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Davis Projects for Peace
Completion and Implementation of a Library in Sutiava, Nicaragua

Specific Aims:

The objective of my proposal is to finish the construction of a lending library and implement a sustainable lending library system in the village of Sutiava, Nicaragua. Due to the lack of public library facilities in rural Nicaragua, as well as the lack of educational materials available to children in their free time, I saw the need to provide an educational facility such as a library to the community. Sutiava is located in the department of Leon, in the western region of Nicaragua. Based on preliminary research obtained through community meetings and house visits in Sutiava in December 2012 and January 2013, community members showed a strong interest in the project. In March 2013, another community meeting and focus groups took place as well as research for potential locations for the library. The need for an educational facility such as a library was positively evaluated for several reasons. First, the library is located directly in the community, which will allow children and adults to visit the library whenever they wish due to its close proximity. Second, many individuals in the village cannot read or write at their highest potential and view a library as a resource to better their skills. Finally, the library can serve as an ideal place for children for homework investigations, homework help, and other activities such as arts and crafts and story hours. By implementing a lending library, my hope is that the books available will influence the reading abilities of children and adults in the village, help increase their basic vocabulary, and foster appreciation for educational and intellectual activities within each child and adult who participates in the project. By using the lending library, individuals who participate in reading will gain reading and writing skills through the usage of books. Such tools will be useful in order to help individuals further their education, to increase their knowledge of the world beyond their remote community, and to better their socioeconomic position through newly acquired opportunities such as jobs.

After personal fundraising from March to May 2013, \$4,000 was raised to begin the construction of the library. From June to August 2013, I oversaw the construction of the library. Currently, the physical shell of the library has been built; however, the project is lacking funds to put a roof, floor, doors, and windows to the library. I have obtained many Spanish books through donations and purchases; however other educational materials and furniture for the library still need to be bought.

Project Rationale:

Literacy is considered a right in conjunction with the right to an education by organizations such as UNICEF (2012). Literacy influences the daily lives, learning, and social interactions of people living all over the world. It can provide new opportunities within one's society or community and can be seen as a tool of empowerment by becoming aware of one's personal freedoms and rights. Distribution of education and literacy is based on the distribution of wealth. As a result, many of the world's illiterate are living in impoverished areas of the world such as Nicaragua, the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Poverty is not only considered as material deficits, but also as intellectual and cultural deficits (Ireland, 2008). For this reason, educational resources need to be established in impoverished regions lacking current educational programs.

The Davis Projects for Peace grant would enable me to complete the lending library and provide necessary programming for the people of Sutiava. Once the building of the library is completed and all the furnishings installed, we will begin lending books to children and adults in the village. In addition, educational materials such as paper, pencils, crayons, etc. will be made available to visitors of the library. Ultimately, I would like to implement homework help and tutoring groups, arts and crafts activities, and other social and educational activities in the library.

Background:

I first traveled to Nicaragua in June of 2012 through a volunteer group with Hope for the Children Foundation. Since then, I have been travelling back and forth during my vacations to volunteer in the village of Sutiava, spending my time planning activities for the children. In August 2012, I volunteered at the local preschool and noticed it had one book. Also, there are no public libraries in Nicaragua. With this being said, I began to develop an idea to implement a library to benefit the community.

Sustainability:

Many educational activities can take place at the library. A library serves as a compliment to formal education (UNICEF, 2012). Children will be able to use the library's resources to help with homework as well as to educate themselves on unknown subjects. In addition, there are possibilities to help individual students and children with reading or with difficult school subjects. Furthermore, many educational books were purchased for the library. For example, book sets with 5 books in a set were purchased on science topics such as mountains, oceans, and avalanches. Such book sets can be used to facilitate groups where the book would be read and discussed afterward. The library can also hold story hours for younger children at a set time each day so as to encourage the power of telling and listening to stories. The library can host weekly or biweekly book making and story-illustrating activities for children and adolescents. In the future I would like to train two adolescents to run the library while I am not present. Also, a large garden is being constructed next to the library, although not completed. This garden will serve as an area for children to relax and read. In addition, vegetables and fruits will be planted with the participation of the children so as to teach them sustainable tools for the future as well as to provide them with healthy snacks. Overall, I am committed to working with the community of Sutiava and devoted to the completion of the library.

Peace:

Beginning in the 1970s and onward, Nicaragua experienced political upheaval. After the Somoza dictatorship was overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front in 1979, a civil war broke out between the Sandinista party and the Contras. The infrastructure of Nicaragua was thrown into turmoil and is still slowly recovering. I hope for this library to serve as a space of peace for both children and adults in the village, in which they can enter a place of tranquility and become engulfed by the books and other stimulating educational resources that are available. Nicaraguans lack the monetary resources to purchase books, computers, and other objects that are educationally beneficial. The country suffered through a period of warfare and many Nicaraguans such as the community of Sutiava continue to suffer in poverty. In conclusion, I feel as though the library can serve as a symbol of peace and hope for the future.