



TALICA: The Teaching and Learning Initiative for Central America

With one child at a time, one book at a time, we can change the world.



Collaborative Success The Community Library Balue Opens

What happens when people come together and lay down their agendas to listen to others? One result, for us, is a new space that will give way for community projects that are developed and implemented by the community!

In January 2008, Michael Judd, founder and co-director of United States-based NGO Project Bona Fide, purchased a run-down two story building in the center of the village Balue, Nicaragua. Michael approached me with the idea of creating and supporting a community library that will be housed on the second floor. The task, at first, seemed daunting—but I let the idea percolate a bit—and listened and listened some more to Michael's vision—and the appeal of sustainability built on a foundation of community involvement became irresistible.

As word spread rapidly throughout the village, as most new gossip does, that a new center with a library and who knows what else is coming, I learned that community involvement would be much easier when the building was cleaned up and orderly. If this task looked daunting to me, it must have seemed completely impossible to people who live on less than \$3 per day!

"My January trip was full. I had delivered over 1000 books to 6 schools, and now the idea of a community library, how was I going to do this? As I mentioned before, word of mouth in small village is...well... quite efficient. Within a day, a friend of mine from Holland said he had a friend, Patricia Petri, from Spain who was coming to visit the island in June. She actually knew a local library in Alicante, Spain that was cleaning out their collection and had more than 1500 books that were up for grabs. I contacted her and she contacted the library and presto! We had an initial collection! Now, how do we get them to Nicaragua? Patricia contacted the Volunteer Association of "La Coixa" in Alicante, Spain. They collected more than 700 Euros to pay for the shipment! (The books were coming—WOW!) Back on the island, Project Bonafide's co-director, Chris Shanks, was working endlessly to upgrade the building with proper electrical devices and secure the power. Chris, along with other community workers and international volunteers, secured the wooden boards and walls of the upstairs and de-

Chris and Heather and sat securely in the center waiting to be unpacked! What TALICA couldn't do personally, was made up with funds to pay for transportation and customs fees.

Now, it is approaching September and book cases are being made, again thanks to Heather and her father, who came all the way from Virginia to help. (I now have a job with a U.S. public school and can only offer support via email). However, I knew I would return in November to do whatever was necessary to get this library up and running before the December school vacation.

My November trip was a very short three weeks! I had work in the schools, including a new partner school, and now this community center. When I arrived I was very pleased to see the book cases had been finished, and the books were snug in their boxes. My new Spanish friend Patricia was there along with a TALICA volunteer from the U.S., Beccah Frasier, and a Welsh volunteer from Project Bona Fide. Wow! Four women from three countries together as strangers to unpack and organize the initial collection! After a few hours, we had it organized enough to start the inventory. The following weekend, more volunteers from Project Bona Fide came with tools to complete the installation of the wall shelving, and we are proud to say the wood for these shelves was saved from scrap that was removed from the interior and exterior walls of the top floor when the top floor was improved and secured). Now, all the books are safe on shelves and ready to read!!

International volunteers had been hosting free English classes and arts/craft activities for the local children; it was amazing what they had already started before a single book was unpacked. Now, with the collection organized and the entire building cleaned-up, the local community could see its potential and we were ready to hand it over and what would happen.

On Tuesday, December 2, TALICA and Bona Fide hosted an "open house." A community center committee of local people was formed, and children came with friends and family. We have readers for the school vacation, and now I will wait and see who takes a lead on the ground. TALICA will continue support the efforts of local initiatives because these are the ones that will last!

By Sue Ellen Wortzel

Community Center of
Balue, Nicaragua



A Local Teacher Biography...

Martin Otero

Martin currently teaches first grade in the village of Corozal, and lives with his wife, Irma and two children, Enrique and Holberg, in Balue, Ometepe, Nicaragua.

He is a life-long resident of Balue—and is a beloved member of his village—one who has served his community in many different ways.

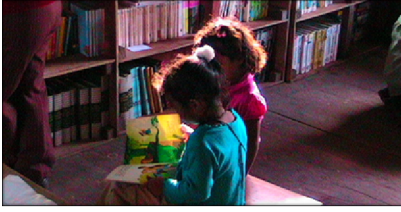
Martin finished his primary and secondary studies in the local schools. After completing his educational degree from a university in Managua, he returned home to serve the community. He has been a public educator for more than 15 years, and served as director for more than 10 years. He believes all children can learn and to improve the standard of living for the village each must have access to quality education.

I had the most amazing opportunity of living with Martin and his family for a month. Martin awakes by 5:00 am with wife and also educator, Irma. The smell of smoke seeps into Martin's home through the open areas above the walls and the roof from neighboring cooking fires. Roosters, dogs, and howler monkeys join the morning chorus of the village awakening. Irma is out rattling in the outdoor kitchen and brings her fire to a roar. She places a small aluminum can over the fire to heat water for the morning coffee. Martin gathers wood from the yard for the day, takes his coffee and begins studying or preparing for daily lessons. By 6:15 am, Martin has bathed from a bucket, helped get the two boys up and ready for school, and has a bite to eat, usually rice and plantains, with the occasional hard boiled egg. To make sure he is well dressed and profes-

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tional volunteers, secured the wooden boards and walls of the upstairs and designed security doors and windows. TALICA provided funds for the upgrades to secure the building. Upon my return in June, and between my visits to our partner schools, I watched the dream come alive—seeing first-hand the fruits of all of this labor. The books were due anytime, and my departure date was quickly approaching. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to be a part of physically bringing the books to the island; however, Chris Shanks and international volunteer Heather Knorr of Virginia, made multiple trips to Managua (a five hour journey that includes a buses, boats, and taxis) dealing with customs agents and port agents.

Finally, the books were in the hands of



Readers have arrived!

with the occasional hard boiled egg. To make sure he is well dressed and professional when he arrives to school, Martin places his "good" shirt in his bag that is draped over his shoulder and rolls up his pants so that the dirt, mud, or dust doesn't spatter on them, mounts an old bike and is off down the path. His bike ride is about an hour to his destination: the first grade classroom in the village of Corozal. Upon his arrival about 20 village kids wait for their teacher. He greets each one with smiles and plenty of patience. He begins the day with word games, reading aloud, and writing exercises. (...continued on the back)

(Biography, continued...)

By mid-morning the students have had a couple of hours rich in literature. The teachers here in this village are well trained and when the books they needed arrived, the learning transformed. Math time comes after a mid-morning break of games and snacks that are provided by MINED, a Nicaraguan government agency. His math class is full of counting, practicing the basic operations, and of course reading. Martin's lessons are some of the most active I have seen in all my years working with teachers and students. He teaches and brings to life the most complex content with minimal materials. His creativity and knowledge shine through. First grade lessons ends at 12:00 noon. Martin packs up his homework and rides his old bike back to Balgue. By now the mid day sun or mid day monsoons accompany him for the long hour. Upon arriving home, his afternoon work begins. Depending on the time of year, he goes fishing, helps the family work in the fields, attends community committee meetings, or completes chores around the house and is always there to love the support his two boys' homework. The day ends with supper and preparing for the next day's classes.

TALICA salutes Martin for his dedication to his community and to all the children and families in the surrounding villages. His commitment to the growth of each mind is never ending. Thanks, Martin—you keep our dreams alive. —by, Sue Ellen Wortzel

To read more about the people and school of Corozal, please visit www.talica.org.

The Otero's



Picture taken by Sue Ellen Wortzel

After a very fun and productive day of fishing. (left to right, Martin, Enrique, Holberg, and Irma)

Current Projects and Future Goals

TALICA's book donations are off to a fantastic start. The total number of TALICA donated books is up to 3,607. In the next year, TALICA hopes to double the amount of books for each project for a grand total of 7,214books! Help us reach our goal by supporting this important work through a tax-deductible donation. We are now able to accept stock donations, please contact Sue Ellen Wortzel (suewortzel@talica.org) for information. We couldn't do it without you!



Secondary School - Jaime Marza

Primary School of Madroñal



Secondary School - Robert Drew



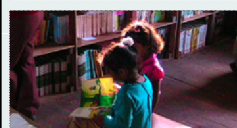
Primary School of Merida



The primary and secondary schools of La Palma (NEW!)



The Community Library of Balgue (NEW!)



Community Library and Book Mobile of Santa Cruz



TALICA MISSION STATEMENT:

The Teaching and Learning Initiative for Central America is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding the access to basic educational materials and promoting international educational partnerships that will improve the overall access to education throughout Central America.

We envision life-long learning by providing materials to local community and/or school libraries in Central America. We believe by supplying these centers - which will celebrate the value of learning - we will increase the likelihood of students attending and completing school.

We are in the
process of updating
our website.
Check it out:
www.talica.org

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“There is no greater power than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.”

-- Margaret Wheatley
The Berkana Institute

TALICA wants to start the
conversation that matters