



# Project Learn Belize

*Project Learn Belize* School of Education: The University of San Francisco + 2130 Fulton Street + San Francisco, CA 94117

## Three Years Old and Running

Dr. Geoffrey Dillon, S.J. ~ Director

At the end of October, we marked the third anniversary of *Project Learn Belize*. Because of the support of so many friends, the programs first dreamed about in October of 2007 have made remarkable strides. Certainly the highlight of our activities this year has been the planning for Sacred Heart School's new Learning Center (which is showcased on page 2 & 3). The bonds of support and genuine affection between the community of Dangriga - especially the children, faculty and families of Sacred Heart Primary School - and the USF community continue to grow. Most importantly, for everyone who travels with us, it remains an experience of learning.

It's only right, then, that we send along this "progress report" of some of the highlights of our third year. As we look forward to the coming holiday season, we want to wish you a very joyful Christmas, and blessed New Year.

## Nursing Adds to the Mix

It began three years ago when Dr. Judith Karshmer, Dean of USF's School of Nursing, visited Dangriga to explore opportunities for a partnership program with *Project Learn Belize*. The end of May, 2010, saw the inaugural trip for *Project Learn Belize: Health Advocacy Program*. Four USF student nurses (three of whom had graduated the day before) along with SON faculty member, Dr. Mary Lou DeNatale, presented a full week of presentations on health, nutrition, and first aid for students and teachers in Dangriga. The unit on the "food pyramid" went well, once the nurses realized that all Belizean children refer to one of the major food groups as "legumes" (I am sure Julia Child smiled down upon them from above)..... When asked to detail the "meat" food group, the favorite responses were "pig tails" and "iguana - when they are IN SEASON." The Nursing team also had the opportunity to visit the local hospital and consult with area health workers.



USF / PLB Teacher Assistants receive thank you gifts from SHS faculty and students: January, 2010

## Teacher Assistant Program

Integral to *Project Learn Belize*, the TEACHER ASSISTANT PROGRAM offers undergraduate seniors (Arts & Sciences: *Dual Degree in Teacher Preparation Program*) and graduate students (School of Education) in the USF Teacher Credential program the opportunity to work in classrooms at Sacred Heart School. Beside their talents and energies, Teacher Ed. students share their acquired knowledge and passion for teaching with the faculty and staff of the school. Eight USF students are preparing lessons that will focus on improving the children's math skills and creative writing during the fourth Teacher Assistant Program trip in January, 2011



USF Nurses complete a week of health advocacy

## PLB: Learning Center Proposed For Sacred Heart School



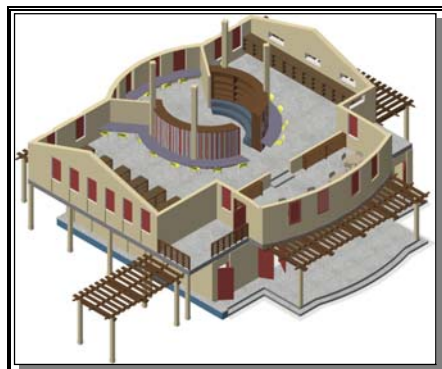
After PLB-sponsored literacy workshops for teachers in Dangriga, faculty from Sacred Heart School expressed a need for space for reading instruction, apart from the classroom. The current classrooms are not suitable for reading and literacy instruction: they are noisy, lack privacy, and share walls with other classrooms. There is no existing library for the school.

Students from the University of San Francisco's Architecture Department partnered with Dr. Dillon, students in the USF Masters' Reading program, and Teacher Education faculty to design reading rooms and a library for Sacred Heart. Several iterations of the learning center plans were reviewed by administrators, teachers, parents, and builders in Dangriga before a final design was determined.



*USF students & faculty discuss design of the new library*

The two-story building will provide teachers a dedicated space apart from regular classrooms to teach reading, in addition to the second floor library. The Reading Rooms accommodate different age groups of students through the creative design of the space and use of different furniture. The building was placed in this specific location to close off the courtyard area and create a secure gathering space. There is also a stage on the outside of the building, facing the courtyard that can be used for sitting or performances.



*In an effort to reflect the architecture of the local culture, the inner "reading circle" and vaulted dome ceiling in the library are fashioned in the style of the native Garifuna "dugu" temple.*

## Building a Future for Learning

*Here's the thing about libraries... they are a place where children can grow, investigate, take risks, explore ... a place of wonder, knowledge, love ... a gift to an entire community ... these plans pave a path for such a gift to be given, and received ...*

- Comment from a Friend of *Project Learn Belize*



The estimated cost of the two-story, 3700 sq.ft. Learning Center is \$150,000. The annual operating budget of the school of \$14,000 understandably has little room for such capital improvements. While the local community of Dangriga is anxious to contribute what they can from their very limited resources, the continued generosity of friends of *Project Learn Belize* is crucial to see this dream come to full reality. We have begun the process of approaching Foundations and Donors willing to contribute to this worthy project. The **Arthur P. Schultz Foundation** has already underwritten the cost of required in-country architectural plans. Looking to the completion of the interiors of the Learning Center, continuing supporters, the McNany family, through the **Bartsch Charitable Lead Trust**, have pledged substantial funding for fixtures, furnishings, and books. As anyone familiar with Foundations is aware, evidence of existing support is a substantial feature for successful applications. **Your contribution, no matter the amount, can make a difference!**

(from dd's *journal*: October 8, 2010)

I was sitting in the principal's office this afternoon. One of the vice principals appeared, with a little first grader, who mumbled complaints of stomach pains. In response to my medical interrogation (no one is quite sure why, but they think "dd" is somehow medically trained), the little one, Asozone (sorry, but I asked him three times his name and I could only make out a name that included "Ozone"), responded he had not had lunch ("dinner") nor breakfast ("tea"), and "supper" the night before was in question....

The school's "kitchen" was already closed for the day, where they usually send a meal-less child. So I took the boy across the street to one of the Chinese restaurants. During our brief perambulation, I wanted to make sure he knew who this stranger was leading him off-campus:

"You know my name, little man?"

"Yes, mista dd..."

At the Rainbow Restaurant, after being assured that he could have anything he wanted, he haltingly indicated a preference for a "beef burger" (yes, you need to be very specific, lest it turn out to be iguana) with cheese and a "dolla juice" (translation: some kind of sugary bottled soda that costs a Belizean dollar). Up until this point, the little boy had both arms wrapped around his stomach, obviously in pain. The first few bites and sips were tentative. Suddenly, he found his tempo and the plate and bottle were emptied...

I thought I knew what it meant for a child to be hungry – from gospel passages and the Sally Struthers' TV appeals. But for the first time today, I think I may have finally eye-witnessed it.

When he was finished, he looked up from his counter stool, and smiled...no words; just a big, six- year-old's smile.

At the end of the school day, somehow, he found me in the yard of 700 children. He ran up and almost knocked me over with a tackle-hug around my knees.



Last January, in the face of skeptics who questioned the life-expectancy of such a venture, we started a garden outside of the Principal's office. Almost a year later, the garden is thriving. Each morning, the 1<sup>st</sup> graders wait patiently for the appearance of butterflies, drawn to the lantana. A volunteer water brigade eagerly waits in line to fill their plastic water bottles at the only outdoor faucet, half way across the campus. At the start of the new school year, mesmerized by the process, Jaden (pre-kindergarten), asked if he could join in the effort. Returning with two overflowing bottles (and quite a bit of water on his uniform), he was instructed: "O.K., now water the flowers." He proceeded to hold a periwinkle blossom gently between his little fingers, while he dripped water on the petals. Literal enthusiasm...





## Money Matters

The work of *Project Learn Belize* is multifold: Immersion experiences for USF nurses and future teachers; ongoing education and training for teachers in Belize; school supplies, books, and computer equipment; capitol improvements to Sacred Heart School. While *Project Learn Belize* operates under the umbrella of the University, most notably sharing the University's tax-exemption status, its programs are financed solely through its participants (no financial compensation for participation is provided to any member of the USF community from its funds) and the generosity of benefactors of *Project Learn Belize*. One-hundred percent of every dollar contributed goes to direct support of the works in Dangirga. During the past year, those friends have made it possible to provide Sacred Heart School:

- + Computer projector w/ DVD player and speakers;
- + 50 new school desks;
- + Shipment of 20 computers (donated from USF /ITS);
- + 10 new flat screen computer monitors;
- + Upgraded computer internet hardware & wiring;
- + 2 new "Jr. Size" dining room tables & chair sets;
- + Architecture fees for the new Learning Center;
- + Kitchen appliances for the cafeteria/feeding program;
- + Maintenance & repairs of campus buildings;
- + 100 cases of school & computer supplies and workbooks, which the school's \$20/yr./child tuition cannot provide.



*The difference two years, a new cafeteria, and a few teeth can make*

We are indebted to our benefactors this year, for their financial support of the on-going work in Dangirga.

The Bartsch Charitable Lead Trust  
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