

JUNTOS Newsletter – February 2018

So much to report!

First, we are introducing big changes into our programme. Why? Because technology changes so quickly these days and we need to keep up. The new programme will therefore focus on innovative technology, bring a mix of various programmes and focus on moving forward.

To that end we have introduced robots, Khan Academy, plus our tool box of various skills from Word to Moviemaker and from Excel to Scratch. First the robots. These crafty little fellows are a unique way to teach coding. With a board, some chips and a little robot, children learn coding through play. Our robots are Danish, were shipped to the United States and then bought into Mexico by several volunteers. Many thanks to the robot carriers. So far they have been very successful because children aged seven to twelve think they are just playing with a nifty new toy. Little do they know! In fact, they are learning coding. We are happy to report that the robots are now being used by the children at all the Juntos locations.

For those of you who do not know Khan Academy, here is the link to their page so you can see what they offer. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan_Academy More than anything else, Khan Academy gives students the world over tools to get ahead, to get the same quality education that rich countries offer their children. Khan Academy has delivered a billion free lessons online and we are very happy to report that the number of resources in Spanish has increased by leaps and bounds. We plan to have every one of our students sign up for this excellent resource. We are encouraging our students to work on their math skills to begin, and then continue with the many other options available. We hope that our introduction to Khan Academy will encourage many students to further their own educations. As an added bonus, our teachers will be able to monitor the progress of our students, encourage them and offer instructional help when needed.

We have also begun our computer classes at a new location, Ministerios de Amor. This Mexican organization runs homes for abandoned children in several cities. The information on their web page is in Spanish. <http://ministeriosdeamor.org.mx/es/> In Cuernavaca they have five houses and some 100 children ranging from infants to young adults. The houses are divided by gender and age and on Wednesday, January 17th, we began giving classes at two of their houses. We have three teachers in one location and the fourth teacher, with a helper, at a second location.



Here are some of the younger children, cooperating and learning.



The first time at a new location is always a challenge as students are not sure what to expect and in this case, the teachers had a very large number of students in their groups. Nevertheless, most children had some computer skills and were eager to learn more.



Two adolescents had already worked with Juntos because they had been housed at the institution that was closed, Amor para Compartir. The two boys were all smiles to see the teachers they knew and to be able to continue where they left off almost two years ago.



Switch gears from a large group to one individual student.

We are very proud of Cristina who is living testimony to the Juntos computer classes. Now eighteen and a chemical engineering student, she started attending almost ten years ago, when she was nine years old. Over the years she learned all the programmes available, but more than anything, she availed herself of the computers and internet to complete her homework.

Bright, smiling and cheerful, she shared her experiences with us. We were delighted when she recounted that she got some help for her university programming course from one of the Juntos teachers, Sergio, who is a few semesters ahead of her. We can say that we are providing help for all levels; for those

who have never touched a keyboard before, to very advanced levels.

When asked about the last semester, she talked about the terrible impact of the 7.1 earthquake on September 19th. When the earthquake hit, her classes had ended and she was standing on the street waiting for the bus. Such was the strength of the moving earth that she and her fellow students had to hold on to each other to stay upright. When she saw the bricks tumbling down from a nearby, old sugar cane plantation smokestack, she realized there would be terrible damage everywhere. When the earth finally stopped shaking, everyone tried to contact their loved ones and the phone system went down. Luckily she heard from a friend that her family was unharmed. Nevertheless, at her university several buildings were severely damaged and have since been demolished.

All schools in Mexico were closed after the earthquake in order for experts to assess the damage and reassure parents, students and teachers that they would all be safe. Cristina's classes were suspended for only two weeks, but for others it has been disastrous. Her twelve year old brother's school has not reopened yet and the family is still waiting for him to return to school.

It is a pleasure to report that Cristina was the recipient of one of our free computers. We hope that it will help her during her studies and allow her to achieve her goals. She hopes to work in an industrial setting and her dream is to be able to transform materials to make them less harmful to the environment.



Cristina with Óscar, one of the Juntos teachers.

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