



## Apoyo Escolar Newsletter

**December 2023**

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the second annual newsletter from Apoyo Escolar! As you may remember, Apoyo Escolar is a grassroots, non-profit organization formed and staffed by Bill and Jane Wilkinson. Our mission is to provide educational resources to the children in primarily rural areas outside San Miguel De Allende, Mexico. These schools are very poorly funded and lack fundamental materials and services that we in the U.S. and Canada take for granted.

During 2023, thanks to the support of our generous donors and Apoyo Escolar volunteers, Bill and Jane have been able to provide significant help to six rural schools. Through our network of volunteers, we continue to offer English-language skills to kids, build up and equip libraries with shelving and books, and provide scholarships to students so they continue their secondary school and prepa school education. This year, because of our special relationship with Raphael Franco, we have provided schools with facilities such as kitchens and classrooms.

For this newsletter edition, we would like to emphasize two of our major efforts—*computer access* and events intended to *expand the cultural and social perspectives* of our schoolkids.

## Computer Access



Since inception, Apoyo Escolar has provided exposure to computers and the internet to the kids in our partner schools. For the most part, these schools offer no computer exposure and do not have an internet connection available for student use. This is probably hard to imagine for those of us in the U.S., Canada and Europe whose kids were introduced to computers in pre-school and by the lower elementary grades depend on computers and internet connections to complete basic school assignments.

As we have gained experience in assisting our partner schools, we now understand that four factors are necessary for a successful program of computer education – (1) facilities, (2) computers, (3) internet access and, as we now realize, (4) hands-on, on-site instruction. To make this happen, we have invested in all three elements.

- We have built-up facilities to accommodate computer use, including expanding library facilities, at Salatrillo, ElAguila, and Medina schools, and have constructed and donated stand-alone buildings at Nuevo Pantoja and Estancia de Canal schools.
- We have provided for and subsidized internet access at Salitrillo, Nuevo Pantoja, Le Medina, and Estancia do Canal schools.
- We have distributed over 100 Chromebooks to schools, students, and teachers and placed 6 large screen televisions in the schools..
- We have subsidized teacher salaries to pay for extra classroom time devoted to computer education for the students.

Because of our efforts to equip and empower these schools, a group of teachers now meet to exchange ideas about how to use the computers and how they can best work as

educational tools. We believe that our efforts could have a profoundly positive effect on the lives of these children in their educational and job careers.

## **Cultural and Social Perspectives**

Many of our partner schools are located in rural settings outside of the bustling, tourist city of San Miguel De Allende. We find that many of the children in these villages rarely have a chance to leave their local area and gain exposure to new places and experiences. In the last couple of years, we have attempted to address this situation with a few specific activities.

### ***Beyond Borders***

In 2022 and 2023, we supported two exciting events made possible through our volunteers and school partnerships.



- In 2022, second graders at Nuevo Pantoja Baja had the opportunity to share and relive the beautiful tradition of Day of the Dead. Twenty-five second graders participated in a video happily and lovingly building an altar, or “orfreda” as part of “What is Day of the Dead?” The students used zoom to connect to 25 second graders from Oriole Beach Elementary school in Gulf Breeze, Florida, who then told the Mexican class about their American Thanksgiving traditions. Following these presentations, the children asked each other questions. All hands were raised, with much interest from both classrooms. The exchange was facilitated by Jane and Bill Wilkinson, founders of Apoyo Escolar and supported by the internet connection provided by Apoyo Escolar.



- In 2023, one of Nueva Pantoja's enterprising teachers contacted a NASA engineer in the US and arranged for a Zoom call between the schoolkids and some NASA engineers. The kids presented a robot that they had built in class (see picture above). Imagine how exiting this type of exposure is for these kids from rural areas with limited resources. I'll bet it was exciting for the engineers as well! Again, this kind of thing would not be possible with access to the internet provided by Apoyo Escolar.

### *Closer to Home*

- In the past year, we have sponsored and help to organize field trips to important historical and cultural sites such as:
  - *EEESMA School for the Deaf*, which teaches bilingual sign language to hearing impaired children,
  - *Canal de Virgin*, a pre-Hispanic pyramid complex and former ritual and ceremonial location, dating from around AD 300 and in use until around 1050
  - *Tikkun*, a [permaculture center](#) serving as a community hub for ecological education and restoration. Tikkun includes an organic farm, a water harvesting site, and a permaculture demonstration site.

- *Charco del Ingenio*, a botanical garden and nature preserve located on the outskirts of San Miguel De Allende. The garden contains one of the most extensive and diverse collections of cacti in Mexico.
- In December, we organized and conducted a “Career Day” for 6<sup>th</sup> graders which included a demonstration of our robot project, some basic mechanical principles, Mexican cultural awareness, and opportunities in vocational training and college paths. All of the activities were presented by Mexican teachers. The event was attended by 47 students who we hope will be motivated to continue their high school and prepa attendance.



## **We Need Your Support to Continue These Important Activities!**

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the amazing efforts of Bill and Jane, and **your financial support**. Apoyo Escolar has no paid staff and all donations are directly invested into our charitable activities. You have been very generous in the past and we are hoping you are able to continue helping these kids out.

Our website ([www.apoyosma.org](http://www.apoyosma.org)) provides links for paypal contributions and checks can be mailed to:

Chris Scherer, Treasurer  
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***Thank You!***

Chris Scherer and Susan LeMaster