

## Visit to our project in Costa Rica: Coherent dynamic between the material and the spiritual Preparation for Social Action (PSA) in Costa Rica

Last November I had the privilege of visiting the project that Unity Foundation supports since 2010 in Costa Rica and that is being implemented by our partner, ACEM (Asociación para la Ciencia y Educación Moral). *Preparation for Social Action*, widely known as the **PSA Program**, constitutes one of the main programs together with the *Community Schools Program*, which Unity Foundation supports with the guidance of the Office of Social and Economic Development; (OSED)- our Centre of Excellence located in Israel -PSA is implemented throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia by different development organizations.

PSA is an educational program which empowers young populations to participate in their own generation and application of knowledge as protagonists of the material and spiritual wellbeing of their communities. The program originated in Colombia based in the experience of and as a natural continuation of Fundaeac's Tutorial Learning System (SAT), carried out in rural communities throughout Latin America for the past 20 years.

Upon finishing the first level of PSA, after approximately 2 years and a half, participants obtain a diploma of "Promoter of Community Wellbeing". The PSA curriculum is organized, not in subjects as the common school curriculum, but in areas of capabilities on science, technology, math, language and service to the community. The Textbooks of the Promoter of Community Wellbeing have been developed as a process of action, reflection, consultation and study for more than 25 years and which guide the participants through a path of learning and service to the community.

### PSA in Talamanca



ACEM carries out the PSA program in the indigenous area of Talamanca, bordering Panama in the southeast side of the country. A 6 hour ride from the Capital **San Jose** to the Monjoncito area in Talamanca leads to a beautiful scenery of tropical rainforest vegetation and banana plantations until the road comes to a stop in the indigenous reserve of the Bribri people. A motorized canoe takes passengers up the river then followed by a bus ride which serves all the villages or 'neighborhoods' in Mojoncito indigenous zone.

I had the opportunity of meeting tutors and some participants of three PSA groups, as well as the parents of the participants. While the program provides the opportunity to study to those who cannot or did not go through formal education, the majority of participants attend regular state schools within 1-2 hrs walking distance. These participants are very committed to the program as they arrive home after having walked 1 to 2 hours back from school to quickly eat and continue studying with their PSA group for some 3 to 4 hours until early evening.

Parents mention that they see the effects of the program not only academically in the school results of their children, but also in their attitudes towards studying and towards community service and participation, as well as in their behavior at home. PSA participants have obtained the highest scores

in math and other subjects in their school and parents share that the school teacher praises them for their good conduct and being examples for their classmates. A mother shared that her son is teaching her many useful things he has learned in the PSA program in relation to math, energy and growing crops, and she would like to enroll in the program next year as she never had the opportunity to go to high school.

To speak of the PSA Program in Mojoncito without mentioning the Institute process would make no justice to a process which interacts beautifully with the constant development of human resources in the area through the sequence of books from the Ruhi Institute. In fact, the program engages participants in the application of the knowledge acquired studying through the participation in practices and service activities. The youth are engaged in a program for 'Nurturing young minds' of small children part of the PSA curricula. But likewise they participate as children classes' teachers or animators of junior youth groups.

One of the participants of PSA is serving as a teacher at a Kindergarten in the community. She shared that the program has taught her a lot in relation to service to the community, in math but also on the education of children and pedagogy. She also mentioned that the program has helped gain confidence in herself and in her role of young mother, but also in order to assume her responsibility as teacher in the kindergarten of the village.

### **The concept of learning in the PSA program and the educational process**

Likewise the process of expansion and consolidation, social action is also nourished and emerges from a systematic process of learning that combines study, consultation, action, and reflection on action, and which enables any endeavor to move forward. This is perhaps one distinctive characteristic of our projects.

Actors involved in the program meet regularly to reflect and systematize the learning that has occurred and ways to improve the program and keeping a posture of learning permeates all aspects of it. From the way a participant is perceived, to the way a coordinator and tutor interact, to the dynamic created in a group to the content and the way the texts of the PSA curriculum have evolved. The student is considered the main protagonist in his or her process of learning, and the tutorial approach allows students to be engaged in society and participate both in productive activities and in service to the community.



Interesting examples are the highly efficient plots which teach, among other things, efficient ways to use the soil and grow crops. It was nice to see a plot in Bajo Coen which one of the PSA groups had been working on for about a month with an alternated planting of beans and corn. Soon tomato and yucca will also be grown in the plots. Don Eulanio and older participant of the program is shown below with his wife and other younger PSA participants in front of the plot in his land. Only two weeks after having planted the first seeds, the plot had already awakened quite some interest from neighbors and other community members in learning more about the program.

The PSA Program is beautifully depicted in the following comment from one of our tutors, Axel:  
“I am so grateful for this program as this has changed my life. Becoming a *promoter of community of wellbeing* gives me a sense of purpose in my life and also to the participants, as we learn to improve the material and spiritual conditions of the community.”

Although it’s just the beginning, one can only imagine the effect of PSA in the region as the lives of young participants, their families and communities alike continue to be transformed and different venues of service are systematically and coherently carried out together in a path that will ultimately lead to the building of a new civilization.



**Paola Dumet-Fusco**  
**January 2012**