

# IMPACT TRAINING WORKSHOP REPORT

May 18-23, 2009

Asociación para una Sociedad Más Justa



## Background

In May of 2009, the Asociación para una Sociedad Más Justa invited two trainers from the New Horizons Foundation in Romania to help train youth leaders in the IMPACT service-learning methodology. For the last six years The New Horizons Foundation has developed this method of working with at-risk youth to help them build self-esteem, develop social and occupational skills, develop good values, and find ways to participate in grass-roots community development. The methodology is delivered through groups of 15-20 youth who meet weekly for team building and to plan a community service project.



Many games serve as trust-building exercises. Here, participants have to fall backwards, trusting that their partner will catch them.

Group facilitators design each IMPACT group meeting using games, stories, and reflection with the ultimate goal of including the youth in the improvement of the communities where the IMPACT groups are located.

The workshop was a continuation of an exchange between ASJ and New Horizons Foundation. Last year Nazaria Romero, coordinator of the Gideon Center Project, and Jo Ann Van Engen, a member of the ASJ board of directors, visited New Horizons in Romania to familiarize themselves with the methodology.

## Comparison between IMPACT methodology and the methodology currently in practice

While ASJ, through the Gideon Project staff, has been working with groups of youth for five years, there has not been an intentional framework guiding the work. The unique IMPACT methodology – with an emphasis on both personal growth and service to the community – facilitates micro- and macro-level transformation. The participants learn more about themselves through games, stories and reflections, and use those learnings to create meaningful service projects. Facilitators currently include aspects of personal growth and community service in their work with groups, but the IMPACT training provides a successful methodology to help the youth take the lead in facilitating the IMPACT groups and designing the service projects. Also with this methodology, mentors will work with the same groups of at-risk youth until the youth is ready to be reinserted into formal education.

Another difference in methodologies has to do with the service projects themselves. With the IMPACT model, the service-learning project is very in-depth. Participants first reflect on, discuss, and analyze the needs within their community. Based on their findings, they will design and implement a service project. Once it is finished, the same group will continue evaluating the effectiveness of the project to learn how future service projects could be improved. This is a much



Stories play an important role in IMPACT methodology, providing themes for discussion, reflection, and application to daily life.

higher level of project management than the participants have experienced in the Gideon staff-led youth groups.

Also, while the IMPACT clubs will have an adult facilitator, he or she will serve simply as a mentor or guide. Each youth group will elect its own leaders who will be responsible for the club's functioning, including leading each

meeting and ensuring that the service projects

become a reality. In previous clubs, the Gideon staff served this function.

The final difference is that the IMPACT framework can easily be replicated and adapted to other contexts. One of the goals of IMPACT is to continuously train new leaders who can initiate new IMPACT groups in other communities, creating a movement that will benefit new participants and communities.

### **IMPACT training in Honduras, May 18-23**

ASJ hosted a joint training session for 19 participants from three organizations: ASJ, the Asociación Cristiana Juvenil, and Asociación Compartir. The six-day workshop was led by Maria Neagu and Diana Certan, two Romanian youth trainers from New Horizons with extensive experience both in leadership training and IMPACT group facilitation. The workshop combined lecture with group participation to allow the future IMPACT group facilitators to personally experience the methodology in action.

The facilitators delivered the content with three objectives in mind:

- Participants will learn how to open and manage an IMPACT youth service-learning club in the community.
- Participants will be able to facilitate specific non-formal methods to deliver IMPACT meetings.
- Participants will be able to initiate, along with the IMPACT members, IMPACT service projects.



Diana Certan (left) and Maria Neagu (right), the Romanian trainers, pose with a participant at the workshop graduation ceremony.

### **Lessons learned from the trainings**

The IMPACT workshop provided important lessons for the the groups the Gideon staff will initiate. The Gideon Center staff is facilitating 7 IMPACT groups initially – three in Nueva Suyapa, two in Flor del Campo, and two in Villa Nueva – and will lead trainings for two new groups of facilitators within the next year. The groups will be comprised of at-risk youth, many of whom have already been involved in gang activity.

For the workshop participants, the most important part of the training was gaining a better understanding of the methodology. It was important for those who will be facilitating groups to experience the games and stories in real life, rather than through a manual.

Other important learnings for ASJ:

- It is essential that each group member participates actively in the life of the group to develop his abilities, put her skills into practice, and learn to love the community.
- Youth have different learning styles. Every meeting should include activities that will appeal to each type of learner.
- Participation in and IMPACT group should be fun. Information must always be presented in a creative way that emphasizes participation.

## Reactions from Romanian trainers

Maria and Diana, the trainers from Romania, reported that the group of Hondurans was the best group they had ever worked with. The following is a summary of their reactions, excerpted from their final report.

Positive points of the training- from the trainers point of view:

- the number of the participants
- the very strong motivation of the participants
- the high level of involvement of the participants in all the stages of the training
- the responsibility of the participants and the willing to become better youth workers
- the good translation from English- Spanish that was done by the staff of ASJ during the training
- the handout materials in Spanish that were prepared by ASJ
- the location of the training was very good
- the good collaboration of the trainers with the staff of ASJ
- the trainers spanish level of understanding
- the working in groups- participants worked very well in groups
- the dinamic of the group
- We consider that the participants greatest learning experience was related to: the cycle of experiential learning, understanding the importance of debriefing a service learning project, and learning lots of new games and exercices.

Personal reflections and insights after the training:

- Honduran people are very warm and open to communication
- IMPACT can have a great results in Honduras because of the youth workers potential. They are very motivated, very creative, very inspired very willing to do the change
- Working with the Church is very helpful and the Church is a great source of inspiration and support .
- The youth workers have the capacity to do miracles using only the resources of the community and the support of ASJ.
- Honduras is a poor country but rich in its people who are willing to work for change.

- The support of ASJ is very important, and we really think that it makes the difference in people's lives in Honduras.
- From our point of view, this group of participants was the greatest group we ever worked, because they gave us a lot of energy and motivated us a lot.
- We think that this training is the starting point of a good collaboration between IMPACT Romania with future IMPACT Honduras
- Each day for us was an outstanding intercultural experience and also improved our training skills since we had to work with 3 languages in the same time: Romanian, English and Spanish
- Here are what we personally gain from this experience in terms of competences: we learned about Honduras and the youth context in Honduras; we understood better the importance of the church and religion in youth work; we became more open and more understanding; we developed the ability to see and understand youth work from different points of view; we became more attentive to details, always taking into consideration the culture and cultural differences when preparing an IMPACT training; we became more open to future collaboration; we became more "brave;" we can see youth work and Romania from a different perspective.

### **IMPACT methodology**

Each IMPACT meeting follows a certain structure that includes:

- Team-building game with reflection
- Moral development story with reflection
- Planning of service project

Each component plays an important part in developing the three aspects of the IMPACT mission: fun, learning and service.

#### *Games*

Games build group energy, help group members get to know each other better, and provide a platform for reflection on various themes, such as unity, leadership, and communication. Some games are simply ice breakers, while others have a component of self-discovery.

In the IMPACT context, winning is not the game's main objective. Many of the games are group problem solving games, which challenge participants to work as a team to achieve a desired outcome. After the game has been solved, the facilitators lead participants through a reflection to consider what happened in the game, what was learned, and how that learning could be applied to real life, or to the service project.

According to the IMPACT manual, “Games promote active group participation and an invitation towards greater community involvement; games themselves are also a powerful tool for teaching and for internalizing moral values.”

### *Stories*

Within the IMPACT framework, storytelling is used to teach values. The IMPACT manual says, “Stories are powerful teaching tools because they require an active, rather than a passive, learner; they require the listener to form his own conclusions and his own thoughts.”

Facilitators choose a story based on a certain value or concept they want to

teach. After reading the story out loud to the participants, the facilitator leads a discussion, asking participants to summarize what happened, analyze what they learned, and find ways to apply those learnings in real life.



In this game, called the giant ant house, the blindfolded group members discuss how to spread out and make a perfect square.

Stories also serve as a vehicle for participants to learn about themselves. Often the story reflection time is when participants begin to disclose very personal thoughts and feelings, providing the opportunity for personal growth and the development of group unity.

### *Service project training and project planning*

The IMPACT manual describes the community service project as the cornerstone of the IMPACT groups. It should be emphasized that the project should not just be about service, but should be thought of as *service-learning*. As the manual says, “Learning and service go hand-in-hand; the projects are not ends in themselves but rather are tools for the learning of important skills.” The skills learned may include budget planning, project management, computer skills acquisition, trust and teamwork. The IMPACT clubs will be responsible for reflecting on community needs, designing a service project based on those needs, implementing the project, and evaluating its effectiveness. The goal is for groups to carry out one service project every three months.



*“This methodology will be implemented with a group of 150 youth that are being rescued from gangs, drugs and alcohol. This methodology will help the youth move forward and reintegrate into society.”*

*--Franklin Martínez, Asociación Compartir*