

Overview

Maya Tech Learning Centers, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in Dayton, Ohio, has developed a project targeting underprivileged children, students, parents and teachers in Guatemala. While many of us take making a trip to the local library for granted, MTLC has introduced one Mayan community to the value and intrigue books and organized activities reveal.

Maya Tech Learning Centers, Inc. seeks to curtail the gap between First and Third World communities by creating a center where children can learn, grow and experience healthy self-concepts to achieve in their community and beyond. This mission begins in Nahualá, a rapidly growing K'iche' Mayan town in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Through a community learning center established here, (Computer Center Swan Tinamit) students and others use computers, sign up for formal classes and workshops, and have access to library materials and a facility for study groups and safe, positive interaction with their peers.

From its conception, MTLC has adhered to the following goals: *Goal 1: Community Computer Lab*; Provide access to computers for personal, school and business use. *Goal 2: Training Center*; Offer a set curriculum and classes on various levels of computer operation. *Goal 3: Internet Café*; Enable people to discover the benefits of the internet in a community setting. *Goal 4: Facilitate/Promote Youth Education and Leadership Development*; Set up, staff and maintain an educational center for young children, incorporate structured activities, and initiate a cultural exchange between local students and supporters abroad.

It is the fourth goal that captures the focus of this proposal.

The **Children's Education Center** promotes interactive learning for ages pre-school through high school. Members of the community are involved in program planning, curriculum development and staffing the center. Thus far, work in the children's center has been voluntary. While start up costs are inherently high for such luxury items as books and desks in rural Guatemala, it is anticipated that the costs for maintenance and administration will become sustainable in the future. However, without donations for classroom set up materials such as furniture, books, teaching and school supplies, and minimal administrative costs such as initial local salaries, the center can not evolve in a timely manner.

With the pace of technology and subsequent educational opportunities being rapidly outdated and replaced, it is time for the indigenous and poor communities of Guatemala to engage in directive, goal-focused programming at an early age in order to impress a positive influence in their daily lives. Where children are impacted, families are impacted and from there results communities that are stronger, more knowledgeable and self-motivated as a whole. Through our mission we seek not charity, but justice for the poor, overlooked peoples who have had to settle for limited educational opportunities for too long.

Project Description

In accordance with the organizational goal of youth education and leadership development, a **Children's Education Center** serves youth in Nahualá, Guatemala. The purpose of such a center fills many needs in the community for youth-focused programming. First, the center accommodates a library equipped with books, educational games, puzzles and art supplies for use during supervised free-time. Secondly, a structured program offers age-appropriate sessions to guide youth through goal-directed activities and educational lessons on life skills, health and nutrition, cultural and personal awareness, and leadership development. Topics will be actualized through hands-on projects, exploration of art, individual journals and interaction in groups. Lastly, the staffed center serves as a place for parents to bring their children when they have classes or business in the adjacent Computer Center. Reading groups will be formed in which older children will be given the opportunity to read to pre-school and elementary-aged children, honing their Spanish skills while exemplifying listening

skills and appropriate group behavior under the direction of a Youth Educator. The services of the **Children's Education Center** are free. It is anticipated that 200 youth will be served in the first year of implementing structured programming.

Programming will use the community's indigenous identity to address issues of self-esteem and self-worth. Topics will be relevant to life in Nahualá, such as the community's foundation and history, significance of their indigenous dress, works and life of their ancestors, and geography of Maya languages and peoples. These topics are at the heart of one's self-concept in Nahualá but are not exposed or addressed in the formal school setting. Sessions teach children how to build upon their strengths to adapt and apply concepts to everyday activities, strengthening their selves, their families and their community. Essentially, the center enables youth to be successful in an ever-changing world.

The **Children's Education Center** is a work in progress. An MTLC fundraiser held last fall, provided initial library books for ages infant through middle school. During a subsequent work-trip, MTLC Board members painted the center and assembled make-shift shelves to temporarily hold the books and a few donated puzzles and games. However, without sufficient funds for implementation of a fully staffed and equipped center, this remains a project awaiting finalization.

Need Statement

The need for such a community center in Nahualá is intense. While banks, cell phones and stores show signs of increased commerce, the country's poor infrastructure and past years of social and military oppression have made progress in Mayan and rural villages come about slowly. The schools are typical of many in rural Guatemala that have few textbooks or other educational materials, let alone a curriculum that promotes positive self-worth. Curriculum has traditionally focused on the memorization of facts – learning Spanish, basic math and Guatemala's Colonial History. Classrooms are crowded and teachers are not generally trained to offer a broad perspective. On a positive note, a recent increase in the number of secondary schools in Nahualá has meant that fewer students are forced to travel outside their culture, language and comfort level and therefore are more likely to continue their education. A Children's Education Center in Nahualá seeks to enhance and embrace educational opportunities at home. With the cultural familiarity of one's own village, community members are more likely to embrace the center, extending their interests beyond the classroom.

Due to poverty and lack of education, much home life in Nahualá focuses on daily tasks of cutting firewood, working the cornfields, and grinding corn for tortillas. While adults stress lessons acquired from hard work, children often tire of hearing the message. Furthermore, in candle-lit, adobe homes, homework is made more difficult by lack of electricity or appropriate study environment. The **Children's Education Center** provides a forum for youth to complete school assignments and utilize corresponding library materials and supplies.

Guatemala's 36-year civil war ended with the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, but an infrastructure was left broken. The decline of military and guerrilla violence, left a subsequent increase in criminal activity which grew out of desperation and poverty. In recent years, this otherwise peaceful mountain village has seen a rise in youth gangs, burglary and vandalism. Youth hang out in the streets where they are exposed to risks. By engaging youth early, activities at the Center could curb these negative alternatives. Providing a center for simple activities such as chess tournaments and art, children would be challenged and have an outlet to express themselves in more productive ways.

Description of Project Area

Nahualá is a community that has maintained traditional indigenous dress, language and lifestyle for centuries despite military and societal oppression, discrimination, and poverty. The primary language spoken is K'iche' with Spanish taught in the schools. Many women and children who have received little to no education, as well as elders, only speak K'iche'. The entire Municipalidad, or county, includes the surrounding villages stretching from the mountains to the coastal plain with a population of 64,895 (according a recent report published by the municipality). The population of the town alone is 4,423. The town serves as a center of business and personal activity for the area. Perhaps its accessibility to the Pan American Highway has helped the town prosper as supplies and materials are more easily transported from the larger cities of Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City.

This indigenous community has grown rapidly in the past 10 years. While businesses and multi-level, concrete homes show signs of increased commerce, inadequacies become evident in the lack of phone lines and potable water projects years in the making that still await completion. Yet the value of education has been realized by many who have continued their studies and promote community development efforts in town

While language and cultural traditions remain strong, Nahualá is no longer dependent solely on subsistence agriculture. The official end of Guatemala's 36-year civil war in 1996 and subsequent reduction in military oppression have given way to incremental progress in a once persecuted indigenous population. Travel has become a choice, not a necessity to get ahead or a means to flee oppressors. Building on the culturally inherent sense of community here, the **Children's Education Center** emphasizes youth programs that strengthen and add to the academic and technological growth of Nahualá.

Background Information

Maya Tech Learning Centers, Inc. was founded as a non-profit corporation in the state of Ohio in 2004. In August 2006, the IRS classified the corporation as a 501(c)(3) organization. MTLC is governed by a voluntary local Board of Directors and nationwide Advisory Council. Members hold expertise in community development, computer technology, social work administration, adult and youth education, law, and third world programming.

Board members: Camilo Macario, President; Brian Raison, Vice President; Karen Wilk Macario, Secretary/Treasurer. *Advisory Council:* Joanna Cross, Monica Grilliot, Scott Ledyard, Jill Raison, Sherri Shropshire, Mark Wilk, Lucy Perez Wilk.

The Computer Center Swan Tinamit/Centro de Computación Swan Tinamit houses the Children's Education Center and was founded in 2004. It is established as an non-governmental organization by Guatemalan law. *Staff:* Alonzo Buenaventura Macario Guarchaj, Program Manager; Poncio Macario Guarchaj, Director of Education; Alonzo Dario Tum, Computer Technician. In addition, Marleny Macario Ixmata, a volunteer board member of the Center, held the prestigious title of 2005 Rabin Ajau, Indigenous Princess of Guatemala. In her reign, she publicly promoted a platform of youth development using the center as an example to rural communities across Guatemala as a method of empowerment and pride.

Mission Statement

Maya Tech Learning Centers, Inc. seeks to advance educational and technological opportunities for underdeveloped Mayan communities in Guatemala through comprehensive, culturally appropriate computer access, training and development; providing internet and email capabilities; sponsorship and facilitation of community and youth-focused educational programming; and promotion of projects honoring Mayan heritage.