

PROJECT

Accompanying Words: Reading in Times of Crisis

**With the support from the Chilean Section of IBBY
Funded by International IBBY**

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Design and implementation of the project: Reading Live Development Corporation of Reading.
No. 540 Legal status of the ministry of justice.

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BACKGROUND to the PROJECT ACCOMPANYING WORDS

This proposal comes as a reaction to the great personal and social need caused by the devastating earthquake in Chile on February 27, 2010. Many children and young people experienced situations of anxiety and distress. According to the UNICEF study, 93% of children and young people experience a posterior effect due to the earthquake. 44% show anxiety in situations involving separation from their parents (being alone, afraid to go to school, need to sleep with an adult around, not wanting to be away from their parents). 47% show sleeping disorders and 38% physical alterations.

In relation to these states of crisis, international studies, and in the experience of Lectura Viva show that reading is fundamental to overcoming adversity, it contributes to the reconstruction of reality that has been disrupted and favors changes in the lives of those affected.

Therefore, in this complex context, Lectura Viva Development Corporation for Reading Promotion, created the project "**Accompanying Words**" to enable children and young people affected by this situation to have access to reading, as a resource that aids them to construct meaning, enabling them to make sense of their experiences, but also as a permanent tool to help improve their quality of life. For this purpose it had the support of the Chilean section of IBBY and IBBY International, by providing funding which was essential to cover most of the costs of this program.

The presence of the International IBBY President, Ms. Patsy Aldana at the time of the earthquake, allowed us to secure the concrete financial support for the project once the report was presented and was accepted by the president of the Chilean section of IBBY Maria Eugenia Coyemans. Once the proposal was made and released, International IBBY proceeded by sending 9'876.00 Swiss francs, equivalent to \$ 4,107,840 (Chilean pesos). This sum allowed primarily to cover the costs of fees for 3 experts for the realization of the project in the Metropolitan Region and Region VI. This meant a total expense of \$ 3,426,874 fee during 10 months while the project lasted 12 months. This is an average of \$ 114,230 per month for each expert. (see financial report). For the complete implementation of the project, Lectura Viva provided it's own resources to cover expenses for food, lodging and transportation.

Project General Objective:

Provide opportunities for access to reading and literature to children as a means of overcoming the crisis prompted by the earthquake and further development in their lives.

Specific project objectives:

- Contribute to the education of readers, from early childhood to age 14, providing spaces that allow them to bond with literature and use it as a tool for transformation.
- Carry out Animated Reading with children and young people from families affected by the earthquake in the Metropolitan Region and other regions, creating opportunities to approach the book and reading in a free and enjoyable environment.
- Train community members, teachers, educators, nursery techniques, facilities, library managers to ensure continuity of reading Animation guided towards children and youths.
- Create small libraries to provide access to books, in places that provide minimal or no infrastructure for their existence.

The proposal addressed to:

I. Children from pre-school to 14 years of age, belonging to communities affected by the earthquake crisis in Chile.

II. Teachers in charge of the levels of the children with whom fill the criteria, heads of libraries and community mothers.

Project phases:

First Phase.

- Visits to the field, identification and collecting background of the area where the program would be conducted.
- Presentation of **Accompanying Words** program (in the places identified).
- Diagnosis and characterization of the places.

The first phase consisted of conducting site visits to ascertain the situation of children affected by the earthquake. This allowed us to consider which location was appropriate to implement the program Accompanying Words, according to its specific situation.

Thus, several locations were identified in both the Metropolitan Region and the other neighboring areas, including schools in Paine, Dichato, and Constitution. Given urgent character of the situation, special care was taken not to obstruct the aid that was being provided.

Thus three areas were defined due to their characteristics which facilitated the realization of the project these were:

I. Community Sara Gajardo. Comuna Cerro Navia, Santiago.

II. Escuela San Vicente Ferrer. Comuna de Cerro Navia, Santiago.

III. Escuela Manuel Rodriguez. Localidad de Poblacion de la Comuna de Peralillo, Region VI.

In the community Sara Gajardo, to facilitate our access, meetings were conducted with community leaders, who once they learned of the objectives of the project gave their support. They also provided information about their community and the present situation they were facing due to the earthquake: homeless families who had to choose to sleep in the fields, or move to homes of other family, loss of property and some personal damage, especially in older adults (grandparents of children). In general, the community was plunged into a crisis that was reflected in behaviors of insecurity and dependence.

Community leaders made us aware of drug trafficking related violence they have to face in the community and informed us on the precautions that we should take, while the community got to know us and become familiar with our work. They also emphasized precaution with the use of photos from the children and adults throughout the program, requesting copies and information of people who would receive them. This request has always been respected, and they were always informed about the dispatch of pictures of the president of the Chilean section of IBBY and IBBY president of international, as well as Claudio Aravena for IBBY Facebook Chile (due to the request made earlier this were kept in small numbers).

In schools, the first contacts were made thru meeting with the schools directors. In the first meeting the project was presented, the directors were especially interested in the theme of the project and welcomed it immediately. Target groups were immediately defined: levels of children, teachers, educators, kindergarten, and librarians. An agreement was reached regarding the timetable for the whole year. In the case of the school Manuel Rodriguez de Poblacion, it was necessary to travel a weekend in early March to meet with the director and work out the details of the program.

Prior to the start of activities carried out an assessment and characterization of the workplace (Sara Gajardo community, School Manuel Rodriguez, School San Vicente Ferrer) was done. The program was modified to cover the specific needs according to the characteristics and capabilities of each location.

The School Manuel Rodriguez, was very isolated due to the destruction the earthquake had inflicted on the road 4 ½ hours were needed to reach the local population in the VI region. This forced us to use different means of transportation depending on the characteristics of the road and the reconstruction in progress. Sometimes the trip took place in intercity bus and other times the travel was done by private car.

Animation activities and training for adults in the Manuel Rodriguez, required a minimum of two working days. For this reason we felt the need to find accommodation, which caused unexpected difficulties because the earthquake had destroyed the few places of accommodation in the district of Peralillo. We were finally forced to stay in hotels in Santa Cruz, most of the time covered by Lectura Viva.

In both schools two diagnostic questionnaire were applied this allowed us to understand the notions of teachers regarding children's literature and its relation to the ages of children and youths, their self-perception as readers and their experience with the most effective actions to motivate reading.

The results generally showed a poor knowledge about children's literature and issues relevant to motivate reading, which result in uncertainty and confusion. Also a trend was recognized among teachers to manipulate the reading experience for educational purposes. Afterwards the questionnaire were returned to teachers and used to develop the issues involved and rectify mistakes. As for the self-perception in readers, half of the respondents qualify as readers, and the other half as little or no reading. Except one case, often indicate a book reader. The answers generally do not refer to literary reading.

Note that diagnostic questionnaire applied in other places, times and contexts, show similar results in terms of self-perception of teachers as readers. In general, there are few who see themselves as regular readers, and few who favor for literary reading.

Second Phase.

- Target Audience and Program Description
- Call and selection of books donated depending on their quality and targeted ages.
- Conducting of Reading Promotion, aimed at children.
- Other activities.

As noted above, the project considered two target groups: children in educational institutions and their teachers, and the second: children and ladies of the Community Sara Gajardo.

Community Sara Gajardo, Cerro Navia, Región Metropolitana. Contact began with the community, in March and a Animation Reading workshop began, these were aimed at children from 6 months to 11 years. Involving an average of 25 children.

The work in this community had particular characteristics. A courtyard of a house generously offered by one of the mothers interested in participating was used as headquarters. Thereafter, another mom joined to support our initiative. Their role as hosts was important to gaining entrance to such a complex community. Mothers also participated in a workshop as reading mediators, and during all sessions were very active. The motivation of children to participate in these reading meetings was memorable. Being an open invitation, with no requirements or needs children came voluntarily and were responsible for extending the invitation to other children. They quickly took over this space and they gradually make reading an activity carried out with pleasure.

This produced the need to give them books on loan, a donation convened from Lectura Viva at the beginning of the project. For this purpose, the ladies of the community were responsible for drawing up lists of loans and agreeing with the children about the return date. In most cases, it was remarkable to observe the care that was given to the books and the punctuality observed in returning them.

This community has benefited from the donation of approximately 50 informative works and literature for children and youths becoming part of a small library. Given the conditions of space, it was more practical and functional an adaptation of market carts as "bibliocarros" a mobile

initiative that allowed transportation of books and accessibility to children.

Further activities were carried out such as visits to the Public Library of Quinta Normal, in order to familiarize future users with the place and create a bond that encourages contact with books. Please observe that neither children nor their mothers knew about the library and had no knowledge that it is open and accessible to them. Another activity was a visit to the community of the storyteller María Teresa Vial, group member of Giracuentos, who graciously shared stories with the children. This activity was coordinated in a meeting organized by Isabel Tenham, Director of Giracuentos, to publicize the program *Accompanying Words*.

In this community work has been carried out since March, on a basis of once a week for one and a half hours, including summer and winter holidays as well as sporadic visits in the last two months of 2011. Meetings are currently scheduled to guide mothers and motivate them to continue with the program.

- At the **School, Manuel Rodriguez, Peralillo Commune**, localidad de Poblacion, we worked with a total of 276 children and adolescents pre-K through 8 grade. Of these children, 112 students lost their homes and were vulnerable. The headmistress gave the support needed to reach the entire school community, providing access to courses from pre-school basic to basic VIII and also supported the participation of teachers in the classroom while a Reading activity was performed live with the purpose of **observing actions that were reinforced in training**. Children at this school showed shyness and insecurity to communicate, and they were very affected by the earthquake in which people close to them such as grandparents and uncles in some cases were killed. The interest of children through the activities offered by *Accompanying Words* was significant, they were curious and happy waiting for us, insisting to come back soon.
- Attention and concentration of children during the activities increased. The number of students forced us to divide the groups by level for a more personal work such as reading.
- **The School San Vicente Ferrer**, the municipality of Cerro Navia, the work began in May following the request of the director, since the school was undergoing repairs for damages caused by the earthquake. The activities were addressed to children from Pre basic, Basic One and Two, serving a total of 8 courses and 300 children.
- The participating children showed great interest in reading, even more so in an activity willingly offered without asking anything in return. In the early stages a difficulty in handling the books was noted, clearly due to the lack of books and lack of ties to the school library. This was later discussed with the director and the head of library and will take action to make changes.

At the schools meetings were held every 15 days during 2010 thru November and in March a reinforcement visit was made. The estimated duration of each session depended on the age of the children. The bond to reading and books was formed through basic activities of Reading Promotion, according to different age groups, using literary texts books, both poetry and narrative, illustrated books and book album. Activities integrated oral tradition as a resource of great cultural value and reunion with our roots.

The nature of these activities was essentially playful and of a generous nature unrelated to any training-related (cognitive, value, etc.), as to raise awareness on children's books and reading as pleasure.

Donations and book selection:

In the month of March an invitation was made, via email, to donate books for children and youth with the aim of bringing them to schools and communities affected by the earthquake. However, the grant was insufficient to meet the existing needs. We selected the books received and distributed according to their quality and age of recipients. Once classified they were delivered to the school libraries and the bibliocarros in the Poblacion Sara Gajardo.

Third Phase.

- Continuation of animation activities, aimed at children.
- Other activities
- Training for adults who would continue the project.
- Assessment

In Phase Three activities for Reading Promotion continued, as have been described, and according as scheduled, in selected locations. A second visit to the children of the community to Sara Gajardo Quinta Normal Public Library was organized in order to get to know and participate in the workshop taught by Irish illustrator, Oliver Jeffers.

Around Christmas the visit of Mrs. Marlou Anwandter composer and performer of children's songs was scheduled. With her talent and creativity she was commissioned to design a presentation for children in the Community Sara Gajardo, which responded with particular

enthusiasm.

The animation activities carried out by Lectura Viva were complemented by a series of training sessions for mothers and teachers from the two schools involved in the Community Sara Gajardo, in order to provide sustainability to the activities and library use. In the case of schools it was necessary to provide tools and methodologies to train teachers and library managers as reading mediators. The intensity of this training was 12 hours.

With this cycle, designed by Lectura Viva, we sought to motivate interest in the subject, providing tools for Reading Promotion and generate responsibility for activity continuity and the use of the books that were delivered. The training involved 17 teachers from school Manuel Rodriguez, and 16 of San Vicente Ferrer school and 2 community mothers.

Results

Due to the warm welcome that was given to all participants from the start of the project, and the growing enthusiasm with which they were participating in the activities, we believe that the overall proposed objective was achieved **create awareness to reading**. Taking into consideration that we dealt with reading as pleasure, beyond the school obligations.

Also implemented was a job evaluation questionnaire, developed by teachers of both schools. The nature of open questions, required their views on their work in general and specifically on the presentation of the contents, materials used, the occurrence of children, and other aspects, including their self-perception as readers.

Almost all responses were positive, calling the work (approach, method, materials) as a motivator, fun, dynamic, successful integration and educational theory and practice.

Also, almost all have seen a change in children: they are expectant to team visits, they improved their standards of speaking, and prompted more interest in reading at the school library or classroom.

Regarding the relationship between the project and the earthquake, most described it as positive, indicating a liberating effect, especially as a distraction and relaxation due to the playful activities.

In relation to children and according to our perception, we appreciate that they have developed a new meaning to the crisis experienced. Acquiring new tools for life through reading and their proximity to the books.

We also noted positive changes in children with regard to their interest in reading and through the weeks, their participation was more active and spontaneous an appreciation that corresponds to all the locations where the project was implemented.

We would like to point out that in Population Sara Gajardo very young children voluntarily attended entertainment activities, usually alone or in the case of babies, with their older sisters.

We regularly sent via e-mail to the chairperson of the national and international president of IBBY, pictures and progress reports on the program, in order to keep them up to date on the progress of the project.

The impact and relevance of the project Accompanying Words for the Peralillo Commune, is illustrated by the request of the Mayor and Technical Chief Officer of the Department of Education to extend the project to all schools of the Commune. This decision was the result of the positive evaluation of the project, delivered by the Director of the School Manuel Rodriguez de Poblacion, Ms. Sylvia Barrera. As a result the project is currently running for a period of 2 years, in 8 schools of the community.

This program gives children an opportunity to engage with books and reading, this would not have been possible without the project Accompanying Words and the funding of International IBBY.

For the team at Lectura Viva it has been a significant experience that allowed us to achieve the goals we aspire to as an organization.