

Computer Learning Centers Panama

Overview: Our Foundation, the Fund for New World Development, presently operates computer learning centers in two poor rural Panamanian schools teaching computer literacy and creative, analytical thinking in collaboration with the teachers, students, principals, government agencies and community members at large. Our teacher/administrators engage with the students to learn new skills, expand their knowledge and their self-confidence, using the centers to help the educational programs to move away from rote memorization to creative and analytical thinking.

To help the developing world, we must change education. Rote learning through memorization dominates. Technology is used for accessing social media, not the growth of learning.

My wife Carol and I served in the Peace Corp from 1969-1971, in a poor rural area of Panama 6 hours outside of Panama City. We lived as everyone else did in the community, spoke their language, learned their customs and worked with them to improve agricultural techniques and children's health.

Those two years changed our lives and our worldview.

Approximately 40 years later, we returned for the first time to the same villages we had served in years ago, but not being sure what we would find. What we found were villages still very poor, but full of people we had known and worked with. It was like a giant homecoming with a long-lost family...which is what it was.

They asked if we could work with them in some way even now, and they called a community wide meeting to offer their priorities. First was improving education, specifically computer education because there were no computers in town or in the schools and their children were falling behind. They also had no place for the children to play baseball or soccer.

So, we started a foundation to work in Panama, secured school rooms to open computer learning centers, fixed them up, secured computer training for 20 people in each of two communities; selected administrators from the trainees; bought all necessary equipment; entered into collaborative agreements with several government agencies and worked closely with students, teachers, principals and the community at large. That collaboration, critical to our model, continues to this day, with students learning to think analytically, not just by rote repetition, and with a whole new world at their fingertips.

Our staff is all Panamanian, and our students and teacher/administrators widely recognized for their excellence.

In addition to teaching and engaging with students, our centers are community resource centers for learning and teaching: they bring in numerous speakers, workshops, and programs for the community, everything from workplace skills and job training, to science fairs, to environmental protection and community safety and improvement programs.

And, yes, we bought 4 acres of land for town ballfields: no more playing on construction sites with a steel pipe for a bat!