a little over one year.



Ruth at the Juntos computer class

Ruth talked at length about her *colonia*, her neighborhood. She described the needs, new sewage pipes, new water pipes, roads, and more and better education. Both the sewage and water pipes are over thirty years old and she fears that both have holes and need to be replaced. She also talked about her accomplishments, many related to the courses on the premises. To date several classes were ongoing, all in the same

building where Juntos holds computer classes. She was very proud of classes for new born babies. Twenty young mothers, grandmothers and caregivers are learning about nutrition, education, health, hygiene and more to better take care of their children. Yet, the great majority of classes offered are to help people in the neighborhood find employment. There are classes on how to make street food, how to paint signs and how to make shoes. There is also a health dispensary and a zumba class.

The Juntos computer classes fit into her idea of helping the residents, both young and old. Ruth talked about how students could do their homework and then print it and how that helped families who could not afford the local Internet cafes. But she was also very cognizant that those three Internet cafes were local businesses that allowed families to make a living and she could not put them out of business by inviting everyone to the Juntos classes.

Another concern was security. There was a gang of youths Ruth has been mentoring, trying to get them to go back to school, asking them to both help by painting the walls, and play, since the courtyard of the building has a basketball court.

It is interesting to note that she only talked about herself at the very end. She had spent some time, she did not specify how long, working as a nanny in the United States; had a son and two grandchildren that lived in Las Vegas and other children and grandchildren in Cuernavaca. At the very end she requested English classes for her community.

The adults....

About ten adults participate, they are about half of the 20 attendees.

There is an exceptional grandfather, Bernardino, with his equally exceptional grandson, Robertito.



Robertito hard at work



Bernardino hard at work

The adults are a lot more serious about their studies but they are also a lot more cautious and their learning curve is often very steep. In addition, they are also willing to organize other types of activities, so in mid-December, there was a one year anniversary celebration which included a power point presentation on the dangers women face on the Internet, a presentation of awards for those who had completed a series of software programs, as well as a pot luck lunch and presents for the Canadians. We received poinsettias, all adorned with small Mexican and Canadian flags.

One of adults is Robertito's 77 year old grandfather. A retired postal worker, Bernardino has been attending computer classes for about four months. Right now he is waiting for a stent and due to his heart problems, has little energy to move around. But he is also an amateur photographer and says his ultimate goal is to learn Photo Shop. Since he has a computer at home, but no Internet service, he wants to spend his days working on his pictures. It is interesting to note that the second time he was interviewed, his grandson was absent. When asked where Robertito was, Bernardino said he did not have permission to come to the computer classes until his behavior changed. This is not the first time we have heard this, nor the first place where attending the Juntos computer classes is used as a reward for good behavior.

And the children.....

Manuel is a 12 year old geeky boy, who is very happy at the computer. The crackerjack mayor Ruth told him about the classes and he started when Juntos first arrived and has been coming twice a week ever since. Since then he has learned Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Publisher and is now learning Movie Maker. He smiled shyly when he confessed that at school they have a computer class once a week and his role during the class is to help his classmates. At school they aren't doing anything he doesn't already master.



Joselyn did not want to attend the computer classes after school preferring to hang out at home with her friends. Her father did not give her the option and insisted she attend. She now says she is not sorry because she really likes coming and at the December celebration, she was the one chosen to make a presentation in front of her fellow students and guests. Her presentation, made in PowerPoint, was about the dangers the Internet poses for young women. She was clear and her presentation was both powerful and well put together.



Joselyn is now in 8<sup>th</sup> grade where she works hard but remarks that in grade school, she never made it to flag bearer. Every Monday morning, in every single primary school in Mexico, public and private, the student body stands at attention, hands on hearts, as the Mexican flag is carried in by the top student from a specific grade, flanked by four other top students in the class. The *escolta*, the flag bearer and honorary flag bearers march around and when they come to a halt, the entire school sings the Mexican anthem.

### **Our teachers**

Sergio, today one of our talented teachers, started in our program when he was eleven. According to Lilia, our lead teacher, he was very skinny and very quick to learn. Then he was in grade 6, a primary school boy; today he is 20, a handsome young man who has finished *preparatoria*, high school, and is contemplating his options for university.

By the time he was 13 he had pretty much mastered all the programs that are taught at Juntos. With the help of another teacher, Oscar, he then turned his attention to programming. By the time he was in high school, he was able to get a technical degree and he is now a systems operations technician.



During the high school years he had to do one year of community service, normally done between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> semesters of high school. He spent a year working in a company specialized in chemistry and although he does not like chemistry, he learned a lot. In addition, during his 6<sup>th</sup> semester in high school, he did a practicum and in his case, he chose the very same company where he had done his one year of service. He did not get a chance to practice any of the computer skills he has, but did filing and other menial tasks. When asked why he had chosen to do his service year as well as his practicum in a chemical plant, he answered that it was close to his house and he would not have to take public transport. Because this seemed such a strange decision, I pushed him and asked again and he admitted the real reason was that there was no extra money at home and taking the bus would have been one more expense. He had to walk wherever he went, so he opted for the closest place rather than the one that would have furthered his knowledge.

This lack of funds, once admitted, led him to the next topic, going to university. He would very much like to attend but the cost is very high. Public universities charge by trimester and the cost, depending on the university is between 2.000 and 1.500 pesos (The equivalent of 180.00 each trimester, therefore 540.00 per year). He explained that the private universities, which he would never dream of attending, cost double that amount. He went on to explain that for many students the cost was a great burden and the universities, having recognized this, give the students options. Those who complete only one third of their degrees are entitled to receive a skilled technician certificate;

those who complete two thirds of their degree get a bachelor's degree and those that complete the full course, are engineers.

At this time Lilia, our lead teacher who has a law degree, jumped in. She added that once you complete your degree, you have to pay for it. When she completed her degree, in 2014, she had to pay 10,000 pesos (about 800.00 CAN) to receive it. And that was not all. She had not completed the paperwork because she now had to get a professional license which meant that four documents had to be notarized, of course for a fee. Nevertheless, Lilia added that there were now many scholarships available to good students and she had certainly profited from those. During her four year legal studies, she had paid full tuition fees only the first year. During the second and third years she had paid a lower sum and in her last and final year, she paid no tuition and received a generous cash grant.

At present, Sergio is a wonderful teacher at the Juntos projects and is helping our students implement web sites to start or promote community projects.

[www.juntos-together.ca](http://www.juntos-together.ca)

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