

WHY WOULD A ROTARY CLUB ENGAGE IN A GLOBAL GRANT PROJECT LIKE LITERACY ALIVE III?

"The Literacy Alive Project has been very successful in improving the reading, writing and speaking skills of primary students in Belize. Different from other humanitarian projects that have been in the Cayo district this project has been a catalyst for educators and community to become very involved and excited about improvements to our education system. The Rotarians have been responsive to the real needs in our schools and work collaboratively with us to design literacy improvement projects that are timely, affordable, exciting and sustainable. The contributions of vocational training team members has been outstanding and the resources directed to our schools as well as the training provided for teachers, school administrators, librarians, and parent volunteers has strengthened our work with students. Strong networks and relationships have formed and a culture of trust, sharing, respect and hope continues to thrive." (comments pulled from the project evaluations completed by Belize participants)

1. WHAT MAKES THIS PROGRAM UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE?

- a) Strong elements to support building the capacity of educators and community in improving literacy,*
- b) Support of the Ministry of Education ensures that the program targets areas of high need in the communities served, and ensures ongoing support to sustain program gains when the international participants leave the country.*
- c) Dynamic and growing website and wiki which serves as a promotional site for the project and is also a repository of all materials used in the project and is available to all Belize participants to access on demand.*
- d) Each year the cohort of Belize and Canadian participants in the project grows and a large network of professional international friends continues to thrive and grow.*
- e) Project is set up to be easily replicated on a small scale (in small villages) and on a large scale in larger centers.*
- f) MOST materials needed in the project are purchased from local Belize suppliers.*

- g) Built in consistency: A cohort of Canadian leaders and Belize leaders on the team must have been involved in previous projects to ensure that lessons learned from previous experiences are incorporated into project development and implementation.*
- h) The project was designed around data collected on student and teacher challenges with literacy learning (collected by the Belize Ministry of Education and from program evaluations from previous projects) and all project activities are targeted to address the specific issues.*
- i) Strong project assessment processes are in place ensuring that all participants (teachers, students, parents, community members, Rotarians, government personnel) through focus groups, surveys and debriefing events and the suggestions for improvement are priorities in subsequent projects.*

2. Participants

a) Active involvement in program delivery initiatives:

15 VTT members

7 Volun travel members

10 Rotarians

Over 250 student direct participants

Over 50 Belize educators

Two public community librarians

Over 20 Belize community volunteers

b) Indirect benefactors : students and other Belize teachers impacted by new learning taken to schools by educators and community members directly involved in the project activities:

Over 2500 students in the Cayo district

Teachers in 25 participant schools

Librarians (over 20) from across six Belize districts

3. Program dimensions

- a) Canadian teacher literacy experts provide coaching and training for all educators in five rural schools (in remote areas) in November 2015.*
- b) Canadian teacher literacy experts host a Rainforest Reading and Adventure Camp for over 250 students in March 2016.*
- c) Belize teachers, community volunteers and public librarians form learning teams at the reading camp and are mentored in the use of literacy teaching strategies.*
- d) All camp participants perform a celebration song and dance for the community ("It's A Wonderful World") to promote the principles of children across the world valuing literacy and learning through the international language of music.*
- e) Belize teachers participate in two days of intensive professional development on: a) literacy strategies that engage parent and community members and, b) the planning and resource development for replication of the Rainforest Reading and Adventure Camp in home villages, towns and communities.*
- f) All participants join community leaders and Rotarians in a celebration of literacy, Rotary global projects and recognition of Paul Harris fellows.*
- g) Creation of of wiki and website that serves as an information one stop for participants and houses all resources used in the various dimensions of the project.*

4. Benefits to Belizeans teachers, kids community

- Knowledge gained for educators on effective literacy instructional strategies*
- Students improve reading skills*
- Student self confidence in school improves and contributes to student interest in remaining in school to graduation*
- Community members receive guidance on how they can actively contribute to improved literacy rates*
- Opportunities for community volunteers to work in schools as reading coaches and to work at a reading camp in a variety of roles*

- *Teacher leaders are formed and are utilized by schools and the district ministry of education to provide professional development support, mentorship and coaching to other educators who could not be directly involved in project training activities.*
- *Many teaching and student resources are donated to schools and accompanied with direction of effective utilization of the resources*
- *Students make many new friends as part of the camp experience*
- *Rotary promotion in the community through community celebration and events.*
- *All Belize teachers have access to a project wiki and website to continue conversations with Canadian literacy experts long after project is completed.*

5. Benefits to volunteers

Canadian volunteers expressed that their own teaching improved as one outcome of the shared experiences with Belize teachers.

Many classroom and school partnerships were developed to increase understanding of Belize and Canadian schools. Volunteers learned about effective humanitarian projects in developing countries and how to include culturally relevant dimensions to all project activities.

6. Benefits to Rotary

An exemplar for literacy improvement local, district or international projects has been developed and is being shared with others. The exemplar assists and inspires other Rotary Clubs to initiate literacy improvement projects.

7. Preparations

It takes about one year of preparations to develop the plan, secure the resources and develop the materials for the project. VTT members meet for orientation and preparations at least six times prior to visiting Belize. Rotarians in Belize and Canada are in ongoing conversation, document preparation,

promotion and planning on a weekly basis until the final report is filed.

8. COMMUNICATIONS, MEDIA, SOURCES

- *development of a brochure for circulation*
- *creation of a website*
- *press release to media in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, Rotary District 5360, San Ignacio, Belie*
- *press releases and coverage by LOVE TV – the national TV station of Belize*
- *development of three different public presentations to share with Rotary Clubs, participating schools and community groups interested*

9. Highlights expected

- *Strong participation by local schools, the Ministry of Education, the community and Rotarians*
- *Enthusiasm to expand the project to local communities*
- *Evidence supporting that the project is making a positive difference in improving literacy*
- *Expanded network of literacy supporters in both Belize and Canada*

10. Unexpected events

- *Students attending the camp: many had never been out of their villages before*
- *Leaders needed to address issues of fear and anxiety of young student participants during the first day of camp.*
- *Competing events held by the teacher union made it difficult for many educators dedicated to the program to participate in the literacy camp.*

11. Unanticipated benefits

- *Using a college facility during a time when college was not in session provided an amazing facility at limited cost.*
- *Donated funds and materials from a variety of sources including individuals and schools from the Red Deer, Alberta area.*

12. CHALLENGES IN THE PROJECT

- *Rising costs due to the poor currency exchange between Canada and the U.S. (Belize dollar value is directly linked to U.S. currency)*
- *Overcoming issues of transportation of students and teachers to camp sites (development of a bussing system)*

13. CELEBRATIONS OF THE PROJECT

- *High participation rates*
- *Successful professional development*
- *Literacy leaders developed*
- *Commitment by government and local schools to expand the learning*
- *Increased awareness of the value of literacy success for communities.*
- *Improved student achievement*
- *Interest by other Rotary Clubs and other communities to engage in similar projects*

