



LA VIDA
EDUCATION

Educate Communities.
Transform Nicaragua.



Highlights of 2011

2011 marked our sixth full year of operations in Nicaragua! The learning center continues to thrive as the educational hub for the region. In this year alone, we had more than 20,000 book check-outs, we added a new team member to help keep up with the demand at the center, and hosted another work trip from the United States. **Thanks for your support of what we're doing in Nicaragua!**

Reflecting on the last five years

Back in 2006, when I moved back to the United States after living in Nicaragua for three years, I was a bit nervous. Not so much about re-acclimating to life in the US (let's be honest, running water and electricity on a daily basis have been nice) but more so about what I was leaving behind. Would LA VIDA continue to grow and thrive? Would the team continue to expand and improve the programs, and would kids and their parents continue to fill the center every day, seeking new learning opportunities and carrying out a vision for widespread community transformation?



The originals - the first five kids at the library

Turns out, I had nothing to be nervous about. LA VIDA is now being run by locals who are passionate about their own community and have made LA VIDA what it is today. Adelaida, our Program Director, has been overseeing library operations, music programs, volunteer work trips from the US, and a five-person team for more than six years now. The LA VIDA team continues to amaze me – they have become recognized as educational experts in the region and spend time each year training other library personnel throughout the country. They've come a long way; I can distinctly picture when some of them hadn't even seen a puzzle and had a hard time conceiving what the library could even become. I also remember seeing kids in the fifth grade at the center and seriously wondering to myself if they would graduate from primary school – they are now attending college classes in Managua! What started as a tiny operation out of a living room has grown into a community-wide effort and a model for the rest of the country.

Impact: Total visits to the center now over 137,000!



Kids study before heading off to school

Total visits to the educational community center have now reached 137,000 – averaging more than 100 visits a day over the past six years! In the beginning, the center was primarily used for puzzles, games, and story books, but it has become more heavily focused on schoolwork over the years as the kids have increased their education levels. Plenty of people still come to check out story books, cookbooks, or play with Tinker Toys, but the center is now used much of the day for homework prep and research, with the majority of the 22,475 book check-outs this year being text books and encyclopedias. To put that in perspective, that's about 100 books checked out per day from a library that only has about 4,000 books total.

The future still is still being built

After years of overcrowding at the current center, we were able to purchase an expansive 3.3-acre piece of property that will be used to house our future site in the middle of San Juan de Oriente. A vastly improved library, art center, tech center and music center will be phase one, and an exploratorium and butterfly farm are also possibilities down the road. This year we focused on preparing the land and getting a frontage road put in place. If you know of an awesome architect who might find something like this to be a dream project (for not a lot of money!), please let me know.



Local high schoolers help prep the land

The River Church Community returns to run the kids' camp



Kids show off art projects from camp

LA VIDA and The River Church Community from San Jose, California have developed a strong partnership over the years. The church has sent several groups of volunteers to run week-long camps for kids in San Juan de Oriente – now a highly anticipated annual highlight for the community with art projects, games, music, and a camp themed t-shirt for each kid. I still remember the first camp seven years ago, which shocked us all by drawing more than 300 kids. It's amazing to see the connection that the community has made with this group of volunteers and the impact this continues to have on the town.

How the educational community center works

- LA VIDA Education operates a free educational community center in the town of San Juan de Oriente, Nicaragua, that includes music and art programs, a library, and a children's learning area.
- Students between the ages of 5 and 16 are the most frequent visitors; additionally, many teachers use the center to prepare lesson plans and adults come to read and check out books for their children.
- Elementary school teachers bring their classes to the center in the mornings to participate in reading programs, while high school students do their homework and use the reference materials for reports and assignments.
- Resources provided by the center do not exist at public schools (most schools don't have enough money for textbooks and some don't even have desks). The center really is the educational lifeline for many people in the area, as some students have taken buses from an hour away to use the center. This model allows us to reach far more students than simply providing resources to individual schools.

Ramping up for 2012

You can always check out www.lavidaeducation.org to see what your donations have accomplished and read more about how an entire community is being transformed. It's amazing how far even a small amount of money can go in Nicaragua, and it's important to me that you can see the results of your donations. One of the most exciting benefits of having a model center in Nicaragua is seeing how this has spawned other libraries throughout the country. Adelaida and the staff routinely train others, adding to impact that reaches far beyond the region of San Juan de Oriente. As we continue to prepare for the building phase of the work, please consider some creative ways you might be able to help with fundraising. Maybe that's hosting a fundraising party in your home, asking about matching funds from work, or even getting a paper route...it all adds up. Thanks again for your support!

Program Director - Adelaida Lopez



Beloved and respected by the community, Adelaida is a former school principal and now has six years as LA VIDA's Program Director

Thanks,
Aaron