

Service Learning: An Impact in Young People's Lives

At the May 2003 Commencement for Loyola College in Baltimore, Los Niños was honored as the recipient of the prestigious Milch Award for Community Involvement. For the past 15 years, more than 300 students and their group leaders have participated in the Los Niños' Service Learning Program. The college has been one of the stalwart educational institutions with which we have partnered in the expansion of this unique forum for community development education.

The award states:

"It is the good fortune of privileged societies that they may take for granted the fundamentals of food, health and shelter. For the low-income communities along the U.S. Mexico border there is no such luxury, and the day-to-day concerns of survival become all-consuming. For nearly three decades, Los Niños has worked tirelessly in that impoverished region to provide the necessary building blocks of community, and in so doing has created hope and opportunity for children and families through activities that promote community development and self-reliance.

Los Niños employs an innovative approach to its outreach programs, working with individual members of a community – promotoras – to provide leadership in organizing and educating their own communities. Last year alone, some 60 promotoras worked with nearly 19,000 family members in the border region, disseminating essential information on nutrition and ecology, and empowering their communities to improve their quality of life.

Loyola students, faculty and staff also have witnessed first-hand the triumph of the human spirit among the border communities, as each year the Project Mexico partnership sends a delegation to work with Los Niños on community-directed construction projects. The labor of the Loyola group is supported by a cam-

pus-wide effort for financial support that has enabled Project Mexico to thrive for over a decade.



This family of tile workers makes 2000 roof tiles a week for \$150 income.

For its commitment to improving the quality of life in the underserved communities of the United States and Mexico, for its innovative approach to outreach that promotes self-reliance and positive change, and for its efforts to reach across international borders for the betterment of all human society, Loyola College in Maryland is proud to recognize Los Niños with the Milch Award."

Loyola also published a booklet of reflections from the students. One poem is shared in the sidebar.

Congratulations! - to the Service Learning team under the leadership of Andy Schaefer, the coordination of Cristina Ayala and the volunteerism of Crissie Phillips. So, ALL of you college alumni out there, send us an email and let us know how to get students from your alma mater to join us for an unforgettable immersion experience. Contact Andy Schaefer by email at: andy@losniniosinternational.org or by phone 619-409-9953 for group booking.

There's a place with a child

There's a place with a child
Who wants to learn to read
But the only place to go
Has walls that leak
And nowhere to play
There's a place with a family
With enough love for a country
Mom and dad work all day
So their children can eat
And know their parents really care
There's a place with a house
In the middle of a dump
It's what the children play in
And what the houses are made of
They just hope it doesn't rain
There's a place with a wall
That's miles and miles long
Water passes through and birds fly over
But people, families
Can only look between the cracks
There's a place on the other side

With big houses
And lots of food
With green green grass
And streets that are clean
But this place with the child,
The family,
The dump
May not have green grass of clean streets
But they all work towards a goal
The goals of a future
For their country
Their community
Their children
This place has the spirit of hope
The place has the feeling of accomplishment
This place shows humanity
A place working with all it has with a vision of
something more
This place, this Mexico

By Lucy Whitford, Loyola College

LOS NIÑOS

The Voices

Los Niños Celebrates the Fourth Annual Bi-Cultural Event

Los Niños celebrated its 29th year of fun. working in support of family and community self-reliance

here in our border region during the Fourth Annual Bi-Cultural Event. From June 19-24th, volunteers worked side by side with community members in Tijuana, Mexico to learn about the culture, practice Spanish, and complete community projects.



Who is teaching who?

As an annual fundraiser for Los Niños, we ask participants to secure a minimum \$500 in pledges to cover costs and leave a financial legacy for the organization. They are then guests of Los Niños and the people of a Tijuana or Mexicali community where they plant gardens, paint community centers and see the sights. Those joining this project have an unforgettable experience getting to know our neighbors to the south. The visit includes lodging, meals, transportation from, and a return trip to, San Diego, Los Niños T-shirt, and lots of

This year's event was attended by Marion McLaughlin, her two grandsons Christopher and Derek, Mavis Cain (Los Niños' Ambassador), a mission group from the Second Congregational Church of Boxford, MA, and several participants that were able to join the group for one day terms. Highlights included:

- A day in Mexicali to see the bee operation and a rural community where roofing tiles are made.

- A day at a "Rancho" on the outskirts of Tijuana, painting and learning about a community in the midst of rapid growth.

- A day in Ensenada and a visit to the spectacular Blow Hole on the coast (Playtime!)

- A day in the community of Felipa Velasquez painting at the library with lunch in a promotora's home.

Group experiences like the Bi-Cultural Event can be booked year-round as either a Service Learning experience for students and youth or as a VolunTours™ experience



Derek learns about Mexico by making new friends.

for corporations, social clubs, or faith-based organizations. Contact Elisa Sabatini (email: elisa@losninosinternational.org) to book one of these rewarding experiences in the Baja Region.

Be sure to stay tuned for details of next year's Bi-Cultural Event celebrating 30 years of Los Niños' (1974 – 2004)!

First Annual Congress on Nutrition and Ecology:

Tijuana, Mexico is now listed as the city/region in Mexico with the largest percentage of obesity, malnutrition, and diabetes.

The Los Niños' promotoras (community outreach workers) of Tijuana, a group of 40 women, saw the need to provide more education around the themes of nutrition and ecology to the promotoras of other nonprofit organizations operating in the region. They decided to organize and host a three-day conference to dis-

seminate relevant family ecology, health and nutrition information.

The event was held at a Special Education school. (They offered us their Plaza, which, coincidentally, was built by one of Los Niños' Service Learning groups.) The students, young people with special needs, were very helpful with sweeping and smiling.

The organization and agenda were well-planned and the speakers noteworthy: a doctor from the Ibero-University



Of LOS Niños

Community Development Addressing Poverty Through Adult Continuing Education

Four years ago Los Niños embarked on a collaborative effort with Ibero-Americana University (Tijuana, Mexico) and Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada) to launch a two-year education program for community outreach workers (promotoras). In conjunction with six other nonprofit organizations serving the Baja Region, a two-year program was designed to support participating promotoras to receive their secondary education and a certificate from the Ibero-Americana University in community organizing. With these tools the participants can seek employment, launch a home business venture, or deepen their community work.

Four satellite sites were selected in an effort to "bring the university to the community". From a field of more than 150 applicants, eighty participants, primarily women, were enrolled in the program. The curriculum includes practicum experience such as: researching community needs, clearly articulating these needs, and creating and implementing a community project to address the needs. After 3 semesters of work over 40 projects have been designed and are in some level of implementation. These include:

- An ecological lottery game for children to learn about the environment,
- Nutrition classes at local factories,
- Providing health information on mammograms to under-

served groups,

- Channeling information to youth on the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and
- Offering recycling workshops.

It is an amazing array of community-driven initiatives and demonstrates the social impact of the program.

The testimonies from the students are noteworthy:

"I have met so many people and we talk and care about each other. When I have a problem with my work, I feel like I can ask someone without feeling like I am not smart enough. We are not compet-

ing... we are family here and it feels good to have so many people who care about each other."

"I would like to change the name of this program to the arrow that breaks the cycle. For us, this program is breaking the cycle of poverty."

"I often feel that there are too many barriers for me to come to this program. But when I get there I feel like light is shining on me. By the time I leave I have the energy to go out and work in our communities for another week."

If you would like more information on this program please contact Rigo Reyes at rigo@losninosinternational.org or 619-426-9110.

"I would like to change the name of this program to the arrow that breaks the cycle. For us, this program is breaking the cycle of poverty."

We Are What We Eat and Breathe

spoke on nutrition, a radio host who is quite renowned in Tijuana for his health themes, and an environmental expert on the bio-region. They used power point presentations and distributed quite a number of materials to attendees. Many commented on the professionalism of the workshops presented by the promotoras. Themes included recycling, composting, and the use of soy in cooking.

Each day an estimated 100 community members attended. Los Niños received \$3500 from San Diego Foundation for

Change to cover costs. To note, the grant was written by our General Coordinator in Tijuana, Teresa Franco, a former promotora. In addition, Pfizer, Inc. provided a mobile diagnostics unit for attendees to be tested for cholesterol, diabetes and respiratory capacity. The promotoras did all the cooking for the event and secured donations for most of the food.

The promotoras are already planning for next year! For more details contact Rigo Reyes through rigo@losninosinternational.org or 619-426-9110.



The Voices

Travel With Purpose: Volunteering Transforms Vacationing

By Jennifer Case

Think "Tourist" and most people imagine camera-laden onlookers clamoring to consume...sites, sounds, tastes, goods, and armloads of souvenirs. In a city promoted worldwide for its beautiful weather, pleasant climate, and persistent sunshine, San Diego is a popular destination attracting tourists and conventioners from around the globe. Now, thanks to the efforts of an innovative local program known as Los Niños VolunTours™, San Diego offers visitors more than the regular tourist fare of great weather and popular attractions by providing a unique opportunity to experience "Travel with Purpose" and "Exploration with Inspiration" through the magic of volunteering.

Los Niños VolunTours™ creates custom-designed half-day, full-day, or weekend volunteer programs for travelers interested in giving back, but not giving up their vacations. Supporting human development, education, nutrition, and self-sustainability for women and children in the San Diego/Tijuana Border region, Los Niños invites visitors to prepare meals for school children, build



Paramedic assists child in fitting her bike helmet.

organic gardens, or participate in construction of schools and community facilities in underprivileged neighborhoods. Los Niños VolunTours™ also works with other area non-profits such as the San Diego Children's Museum/ Museo de los Niños to provide a broad range of volunteer oppor-



Pfizer volunteers and Sherman students celebrate teamwork!

tunities and activities to suit the needs, interests, and schedule of any business or leisure travel plan.

In May 2003, Los Niños presented VolunTours™ at the Yale/Goldman Sachs Nonprofit Social Venture competition in New York. VolunTours™ was one of the twenty finalists, "social ventures," out of 655 applicants in the competition. (For those interested in a copy of the VolunTours™ business plan, please send an email, with subject heading "business plan", to David Clemmons at the email address below. A Powerpoint presentation is also available.)

This summer VolunTours™ hosted events with teams from AllTel Communications and Pfizer Corporation. A local elementary school identified the need for bikes and safety classes as an important element in improving school access and child safety. Fifty bikes were built by teams from both corporations and Pfizer members assisted the local children in completing the bicycle safety training program offered by EPICMedics.

If you have a group coming to San Diego or know of someone looking for a "vacation with purpose" please contact David Clemmons at 619 434 6230 or david@sandiegovoluntours.com.



Of LOS Niños

Family Financial Security — Micro Loans

Over the course of the last year, Los Niños has analyzed its previous experience with small loans to launch small enterprises and has determined to formalize its systems to be able to offer loans to more people.

A consultant to the project worked with us and we finished some revisions to the loan system during the Fall of 2002. We conducted workshops on the new system with groups of Tijuana promotoras and the Mexicali team. Both groups are interested to pilot the system.

The Los Niños Tijuana promotoras (35 in all) have saved \$1700. The history of the savings group is interesting. Three years ago when promotora Maria Elena lost her home to fire she had no safety net. The promotora group leaped into action and began to collect funds from breakfasts that they sold to each other at meetings. These funds were then passed along to Maria Elena. The habit was retained and the group continued to save. Last spring when our promotora Eva passed away unexpectedly, the group loaned her family funds for the medical expenses and the funeral. At that point the group started tracking the savings being collected by individual members. In August of 2002, there were eleven loans of \$100 disbursed, 8 for business activity and 3 for emergencies. In four months all were repaid in full plus 5% interest.

From Mexicali, the program director and four promotoras participated in the opening workshop and are interested in beginning immediately. In our pilot loan project, Mexicali had six loans. The first, a



A visit to the bees in Mexicali—110° outside!

community kitchen and sewing cooperative have been paid in full. The second kitchen owes a very small balance. The third community kitchen has been converted into a multi-use center as the promotoras are attempting to make a go of the location. They are offering aerobics classes, nutrition, karate, and haircuts! The bee project has paid the balance of last year's loan for hives and is now harvesting 2,500 liters of honey. The final loan in Mexicali was for a miscellany store and it is not as yet overdue. The shop sells handcraft supplies, piñatas and party favors. These are the types of initiatives we will support in the new program.

We have received great encouragement from a local San Diegan, Kenny Jones, who is rallying additional support for the pro-

gram. He invited some fellow Rotarians to participate in a site visit and we went out to La Morita and spoke to some of the women. The activity had a strong effect on one of the participants, he stated, "Kenny, can you believe we are 20 minutes from my house?" - a contrast, no doubt, to the simple clapboard community center with bare walls and a dirt floor.

If you have a background in banking or finance and would like to sit on the advisory board for this project, or have capital that you would like to invest to support the loan program, please contact Elisa Sabatini at elisa@losninosinternational.org or 619-426-9110 for more information.



The Vision

Los Niños Organizational Description

Vision

Los Niños envisions a world where people are called to participate fully in the development of their community. These self-reliant efforts address issues of social justice and human dignity.

Purpose

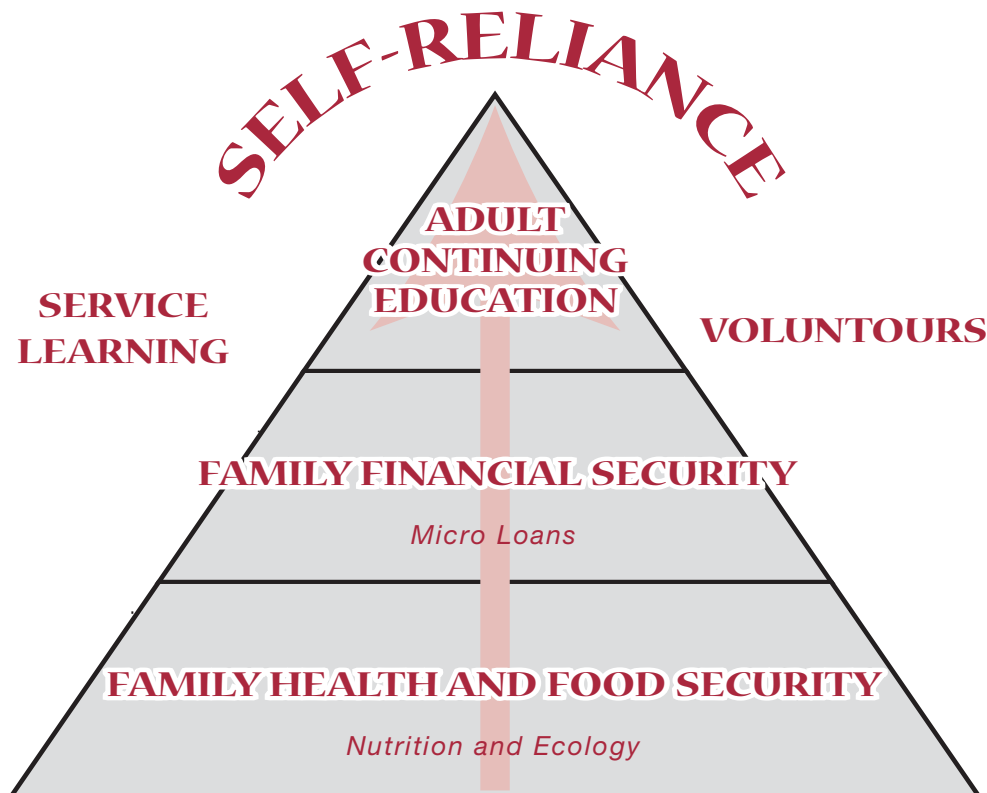
Los Niños provides opportunities to awaken human potential through self-reliant activities that promote community development and food security. Strong communities with healthy children are the foundation of a strong civil society.

Mission

Los Niños' mission is to improve the quality of life by creating opportunities for children and their families to discover their human potential through participation in the development of the community.

Community Development

Los Niños defines Community Development as a participatory process where community members identify community needs and organize themselves to take the actions necessary to improve their quality of life.



Los Niños Model of Community-Based Development

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a person cannot move toward achieving his/her potential (self-actualizing) without first covering basic needs/physiological. Human development/self actualization is a process of several levels. The pyramid shows basic needs (food, shelter) at the base, then a level for security/safety, a level for education/esteem and ultimately a level where a person has time for self-development, spirituality, self-realization – a self-reliant individual. Los Niños follows this process of human and organizational development.



Of LOS Niños

To achieve the mission, Los Niños offers Community-Based Development Programs complemented with Volunteer Service and Education Programs.

Community-Based Development Programs

- **Family Health and Food Security.** Community food security is defined as "all people in a community obtaining a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through non-emergency food sources at all times". Los Niños integrates nutrition, health and organic gardening into an approach that offers community members self-reliant methods to address their food needs. Community outreach workers are trained to teach in their own neighborhoods disseminating information about nutrition, health and organic gardening. The Los Niños outreach workers (promotoras) are community members, generally women, who are residents in the low-income teacher in their communities. For this work they receive a stipend, transportation funds and teaching materials. This strategy has proven to be effective, reaching many families in this complex border region. The needs are many: access to water, electricity, adequate housing and, most basic of all, sufficient nutrition for the children and their families. As these community classes continue, in the process the groups get organized and seek to address other issues in the community. There are now 60 trainers providing education reaching 18,000+ community members annually, either directly or through their families.
- **Financial Security through Micro-Loans.** Community and individual family well-being is enhanced by providing access to credit for small businesses. These include community kitchens, sewing cooperatives, small community stores and a teen center. Community members are looking for ways to augment income and many aspire to self-production of home produced food items. These include sales of dishes using soy products, canned cactus, organic honey, and granola. This increase in household income provides more disposable family income to address child health and support education costs. Health and education are needs identified by the potential loan program participants. The micro-enterprises provide a means to create self-reliant systems to address the identified needs.
- **Adult Continuing Education: Learning the Skills of Community Development.** Los Niños trains outreach workers with methods to attract students to the nutrition and gardening classes. These community members then act as agents of change in their neighborhoods. This education includes teaching skills, self-development and technical training in nutrition, health and gardening. Los Niños also works in collaboration with two universities offering a formal, two-year program for community outreach workers. The program is serving six organizations, accounting for 300+ outreach workers. The curriculum serves participants to improve their community work, provide skill training for potential employment and business training for developing micro-enterprises. Key interests of participants include computer and English training. An essential element to develop is building local capacity. This includes strengthening local non-profit management and systems. Los Niños is also developing strategies with Mexican non-governmental agencies to build capacity for governance, fund acquisition and management.

Volunteer Service and Education Programs

- **Service Learning.** Los Niños provides the opportunity for 600+ U.S. students to visit the border region and learn about community development first hand, working shoulder to shoulder with Mexican citizens in community-driven projects that enhance local schools and community centers. The program offers thousands of labor hours and contributions of materials to Mexican communities. U.S. students learn and serve – this Service Learning approach is nearly self-funding from the fees and support of the students.
- **VolunTours.** In 2003, Los Niños launched a social venture, VolunTours, a marketing and membership building social enterprise that will support the sales of volunteer vacations, team building events, and additional service learning opportunities. The intention is for the income generated to benefit Los Niños core community-driven programs as well as offer participants new awareness, education and volunteer opportunities.



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LOS NIÑOS



Executive Director, Elisa Sabatini

Los Niños will celebrate 30 years of service in the fall of 2004. We are creating several activities and events to celebrate and want to keep you informed. To be in

better touch with the friends and supporters of Los Niños we are developing new ways to communicate! Please use the enclosed insert to provide us with your email information or email us with your current contact information at info@losninosinternational.org. In the future we anticipate offering updates on-line as well as our periodic newsletters.

Now more than ever before it is important to forge cross border relationships and support. Join us in serving low-income families in the U.S./Mexico border region in our effort to address the well being of *los niños* (the children) everywhere.

All the best,
Elisa

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LOS Niños

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