

## **Juntos Newsletter April 2016**

This month's newsletter has two parts, first an update on the children that were removed from Amor para Compartir in February and second, the description of a new site, Instituto de Juventudes.

In early March we visited the site where the majority of children from Amor Para Compartir are now housed. (We have no information about Amor Para Compartir since the site is now closed and there are pending legal issues.) The contrast between Amor Para Compartir and the new DIF (family social services) buildings in Temixco could not be greater. Modern, new, well equipped and with a large staff, they house children of different ages in separate buildings. Claudia, Will, Gerardo and I were given a tour of the premises meant for children from birth to 12 years of age where we saw an abandoned baby less than a week old. The site includes school rooms, an infirmary, a psychological assessment area as well as the bedrooms according to age. In addition, there is a pool and a soccer field meant for children of all ages. We made a legal deposition in favor of the two girls and requested to see them in person.

On this first visit to the DIF, we saw some children from Amor para Compartir who recognized Claudia and Will and waved. Nevertheless, we had no direct contact with the children but saw the DIF lawyer as well as the directors of both primary and secondary education. The director of primary education was our tour guide and was very proud of the installations. Everyone seemed very anxious to help and very pleased that Juntos was funding the education of two girls.

On April 1, our second visit, we were invited to meet with Jacquelin and María de Jesús, the two girls who had been doing so well at the high school in Huitzilac.



María de Jesús, Claudia, Eva, Jacquelin

We found that the two girls were as pleased to see us as sixteen year olds ever show but both were very nervous and stressed. They are not together. Jacquelin is housed at the Salvation Army and María de Jesús at the DIF. The reason is simple, there was not enough space for all the children from Amor Para Compartir at the DIF. The children from the Salvation Army are bused to the DIF every morning and returned in the evenings. All the children, these girls included, attend school on the premises. Since there is no high school, Jacqueline and María de Jesús are in secondary three (really middle school), a grade they have already completed.

We explained that the purpose of our visit was to reassure them that we were still supporting them and most of the discussion centered around their education. The director of secondary education was present and is the person in charge. She was clear that the school they had previously attended simply was too far from their present location. For all those Montrealers who read this, imagine they are presently at Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue and their school would be close to the refineries in the east of the city. We proposed another school south of the city but it was not deemed suitable. The director then proposed a two year computer programme that did not include the high school leaving certificate. This option was refused by María de Jesús who clearly stated she preferred to stay at the school she was attending at present. We also suggested that the two girls, in addition to the schooling they have now, could attend the Juntos computer classes at one of the sites close by and that seemed to be a good option for the present. The director proposed sending other children along. Gerardo will meet with her to iron out the details for the rest of the school year next week and will follow up on the possibilities for the upcoming school year. There is a high school in the area and we will push hard for them to continue their education.

It is clear from seeing and talking to the two girls that they were upset. After they left, the director said that they have had a terrible shock, that the only home they knew was taken away from them and that they were forced into police cars without taking as much as a favorite piece of clothing, a teddy, or necklace, or any one thing that they could call their own. It is so understandable that they have been angry. How strong they are and how well they will do with these new living conditions, only time will tell. We hope they will adjust and continue to do well!

And now the second topic.

The new site where computer classes are being offered is in the municipality of Jiutepec. The entire building is meant to help the young people in this, a poor neighbourhood. Jiutepec is a municipality south east of Cuernavaca with over 200,000 people. Tejalpa, the neighbourhood where the building is situated, has one of the highest crime rates in the state and it is clear that the government built this community building as part of an initiative to prevent crime.



The colored sheets in the picture above are for aerial dancing, a very popular activity.

The director of the Instituto de las Juventudes de Jiutepec (Youth Institute of Jiutepec), Paul Vizcarra, sent a formal letter requesting that Juntos give computer classes at the center since it was very much in line with the activities they offer. Also housed in a new and modern building, the director himself gave us a tour and we saw that there was a lot of potential, yet unfulfilled. At present they offer four different types of activities, sports (aerial dancing, self-defence, zumba, etc.), cultural (theater, guitar, painting, graphic design), psychological help (psychologist on the premises), and crafts and skills to further employment (carpentry, metal work, aesthetician, barman) and in the planning stages, cooking. Obviously the computer classes fit right into this new centre.

Below are two signs outside the premises advertising the zumba and the Juntos computer classes. We were all there on the very first day the Juntos computer classes were being offered.







Our lead teacher, Lilia, explaining computer basics.



Three adults who first said they knew nothing about computers but when they sat down at the machines, it was obvious that they knew quite a bit. The Juntos teachers are all standing in the background helping other students.



Claudia ponders what else she could do!!