

Artículos de educación de Aplicaciones Didácticas Hope for deaf Dominican children

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By Alberto Surís

A group of eight teachers from Instituto de Ayuda al Sordo from Santo Domingo and Instituto Alternativo, from San Pedro de Macorís, Dominican Republic, just returned to their country after spending 18 days in Ipswich, MA in an intensive training oriented to better the hearing of deaf children.

The training consisted of studying the new technologies being employed in our country in these children's treatment. This group visited Children's Hospital, The Department of Public Health, Clarke School for the Deaf, House of Peace, in Ipswich, MA and Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf in New Hampshire, amongst other.

The trip, accommodations and all expenses related to the training of this Dominican women were paid for by Partners for a Greater Voice, a nonprofit international organization, 501(c) 3, from Ipswich, MA, working with parents associations, schools of deaf and individuals involved with deaf children in their language skills development.

"They are not -mudos- mutes!" Said Joanne Travers, Partners for a Greater Voice founder. "They can't talk because they are deaf. Once we have solved their hearing problem, we can teach them to talk", said Joanne in a convinced voice.

Joanne Travers speaks with the knowledge of one who knows what she is talking about. She had experienced on her own what many parents are going through. Both Travers' children were born deaf. This ordeal became a motivation for the couple. After considering all options, they refused to accept sign language. "We wanted our children to be able to hear and speak so they could attend regular schools", said Joanne.

Joanne and her husband Paul, are not deaf and nobody else in their families, either; however, she thinks this could be a genetic problem. Matthew, the youngest child, (7) wears two hearing aids. Victoria Marie, (9) recently received a cochlear implant to help her hear, due to her absolute lack of hearing. Both children are attending regular schools.

During the past seven years, Joanne not only worked hard helping both their children, Matthew and Victoria Marie, but countless other children

with similar hearing problems. Besides speaking in schools, Joanne writes and edits a newsletter that is being sent to families with deaf children in Massachusetts. Now, the organization she founded, Partners for a Greater Voice, has extended a generous hand to the Dominican Republic, where there are 2,000 children with hearing problems.

Travers, with a group of volunteers, had toured different schools for the deaf and met with more than 100 parents and professionals interested in oral communication instead of sign language as an option for the deaf. "In Boca Chica alone, we identified 20 families with deaf children, who are not receiving any education because their families lack the necessary resources", she said.

"In our school we have approximately 300 deaf children; only 52 have hearing aids and only one child has had a cochlear implant", said Lic. Casilda Jiménez de Dantes-Castillo, Sub-Director, Instituto de Ayuda al Sordo Santa Rosa, from Santo Domingo.

Jiménez explained that through Joanne Travers and Partners for a Greater Voice, they received a donation of the first 20 hearing aids, making it possible for more children to benefit with this new technology. "Hearing aids are expensive, and they don't last long with the children. In this tropical climate they get damaged quickly by their sweat and they need to be sent to the States to be repaired, at a cost of as much as US\$80.00 each", she said.

"We also have a program of integration to regular schools in our institution, where we give support and follow up to the 42 children integrated so far", said Jimenez.

Orlando Vargas and Zoila Rosario had just joined Partners for a Greater Voice, giving a shot in the arm to the efforts of the Dominican project. Vargas work as a volunteer, offering logistic support and coordination in the Dominican Republic through different contacts, among them the Dominican Republic Catholic Church, the Government and the Dominican Rotary Club.

Rosario acts as a liaison with the Dominican Government. She is in charge of distributing all medical supplies in the Dominican Republic. As a note of information, she is the wife of former General Consul to The Dominican Republic, Ing. Osiris de León. "To have Orlando and Zoila working with us represents a great help to this project in Dominican Republic," said

Joanne Travers. Vargas and Rosario worked very hard to get visas and lodging for the eight teachers while attending the seminar.

Magaly Pérez, one of the teachers, has worked with deaf children for 13 years. Pérez graduated from Instituto Mexicano de Audición y Lenguaje (Mexican Institute of Hearing and Language) from Mexico City and is very thankful of Partners for a Greater Voice for inviting them to come to the States. "We are going to implement everything we learned to improve the quality of the services we provide at the Dominican Audiological Center. We owe this to Ms. Travers. In the name of the Dominican deaf children, I want to say thanks!" ended Magaly Pérez.

Amongst the Partners for a Greater Voice plans FY 2003/2004 are:

- Construction of an acoustically modified school in Boca Chica for deaf and hard of hearing children not registered in any school.
- Construction of a clinic in San Pedro de Macorís, to be attached to the local school for the deaf.
- Training for parents across the country and educational programs for hearing health while continuing providing examination and audio equipment; some of them, worth more than \$30,000 have been distributed.

How can we help the Partners for a Greater Voice Dominican Project?

Contribution programs:

There are more than 2000 children in the Dominican Republic with hearing loss. Hundreds of these small children need audiological care and auditory oral/verbal therapy. Let's make the world a larger place making an annual pledge to the following areas:

Give the gift of hearing:

Consider a donation of \$150 to cover the cost of a hearing aid and ear mold for one child.

The infrastructure of the development:

Make a contribution to help construction of a school for deaf children in Boca Chica.

The Instituto de Ayuda al Sordo Santa Rosa and the Instituto Alternativo of San Pedro de Macorís, needs modifications in their design, such as reducing the acoustics with the creative use of sound paneling, carpets and a more silent vent system.

General Fund:

Although Partner for a greater Voice is based on volunteers, it still

needs constant economic support to cover the business expenses. The general operations fund also includes shipments of hearing materials, books and other necessary materials.

Senior Sponsor	\$500 or greater
Sponsor	\$250 - \$499
Partner	\$125 - \$249
Friend	\$50 - \$124
Donor	\$10 - \$49

Volunteers and non monetary donations:

Partners for a Greater Voice welcomes every individual interested in volunteering his/her abilities in every way. Donations of computers, business material, etc., are also welcome.

To find out how you can help, call Executive Director Joanne Travers, (978) 312-1200.

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