

'Libro Amigo'



A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Final Report

DECEMBER 2007



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Introduction and key project facts

The 'Libro Amigo' library project was conceived with the aim of encouraging reading and improving literacy amongst the students in rural areas in the department of León. This first pilot project was run at a secondary school in the town of San Jacinto and also included the staff and students of the five satellite primary schools with which it is linked. The intention was to establish the library as a resource and promote use of the library and reading in general throughout the duration of the school year of February to November 2007.

Location: Instituto Sara María Parrales, San Jacinto, Telica, Nicaragua

Beneficiaries: 1020

Project objectives: To improve the standard of education, culture and general knowledge of students in rural areas in the department of León.

To foster an interest in reading which will continue later into life.

To increase awareness amongst students in urban and relatively privileged areas about the needs of their rural and poorer peers, and to develop their sense of social responsibility.

To encourage reuse and recycling of books and educational materials in place of a 'throw away culture'.

Project activities: Purchase of wood and building of furniture for the library (bookshelves, (in original proposal) tables etc) by members of the community.

Interviews and appointment of a librarian.

Visits to schools and colleges in the city of León to solicit the donation of new and/or used books from students and staff.

Selection, classification and preparation of a list of the books donated.

Purchase of new books with donated funds to complement those donated.

Delivery of books and materials to Instituto Sara María Parrales ready for the library opening during the second or third week of the academic year

Development of contacts and organisation of activities with the aim of soliciting further financial donations and donations of books for the growth of the library.

Key Partners: Ministry of Education

Total Cost: US\$ 8,881.86

Donors: Oxford-León Trust, Troutman Foundation, Private donors



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Key Indicators: 288 books donated to the library and satellite schools (total value: \$2,285)
2 workshops delivered to teachers, attended by 32 and 25 teachers
2 workshops delivered to students, attended by 30 and 39 students
Students from all 14 year groups and teachers participated in reading and poster competitions
15 classes each visited twice
2 visits made to each of the 5 satellite schools
4 bookcases and one table purchased and 4 bookcases refurbished

Background

Initial meetings took place with the Director of Instituto Sara María Parrales towards the end of the 2007 academic year, during which the outline for the project was agreed. The opening of the library was planned for the start of the new school year, February 2008. Following the change of government in Nicaragua in January 2008, the law changed to require permission from the Ministry of Education for a project to be implemented in a state-funded school. It took several months for this permission to be granted, despite a very supportive response from the Ministry of Education towards the project so the opening of the library was delayed (as reported in Progress report No. 1, 31st March 2007).

How the project worked

Interviews and appointment of a librarian

Interviews took place for the post of librarian and of the three candidates an unemployed teacher was selected. At this point in the project, however, it was discovered that the school already had a library and a librarian who was funded by the Ministry of Education (as reported in Progress report No. 2, 2nd June 2007). After meetings with the school director to investigate the reasons for the misinformation, a reassessment of the justification for the project was carried out. It was decided that the project should continue but with a greater emphasis on training and developing the resource which the school already had. The library resources available were still regarded as poor for a school serving over 1000 students. It was apparent that the problem was not so much a lack of books, but the poor management and use of the resource which did little to encourage students to read.

Preparing the library

The room designated for the library was decorated by the students and existing furniture was refurbished. Additional bookshelves were made by a local carpenter. With the help of the librarian, all the books in the library were catalogued and shelved according to age range and subject. An inventory of donated and purchased books was drawn up.

Opening Ceremony

The refurbished library officially opened at the start of the second semester in July with an opening ceremony led by students. The ceremony was attended by primary and secondary students as well as teachers and the Nuevas Esperanzas team. A first donation of books was made and activities promoting reading were included. Primary school students cut the ribbon to open the 'Libro Amigo' library officially.



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Involving the satellite schools

During the second semester, the involvement of the five primary satellite schools was increased. Two visits were made to each school and a donation of books specifically aimed at encouraging reading from an early age was made at each school. A 'travelling library' box was also created for the satellite schools. This box contains 54 books suitable for primary age students and is intended to be used on a rotational basis by each of the five schools for two months at a time. The books are mostly colourful board and play books designed to encourage an interest in books and reading from a very young age.

Workshops and classroom visits

Three workshops were run during the second semester. A representative from the Ministry of Education led a workshop for the teachers on technical aspects of running a school library. Workshops were led by the Nuevas Esperanzas team for students and teachers promoting the use of the library and teaching students about how to use books for research and reading for pleasure. On other occasions visits to each class were made to promote reading and activities being run to encourage reading and the use of the library.

Competitions

For the last month of the school year, competitions were organised at primary and secondary level. A poster competition awarded prizes to the class who produced the best poster on the subject of books and reading. To end the year, a reading competition was run during which prizes were awarded for the student who had read and reviewed the most books. At primary level, students retold the story they had read orally.

Awareness raising amongst schools in León

Early in the year visits were made to schools in León to explain the project and seek the participation of more privileged students. Although follow up visits were made later in the year, this aspect of the project was not developed to its full potential. One reason for this was the realisation that the gap between resources available in San Jacinto and schools in León was not as extreme as had been anticipated. Also despite initial interest in the project, the four private schools visited were not so open to supporting the project as had been hoped.

Further donations of books

Early in the project a donation of books was promised by the British Embassy in Costa Rica. This donation did not materialise in time for this pilot project but has been promised for future projects. A donation of 67 books from the Banco Central de Nicaragua was received at the very end of the project. These will be put towards future projects in 2008. Some of the more appropriate books will be passed on to the library at Instituto Sara María PARRALES in San Jacinto.

Looking to the future

The 'Libro Amigo' project was intended as a pilot project and as a result of the implementation of this project the following recommendations for the future are made:

- In order to build on the interest and enthusiasm developing amongst the students, competitions and other activities to promote reading should be continued into a second school year at Instituto Sara María PARRALES and its satellite schools.



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

- Visits should be made to schools in León at the start of the 2008 academic year in order to promote the 'Libro Amigo' project while staff and students have time and enthusiasm for something new. The best approach to involving students from more privileged backgrounds should be considered again.
- When considering suitable locations for future library projects, pre-project research should be thoroughly carried out at both the proposed school and the Ministry of Education to ensure existing resources cannot be 'hidden'. It is sadly common for potential project beneficiaries (including government institutions) to hide the resources that they already have in order to appear 'poorer' and encourage more donations.
- It is recommended that a 'Libro Amigo' fund could be set up and applications sought from rural schools wanting to develop a library, thus ensuring the initiative for the project comes from the school itself.

Nuevas Esperanzas will continue its involvement with the library at Instituto Sara María Parrales in San Jacinto in 2008 and is committed to continuing to work to promote reading and improve standards of education through reading and the use of libraries in rural schools in the department of León.

Acknowledgements

The project was made possible by the interest and support of the school community at San Jacinto and donors in the UK and the USA. We would like to thank the following for their support:

Ministry of Education
Director, Librarian, other staff and students of Instituto Sara María Parrales
Staff and students of the 5 satellite schools: El Tizate, José de la Cruz Mena, San Pío, Anexo Alzara, El Ojochal del Listón
Oxford-León Trust, UK
Troutman Foundation, USA
Connie Hutchins and others from Boone, North Carolina who contributed to the project
Moyra Hampson

Project Team

Project Manager	Jorge Luis Murillo
Project Adviser	Jane Longley
Project Assistant	Marjorie Cadena Zapata
Refurbishment Supervisor	Arturo Juárez
Administrator	Gilma Del Posso
Administrative Assistant	Scarlet Linarte
Financial Assistant	Benelip Nuñez



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Libro Amigo - Financial Statement

All values are given in US\$

Project Income

	<i>Totals</i>
Donations Received	
Oxford-León Trust	1934.50
Troutman Foundation	650.00
Private donors	1666.31
<i>Total donations received</i>	<i>4250.81</i>
Gifts in Kind	
Book donations received	1655.17
Volunteered time ¹	711.96
<i>Total Gifts in Kind</i>	<i>2367.13</i>
Contribution from Nuevas Esperanzas UK	<i>2263.92</i>
Total Project Income	8881.86

Project Expenses

	<i>hours</i>	<i>rate (\$/hr)²</i>	<i>cost</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Project Staff				
Project Manager (January-June) ²	116.5	4.83	562.70	
Project Manager (July-November) ²	227.5	6.45	1467.38	
Project Advisor (volunteer) ¹	33.5	10.36	347.06	
Project Assistant (volunteer) ¹	130.5	2.32	302.76	
Refurbishment Supervisor	51	5.80	295.80	
Administrator (January-June) ²	9.5	8.69	82.56	
Administrator (July-November) ²	17	9.42	160.14	
Administrative Assistant	37	4.93	182.41	
Finance/Admin Assistant (January-June) ²	3	2.90	8.70	
Finance/Admin Assistant (July-November) ²	41.5	3.41	141.52	
Other staff (salaried)			205.86	
Other staff (volunteer) ¹			62.14	
<i>Total project staff</i>				<i>3819.01</i>
Materials				
Books (donated)			1655.17	
Books (purchased)			639.07	
Library refurbishment and furniture			527.36	
Materials for workshops			215.93	
Refreshments for workshops			67.40	
<i>Total materials</i>				<i>3104.93</i>
Transport				
Use of project vehicles	2692	0.25	673.00	
Public transport			26.08	
<i>Total transport</i>				<i>699.08</i>



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

	<i>Totals</i>
Subsistence	
Staff subsistence	409.09
<i>Total subsistence</i>	<i>409.09</i>
<i>Total of Direct Project Costs</i>	<i>8032.11</i>
Indirect Project Costs³ (calculated as 15% of direct costs, excluding donated books and volunteered time)	849.75
Total Project Expenses	8881.86

Notes

- ¹ Volunteer time is valued at rates used for projects where the same staff are salaried.
- ² Rate includes salaries, health insurance, statutory bonuses, paid holiday and 30% non-productive time. Some salaries changed on 1st July 2007 therefore costs for some staff are given at two different rates.
- ³ Contribution towards office overheads, including rent, utilities, office equipment, non-project staff, etc

‘Libro Amigo’

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Instituto Sara María PARRALES is located in the community of San Jacinto at the foot of Volcán Telica in the Maribios volcanic range. The college and its five satellite schools serve over 1000 students.



Project Assistant Marjorie Cadena Zapata provided over 130 hours of work to the project as a volunteer, preparing the new library, ordering books and helping to run workshops and reading competitions. Marjorie is a university student who works part-time as a receptionist with Nuevas Esperanzas.



The library, redecorated, newly furnished and ordered on the day of the opening ceremony.



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Project Manager Jorge Luis Murillo introduces the various participants in the opening ceremony to the assembled students.



The newly refurbished library is open for business!



Workshops were held for both students and staff at the school. An important aspect of this project has been the training and development of the teaching staff at the school.



'Libro Amigo'

A pilot project to promote reading in an impoverished rural community in western Nicaragua

Students prepared posters to promote reading and an interest in books. Prizes were awarded for the best posters at both primary and secondary level.



This poster promotes reading as a necessary part of national development and as a way of enriching family life.



Students compare the efforts of the different classes in the poster competition.

