

SG Foundation report

“There is nothing greater than integrating oneself into the world by doing something for the world...” (Radio Colifata)

What is ALEM?

In the words of one of our members, Pablo Rodríguez, ALEM is “hope, unity, friendship, coexistence, responsibility, expression, creativity, commitment, challenge, (and) growth.” It is the “opportunity to live in a society as an active member, through learning and working.” For Dalia Martínez, ALEM has been an opportunity to believe that women can exceed what is culturally expected of them. It’s not only being a mother or a wife, it’s acknowledging that women are able to use hands-on experience to grow in education. She has said, “Now I know how to paint; I know how to bend tubes; I know how to put together a wheelchair.” These abilities aren’t things which her social network would expect a woman to be capable of doing.

This year has been very active for ALEM. Among the many highlights: we completed several demanding and unique architectural projects which pushed the limits of our mathematical and spatial reasoning; we continued to develop an associative solidarity among the members of our team by raising our political and social consciousness of the situation here in Morelos; and we built bridges of understanding through the creation of a theater project, one which gives expression to the daily realities of living with a disability. Another important facet of our process this year has been our collaboration with students from the Universidad Autónoma de Morelos. As majors in Human Communication, the students have been visiting us and learning from ALEM’s experience. The larger scope of their project is working to make children aware of and sensitive to the experience of living in society with a disability.

“Only the hand that erases can write the truth.” (Meister Eckhart)

ALEM is also slowly, but steadily, becoming a part of a network of organizations which work with different disabilities. Our intention is to meet the government halfway on political issues that will truly embrace the needs of this population. We have been studying the existing disability policies in Mexico (principally in our state of Morelos) and observing the manner in which they are – or are not – enforced. In our meetings with government representatives, we have strived to adopt a respectful tone in our dialogue because we believe it to be far more constructive and effective than making confrontational demands. This incorporative process is still in its beginning stages.

In terms of production, we have been able to make ten special wheelchairs this year, each with its own design requirements and specific measurements. Four of them are specially important, one was financed by the DIF (Center for Family Development) of Zapata, Morelos for use by a 10 year-old child. The second was backed financially by Club de Leones (the Lions Club). The third was ordered by the City Hall of Cuernavaca, for use by a woman with deformative arthritis. The last one was made for a music teacher from Tejalpa in Jiutepec, Morelos, wherein a

group of his young students got together to order a wheelchair for him. This is not the “only” work we’ve done all year, however: we have been continuously occupied with our regular work of fixing and upholstering wheelchairs and building other specialized mobility equipment, such as support tubes for walkways and bathrooms. We repaired wheelchairs for several athletes who competed in the 36th National Paralympic Games, held here in Cuernavaca in October. In an upcoming project, we will be doing upholstery for a major high-end spa in Cuernavaca. Our work has been very diversified, which has contributed to our success in forming a cooperative enterprise. Such diversification will enable us to attract more and more clients, which will, in turn, bring in more and more orders.

Over the last year, the efficiency of our work at ALEM has been increasing rapidly. Thanks to our new drill press and paint-curing oven, we have been able to reduce our equipment costs by drilling our own tubes and make use of automotive paint, which requires the curing oven. Our team has been working as diligently as possible to make these tools critical components of our success. While we are very fortunate to have them, there is still much room for improvement. We currently have only one usable welding machine; we cannot use our second because it would overload the capabilities of our single electrical circuit. We have two skilled people working in upholstery, but only one sewing machine, which slows the output of our seats, backings, pads, and tube covers. We also suffer for having a limited set of hand tools. With only one complete set of wrenches and screwdrivers and one viable drill, our technical capabilities are somewhat restricted when different areas of the workshop need to use the same tool. In the long term, it is our goal to integrate more people into the project; thus, with more hands available to work, we hope to eventually obtain these items so that everyone can be productive.

“The rainbow mirrors human aims and action.

Think, and more clearly will you grasp it, seeing

Life is but light in many-hued reflection.” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

It is not enough, we believe, to merely give the physically challenged a job to do. Rather, ALEM works in a manner similar to a prism: the light passing through is amplified and made brilliant by refracting off of many faces. For us, the faces of ALEM are productive work, yes, but also social integration, cultural and artistic expression, solidarity, and fighting for justice under the law. By touching so many different surfaces, the light of one person entering the space of ALEM is allowed to grow into the radiant spectrum of full human flourishing.