

Working together to strengthen YMCAs in Latin America

A working meeting of Board Members, Secretaries-General, and YMCA partners for the MesoAmerica sub-region of the Latin American and Caribbean Alliance of YMCAs (LACA) took place February 5 - 9, 2009 in Guatemala City and at the YMCA of Guatemala's Camp Chichoj. Represented were the YMCA/ACJ Honduras, ACJ Nicaragua, ACJ Guatemala, YMCA USA, YMCA Canada, the YMCAs of Quebec, the YMCA of Mexico and LACA.

This collaboration between the Meso-American YMCAs and their key international partners is part of their Movement Strengthening process, as are training sessions offered by LACA for Secretaries-General, Board members and ACJ volunteers.

Miguel Blasco, the acting Secretary General of LACA, noted that resource mobilization is key to strengthening YMCA movements and is a priority of the World Alliance of YMCAs. In Latin America, LACA hopes to create a culture of philanthropy; to encourage individuals and the private sector to contribute their time, talent and treasure to the YMCA as a means to improve their community and society.

The Latin American YMCAs have compiled 50 examples of their "Best Practices" of their work with youth and in community development that they hope will make the YMCA more visible and recognized by the public. They also wish to develop a common logo and message to inform, educate and develop relationships with potential funding sources. LACA and the national YMCA movements in Latin America recognize this as a "work in progress" as there are currently 27 different logos for Latin American YMCAs.

Other components of the working meeting included an analysis of the ACJ Guatemala, including its strengths, weaknesses and strategies to strengthening the movement over the next 3 years, presented by Paul Menchu, Secretary-General and Pablo Prado, Board President.

On February 7 & 8, two distinct training streams (Systematization of Practices and Governance and Resource Mobilization) were offered at ACJ Camp Chichoj, for an enlarged group of staff and volunteers of the ACJs of Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

During that weekend, over 50 people shared a very emotional experience when the ACJ youth presented their beautiful outdoor mural in remembrance of the 3 ACJ youth leaders who were murdered in Amatitlan. The youth explained that the images on the Memorial Wall honour the lives of the three youth, and also represent their hopes for a better future.

The ACJ youth leaders also organized a campfire and many, many "dinamicas" that had everyone singing, dancing and playing crazy games that were lots of fun and helped everyone warm up for the first time that day! When it's cold outside at Chichoj, it is even COLDER inside the buildings, in spite of hats, scarves, mitts, coats and ponchos!

by Sheila Laursen



Marco Antonio, Secretary-General of ACJ/YMCA of Honduras with Sheila Laursen, Director of International Initiatives, the YMCAs of Quebec.

The Haiti YMCA

2007- 2009

***EIGHT YEARS OF SERVICE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF YOUTH,
THOUSANDS OF HAPPY, INFORMED AND EDUCATED YOUTH,
HUNDREDS OF YOUTH IN HIGH SCHOOL,
A LIBRARY OF 20,000 BOOKS IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH,
AN EXCELLENT AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM,
10 SUMMER CAMPS, 3 YOUTH CENTERS, 2 SOCCER TEAMS
and many other programs and activities...***

2007- 2009 brought to Haiti four hurricanes, two collapsed schools, a food crisis that toppled the government, and a world financial crisis of a scale never before seen. In spite of all that, the Haiti YMCA has continued to offer support to children and youth, to expand its presence, and to consolidate its relationship with its international partners.

Eight years of continuous services for thousands of youth within the four YMCA Youth Centres is a demonstrable success. By ensuring the positive development of youth in their family and their community, the YMCA of Haiti has also become a credible and well-established partner for the youth of Haiti.

A solid cooperation with the Mountain Wells Foundation (USA) resulted in funding to open, on Saturday January 17, 2009, a new YMCA Youth Centre in Kenscoff. A donation of 10,000 books in French and English has stocked its "Carol Wells Library" and supplemented the libraries of two other YMCA Youth Centres.

Twenty-six Youth Leaders of the Konbit Centre in Port au Prince, and the Cousin Center in Camp Perrin received leadership training in 2006 and 2007, thanks to the PQDI funding of the government of Quebec. Most of these leaders are still very active in their YMCA Youth Centres, and as volunteer leaders, are transmitting the benefits of their leadership training to other youth.

***by Gwenael Apollon,
Secretary- General, YMCA Haiti***



Youth Leadership training in Camp Perrin, Haiti

The ACJ Nicaragua will soon have a Youth Camp!

The ACJ Nicaragua has started the development of a YMCA youth camp. For the ACJ Nicaragua, this camp offers the opportunity to build capacity for the financial sustainability of the ACJ and its important programs for youth.

The camp will be constructed at the ACJ's farm, La Perla, 130 km from Managua, in a zone with strong potential for tourism.

Thanks to the generous support of Y Care, UK, the first camp building is a dining hall of 250 square metres. Its multi-functional design will allow it to be used also for training sessions for the ACJ youth.

The ACJ Nicaragua will soon have a Youth Camp!

***by Carlos Amador,
Secretary- General, ACJ/YMCA Nicaragua***