

With Literacy and Justice for All

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“Survivor”: Nonprofit Edition

Phew! What a year nonprofits around the country and around the world have been through. While the global economic slowdown caused an increase in needs worldwide, funds for nonprofit work suddenly dropped. The same was true in Valencia County.

Here at Valencia County Literacy Council (VCLC), I had the very fortunate opportunity to teach at the UNM-Valencia Campus English Department last year in addition to literacy work. I had five wonderful classes of students from whom I learned a ton. I also saw the students do insightful work with New Mexico literature and history, and I’ll be inspired for years to come by these students and the thoughtful work of my English Department colleagues.

Nationwide, nonprofit finances are now improving. As The Grant Plant, Inc., a New Mexico nonprofit assistance organization, says, we’ve returned to “modest growth in foundation giving in 2011, although it will probably be several years before giving matches the peak levels recorded in 2008” (2011).

I think it's a good time to reflect, then, on what nonprofits provide here in New Mexico. In 2009 "there were 10,608 nonprofits on record in New Mexico," and nonprofits employed "more than 1 out of every 20 paid workers" (The Grant Plant 2011).

In a 2006 study by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) at UNM, nonprofits provided 44,000 jobs in New Mexico, including "attracting out of state funds that create 16,984 jobs and \$468 million in wages and salary payments annually that would otherwise not exist in New Mexico."

As BBER also notes, "a large percentage of expenditures of nonprofit organizations tend to remain within the state economy," and "expenditures by employees and vendors of nonprofit organizations create an additional 7,608 jobs" (2006).

Nonprofits also organize volunteer labor. Last year alone, VCLC's Volunteer Tutors contributed over \$60,000 worth of time to help Valencia County friends and neighbors become more employable. And that doesn't even include the volunteer work of our wonderful BOOK Readers, Board Members, and all the people who help us out at fundraiser time.

Fundraisers are especially important to nonprofits. While typically 90% of VCLC's funds come from grants, these have to be spent within the year they are awarded. Fundraising monies and donations are more "light on their feet"—they allow us to put funds where they are most needed, and we greatly appreciate the donations we receive and those who come out to our *Noche de Estrellas*.

Additionally, many foundations want to fund new and innovative programs. Sometimes this shortchanges the "tried and true" solutions like having a literacy tutor. In fact, as reported by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, 50% of nonprofit agencies they surveyed

in 2011 “expressed the need for more unrestricted... operating support.”

Nonprofits provide essential services which allow our communities to survive difficult times. Nonprofits in Valencia County like El Ranchito de Los Niños, Hogares, Adelante, La Vida Felicidad, the Valencia Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence, Wings Ministry, Youth Development Inc., the Belen Food Pantry, and many others help keep us glued together when the economy slumps.

And while many nonprofit employees sacrifice earning potential (50% or greater) to do this work, we’re inspired when we come to work each day. At VCLC, we get to see the joy people feel when they finally understand something they’ve read. We also get to see the growth and development of children in our small preschool and the joy a child feels when being read to by a BOOK Reader.

Thanks to your help, VCLC is not only surviving the economic slump but modestly thriving. We’re not kicked off the island yet! Of course, it all has to be done all over again for next year, but we are deeply grateful to this community for your support.

Don’t forget to save the date for our annual FUNdraiser, the always surprising *Noche de Estrellas* Talent Night and Chocolate Buffet, on March 16, 2012 at the Los Lunas Transportation Center. If you have a talent for the show, call me at 925-8926.

And, if you can volunteer your time as a Tutor or BOOK Reader, please don’t hesitate to call our wonderful new Volunteer Tutoring Coordinator, Bob Bishop, at 925-8935 (bbishop@valencialiteracy.org) or our terrific BOOK Coordinator, Irene Gogal, at 999-9877 (igogal@valencialiteracy.org).